

Colossians 3:5-7

“Put Evil Desires to Death”

Sermon

Tim Black

1.

Introduction

1.

Christian Character. In the book of Colossians Paul teaches you how to be a Christian . In

chapter 1 he directs your attention to

Christ

your Savior. In chapter 2 he warns you against taking on the world's non-Christian

worldview

and

lifestyle

. And now in Colossians 3 Paul teaches you how to have a

Christian character

. How to be distinctively Christian in who you are and how you behave. He gives you the proper ground of Christian character in 3:1-5, and then teaches you to put off the old man of non-Christian character and put on the new man of Christian character. What characterizes the old man is a love of self on the inside, and a hatred of your fellow man on the outside. And what characterizes the new man is selfless love on the inside, and thankful blessing on the outside. In our passage today Paul teaches you to put to death your love of self on the inside. And centrally, he exhorts you to

put evil desires to death

.

2.

This is square one of having a Christian character. If you aren't doing this, you

shouldn't claim to be a Christian. And if you don't do this, in the end you will not go to heaven. Our passage implies this last point in v. 6. But Paul makes this point perfectly explicit in Ephesians 5:3-5, where he says:

1.

Ephesians 5:3-5 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has **no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

2.

You cannot live unrepentantly in any sin, and expect to go to heaven. And so it is absolutely vital that if you claim to be a Christian, you follow Paul's exhortation today to **put evil desires to death**

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3.

Sermon Outline. We will examine this passage under the following headings.

1.

What you should put to death: Evil Desires v. 5

2.

Col. 3:5-7 - Put Evil Desires to Death

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Why you should put them to death: God's Evaluation and Response
v. 6

3.

How you should put them to death: In Your Walk and Your Life v. 7

1.

Body

1.

What: Evil Desires v. 5

1.

First, what should you put to death? Evil desires. Paul gives a list of them in v. 5:

1.

Colossians 3:5-7 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

2.

Therefore

1.

Ground. Paul begins with the word “[therefore](#),” referring back to the ground

of Christian character in 3:1-5. In those verses Paul exhorted you to “

[Set your minds on things above.](#)

” You may remember that the things on which we should set our minds are God

,
Christ

,
eternal life

,
salvation blessings

,
Christian virtues

, and anything that is morally pure

. The reason why we should do so is that our life is bound up with Christ our Savior, and so we must give our attention and devotion to Him, to His kingdom and His righteousness. And if you are devoted to Christ in this manner, if you set your

mind on Christ, today Paul tells you how your life needs to change in the most practical of ways.

2.

Connection. Amazingly, Paul connects our most grand, mystical union with Christ with our most plain and practical moral obligations as Christians. Would you rather have Christian doctrine, or the Christian life? Paul tells you in this word “[therefore](#)” that you cannot have the one without the other. Your life is not Christian if you are not committed to the doctrine that Christ is your life. And your doctrine that Christ is your life is worthless if it does not change the way you live.

3.

Application. The way you should change is this: If your mind is set on things above, then you should put these evil desires to death. They are sensual in their focus, earthly in their tempting origins, intended objects, and

resulting actions. But your governing desires should be spiritual

in focus, desires that find their origin in Christ, seek the objects He intends, and the actions that He approves. James puts this contrast in the starkest of terms, and the conclusion we must draw is that our desires, our character, our lifestyle, either come from Heaven or Hell. James says,

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James 3:14-15 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

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Put to death

1.

If your life comes from heaven, then you must “**put to death**” the evil desires that remain in your heart. Paul has already told you that “**with Christ you died to the basic principles of the world**

” (

2:20

) and that “

you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God

” (

3:3

), and so now he tells us that while in respect to God’s sovereign initiative we were passive participants in that death to sin, nevertheless we now have an active role to carry out in furthering that project. Sinful desires continue to spring up within you, and you need to put

them to death. They are the weeds in the good soil of your heart, the termites in your walls, the rats in your basement, the cancer in your bones, and they need to die. Otherwise, they will be the death of you

.

2.

Illustration. Alexander Maclaren gives a fitting illustration.

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“Suppose a man working at some machine. His fingers get drawn between the rollers or caught in some belting. Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up

an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist. It takes some nerve to do that. It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death. I know of no stimulus that will string a man up to the analogous spiritual act here enjoined, and enjoined by conscience also, except participation in the death of Christ and in the resulting life.” [1](#)

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Maclaren’s last comment brings out the very important truth that evil desires are desires. They are your desires. This means that of your own will and your own strength you will not desir

e to
put these desires to death. Only Jesus
Christ living in you is able to give you
the strength to fight this battle.

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Members. Paul speaks in v. 5 of “yo
ur members that are on the earth.

” What are these “
members?

” They are
spiritual members
of a
spiritual body

▪

1.

Spiritual members. In Greek this word “[member](#)”
[S](#)

means “body parts.” So Paul is telling you to put your “body parts” to death. Now certainly your physical

body parts can be used improperly as instruments for unrighteousness, but Paul is not speaking about your physical body. This is evident because when he enumerates these “body parts” in v. 5, he does not

give a list of
physical

body parts, but a list of
sinful desires

. Granted, these desires are
experienced in your physical body,
but in themselves they are more
spiritual
than
physical
in nature.

2.

Spiritual body of flesh. You
see, Paul is speaking of a
spiritual body

. He often refers to it as the “flesh,” which means the sinful nature that is the origin of evil desires within us which are often called the “lusts of the flesh.” Paul calls this “flesh” a “body” in Col. 2:11:

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Colossians 2:11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the **body of the flesh**, by the circumcision of Christ.

-

So now in 3:5 Paul speaks in terms of this same concept of “**the body of the flesh**” and tells us to put to death the “parts” of this body—its hands and feet and arms and ears and legs. In a real sense the vital organs of this body have already died, because Christ has put off your body of flesh, made a decisive break between you and it, so that it is no longer your identity, it is no longer

the core of who you are. You are not the old man, but are the “new man, created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

” (

Eph. 4:24

) But though its vital organs are dead, its “body parts”--its “desires

” and “

manner of life

” (

Eph. 4:22

)--still arise from it and must be exterminated lest like the

spasmodic hands of a dying man
they grip your heart and ruin
the course of your life. Your old
heart is dead, so let the body
parts die off too. Paul exhorts
you in

Rom. 8:13

,

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Romans 8:13 13 If you live
according to the flesh you
will die, but if by the Spirit you
put to death the deeds of

the body, you will live.

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Listed

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Let's examine this list of

evil desires. Because this list is so general, I believe you and I actually have each one of these desires within us, otherwise Paul would not command you to face them. The question is not whether you have these desires, but whether you seek to slay them when they rise up in your heart. I want you to ask yourself, “In what particular way do I have each of these desires?”

and then I want you to commit
to pray to God for help to
stop that desire the moment
you next experience it.

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On p. 277 of his
commentary Alexander
Maclaren says “The series
recounts various forms of evil
love, and is so arranged as
that it starts with the

coarse, gross act, and goes on to more subtle and inward forms. It goes up the stream, as it were, to the fountain head, passing inward from deed to desire.”

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Deeds

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Sexual immorality

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First is sexual immorality, which covers every kind of sexual act other than those between a husband and wife which are approved by scripture.

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Examples:

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premarital sex,
extramarital affairs, incest,
homosexuality, bestiality,
lust

-

pornography, lewd
thoughts, words, or looks

-

Uncleanness

-

Second is uncleanness,

or impurity, “which embraces every manifestation in word or look or deed of the impure spirit, and so is at once wider and subtler than the gross physical act.”^{[2](#)}

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Examples:

-

foolish talk, crude
joking, vulgarity, swearing,
vulgar gestures

-

dirty, vile, dead,
mangled, perverse

-

Desires

-

“Then follow ‘passion’ an
d ‘
evil desire

’; the sources of the evil deeds. These are again more inward and more general than the preceding.” Passion is more passive, evil desire is more active. “The ‘lusts of the flesh’ are in the one aspect kindled by outward temptations which come with terrible force and carry men captive, acting almost irresistibly....On the

other hand they are excited by the voluntary action of the man himself. In the one the evil comes into the heart; in the other the heart goes out to the evil.”

3

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Passions

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pa,qoj is passive, as
opposed to evpiqumi
,a ,
which is active. It is
“ungovernable desire.”

-

May have a cause in
view

-

Examples:

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anger, rage, envy,
jealousy, malice, pride,
conceit, enmity,
rivalries, drunkenness,
orgies, hatred toward God,

quarreling, hostility,
hatred, selfish ambition

-

Evil desires

-

**strong impulse or
desire**

-

Has an object in view

-

Mark 4:19 “**desires f**
or other things will
come and choke out the
message.
”

-

Desire itself is not
wrong

-

This word for
“desire” is used positively
in Luke 17:22, 22:15;
1 Thess. 2:17; Heb. 6:11.

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Asceticism is not the

right response. The right goal is not to destroy the physical body and its good desires, but the old spiritu
al body and its evil desires.

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Greed

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Lastly
greed.

Paul mentions

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Definition. Greed is the desire to acquire an object that is not rightfully yours.

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Greed is spiritual idolatry. This means greed is worse than is commonly thought.

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Matt. 6:24 You
cannot serve God and
money.

-

It is often true that someone who has been addicted to sensual desires will also become addicted to this desire to acquire. Maclaren says on p. 278, “How many respectable middle-aged gentlemen are now mainly devoted to making money, whose

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Greed is “the fierce and ever fiercer longing of the creature which has turned from God to fill itself with the inferior objects of sense.”^{[4](#)} “To such a god there is given the first thought of the morning, the last wish of

the evening, and the
action of every
waking hour.”

5

–

Why: God's Evaluation and Response v. 6

1.

Why should we put
evil desires to death?

The reason Paul gives is that these evil desires—even the same evil desires that are within your own heart—are the reason God's wrath is coming.

1.

6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming [on the sons of disobedience].

2.

Sons of

disobedience

1.

Probably copied from
its parallel passages in
Eph. 2:2 and 5:6.

2.

Origin that indicates a state. This is the state of unbelievers – they live in disobedience.

3.

Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged

from the womb; they
go astray from birth,
speaking lies.

4.

Result is that God's
wrath comes on them

—

Ephesians 2:3

among whom we all
once lived in the
passions of our flesh,
carrying out the
desires of the body
and the mind, and
were by nature
children of wrath

, like the rest of
mankind.

-

Ephesians 5:6 6

Let no one deceive
you with empty
words, for because of

these things the wrath
of God comes
upon the sons of
disobedience.

-

Wrath

1.

**Evil desires pose
a great threat to
you.**

2.

“This overgh. is
more than
chastisement...it is
direct and punitive
indignation
frequently inflicted
here in the form of

physical debility and
disease, remorse,
and stupefaction.”

6

3.

Will God's wrath
come on you if you

are a believer? No,
not if you have
placed your faith in
Jesus, who delivers
us from the coming
wrath.

-

1

Thessalonians

1:9-10 you turned
to God from idols
to serve the living
and true God, 10
and to wait for
his Son from
heaven, whom he

raised from the
dead, Jesus who
delivers us from the
wrath to come.

—

But the earthly
consequences of
sin are the same
for both the elect
and the non-elect

■

—

These desires
wage war against
your soul.

-

1 Peter 2:11 **B**
eloved, I urge you

as sojourners
and exiles to
abstain from the
passions of the
flesh, which wage
war against your
soul.

-

James 4 tells
us that our evil
desires are the
reason we fight,
and
war

, and
kill

■

-

These desires
bring forth death.

-

James 1:15 1
5 Then desire
when it has
conceived gives
birth to sin, and sin
when it is fully

grown brings
forth death.

—

Evil desires will

kill you – this is
the goal of the
prostitute in Rev.
17. Those who
dwell on the earth
are drunk with
her sexual
immorality (

Rev. 17:2

), and she is “
drunk with the
blood of the
saints.

” (

Rev. 17:17

)

-

Not only are
the earthly
consequences of

sin the same for
the elect and
the non-elect
alike, but the
eternal
consequences of
sin come on all
who will not

repent .

-

The
consequences
are eternal.

—

Galatians 6:8

For the one who
sows to his own
flesh will from
the flesh reap

corruption, but
the one who
sows to the
Spirit will from the
Spirit reap eternal
life.

-

Evil desires
will keep you
from inheriting
the kingdom of
God .

-

1

Corinthians 6:9

Do you not know
that the
unrighteous will

not inherit the
kingdom of God?
Do not be
deceived: neither
the sexually
immoral, nor
idolaters, nor
adulterers, nor

men who
practice
homosexuality,
nor thieves,
nor the greedy,
nor drunkards,
nor revilers, nor
swindlers will

inherit the
kingdom of God.

—

Evil desires
will take you to h
ell

■

—

Revelation

21:8 But as for
the cowardly,
the faithless,
the detestable,
as for
murderers, the
sexually

immoral,
sorcerers,
idolaters, and all
liars, their
portion will
be in the lake
that burns with
fire and sulfur,

which is the
second death.

—

Illustration: Gollum

—

The ring:
“My precious!”

-

Put it on,
and you gain

the power of
being able to
hide in
invisibility, but it
shows you a
world of evil that
is more

powerful than
you, and which
threatens your
life.

—

At the end,
Gollum clutches
the ring as he
falls over a cliff
into a
burning lake of
fire.

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How: Your Walk and Your Life v. 7

1.

How then

should we put
evil desires to
death? Paul
hints at the
answer in v. 7,
saying

1.

7 In these
you too once
walked, when
you were living
in them.

2.

Paul says that
before you
came to faith in

Christ you had
an old walk
and an old life,
and by pointing
them out Paul is
telling you to
avoid that old

walk and that
old life
whenever you
are tempted to
take them up
again.

3.

Walk

1.

First

Paul

speaks of your
former walk.

2.

Most likely
this is saying

you walked in
the desires
listed above
in v. 5, and it
does not mean
you walked
among the “

sons of disobedience

■

”

3.

“Once
walked”

implies you
now walk in a
new era of life,
in a new
sphere with

which you are
identified and
within which
you move.

4.

It refers to your active life—what you do and the direction in which it leads you.

5.

Life

1.

Paul then
speaks of your
former life.

2.

This refers
to the root of
your life. Tying
your old walk

and life
together,
Maclaren says
“Your active
life was
occupied and
guided by

these sins in
that past
time when your
inward being
was knit to and
nourished by
them. Or to

put it plainly,
conduct
followed and
was shaped by
inclinations
and desires.”
(283)

3.

This “life”
does not refer
to dwelling in a
location, a

house, a
dwelling, but to
the principle of
life within as it
comes to
expression in
all of your

experience.
What drives
you? A desire
to sin? Or a
desire for
Christ? In
what do you

find supreme
enjoyment, so
that you
engross
yourself in it?
What is the
thing that

you fancy will
give you the
greatest
gratification?
In what do
you so revel
that you can

say you “live”
in it?

-

Sexual

immorality

—

Lust

—

Impurity/Unclean-
ness

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—

TV

—

Passion/Evil Desire

—

Alcohol

—

Drugs

-

Food

—

Work,
children, toys

—

Greed

—

Possessions

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Conclusion

1.

You once
lived in what

you must now
put to death.
These desires
are not your
life, and are
contrary to
your spiritual

life in Christ.
They are
contrary to
Christ, who is
your life.

2.

Make it your
ambition

1.

1 Peter 4:2-3

2 to live for
the rest of the
time in the
flesh no longer
for human

passions but
for the will of
God.

2.

You will
suffer as you
seek to fight
against the evil
desires in your

heart. But
remember that

1.

Romans

5:3-5 sufferin
g produces
endurance, 4
and
endurance
produces
character, and

character
produces
hope, 5 and
hope does not
put us to
shame,
because God's

love has been
poured into
our hearts
through the
Holy Spirit who
has been
given to us.

2.

And

1.

Philippians

1:6 he who

began a good

work in you

will bring it to
completion at
the day of
Jesus Christ.

1 Maclaren,

275.

2Maclaren,

277.

3Maclaren,
277.

4Eadie, 223, quoting Trench, New Testament Synonyms

,

§

24.

5Eadie, 223.

6Eadie, 224.