

## 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

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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.

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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.

-

## 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](#)

-

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.

-

**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.

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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**

,

-

**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.

-

**Listed**

-

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.

-

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.”

-

## 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.”<sup>2</sup>

-

**Examples:**

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

-

dirty,                      vile, dead,  
mangled, perverse

-

# Desires

-

“Then follow ‘passion’ and ‘evil desire’ an

’; 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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παροχή is passive, as  
opposed to ἐπιθυμία  
, ἡ  
which is active. It is  
“ungovernable desire.”

-

May have a cause in  
view

-

## Examples:

-

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.

-

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

youth was foul with sensual indulgence?”

“The lowest form of idolatry is the giving of supreme trust to a material thing, and making that a god.

There is no lower form of fetish-worship than this.”

-

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.”<sup>[4](#)</sup> “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

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# 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 hell

▪

—



# 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

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# Passion/Evil Desire

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# Alcohol

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# 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** suffering 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.

4 Eadie, 223,

quoting

Trench, New

Testament

Synonyms

,

§

24.

5Eadie, 223.

6Eadie, 224.