



Death to the Old

[3:5-11]

Gene Cloer

“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (3:5-11).

We are familiar with the truth that the Christian is dead to sin. Paul said in Romans 6:2, 3, “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” Paul’s argument as to why we no longer continue in sin is simply that we are dead to sin. He said, “Our old self was crucified with Him for he who has died is freed from sin” (Romans 6:6, 7). He said, “So consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). In the introduction to our text, he said, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3).

Intellectually, we understand that in becoming a Christian we put our old man of sin to death. We know that in faith and baptism we

died. We glibly quote Romans 6:4 about rising to walk in newness of life, but have we left Christianity in the watery tomb of baptism? We know the theology, but do we know the practice?

Christianity is not like putting on a change of clothing. It goes from the inside out—a drastic change. Christianity is much like an immigrant coming to America who has accepted citizenship but must learn a new way of life. It is not like Cinderella exchanging her old clothes for a new gown for the ball. It is like the ugly frog who, being kissed by the princess, turns into the handsome prince. Peter said, “And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you” (1 Peter 4:4). Our behavior is drastically, observably transformed!

Have we left Christianity in the watery tomb of baptism? Do we live as those who are dead to sin?

In Colossians 3:5-11, we read that sexual sins must be avoided, sins of the tongue must be stopped, and a new image must be put on.

A NEW LIFESTYLE (3:5-7)

All of the sins mentioned in verse 5 refer to sexual sins: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

Sexual immorality refers to all kinds of sexual impurity. Heterosexual, homosexual, premarital, extramarital, and any other type of sin that

might be imagined is included. Any unlicensed sexual activity is comprehended in this word.

Into a world in which people believed that all appetites should be fulfilled, Christianity came saying, "Purity is the goal; avoid sexual sin." What a contrast! No wonder others would think them strange!

"Evil desire" describes a man who is a slave to his passion, who is driven by the desire for wrong things. A man with evil desire has lost control of his life.

Following the word "greed," Paul added the thought, "which amounts to idolatry." The question is this: Does the phrase regarding idolatry refer to only the last word or to all the previously mentioned sins? Covetousness is not limited to money. We can easily covet sexual relationships to which we have no right. Remember the last of the Ten Commandments? It specifically states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

Perhaps you are thinking, "All of this belongs to the first century!" But these sins are as prevalent now as then. They are as modern as apple pie, as current as computer viruses. Our world is filled with greater immoral exposure than ever before through the media. What you would not have dreamed of watching in a movie theater a few years ago, people are now watching in their living rooms. Our young people face greater pressures than ever before. Young married couples face the breakup of homes, the shattering of families.

Remember! Avoid these sins! You are dead to these things! You have a new lifestyle.

A NEW LANGUAGE (3:8, 9)

Six different sins of the tongue are mentioned in 3:8, 9: "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices." We are dead to these sins. We cannot allow them to be a part of our lives. We must put them off!

They, however, have been habitual. Habits are not automatically cut off simply because we are baptized into Christ. Part of the old life will linger, and we will have to continually rid ourselves of that part. It is a day-to-day struggle. We are changing and improving, growing more and more like Christ.

"Anger" is a sudden blaze of temper which is quickly kindled and quickly dies. "Wrath" is a

long-lasting, slow-burning, smoldering anger. We have a tendency to nurse it to keep it going. For the Christian, both the sudden burst of temper and the long-lasting anger must be avoided.

"Malice" is a viciousness of mind that desires evil for others. This mindset not only desires evil but will do almost anything to accomplish it.

Blasphemy is evil talk directed toward God. It becomes "slander" if it is directed toward man. No Christian should ever resort to such language.

Filthy communication or filthy language is "abusive speech." Our world is filled with filthy language. You can hardly listen to anything or go anywhere without being assaulted by filthy language. But it can be easily understood that a Christian can have no part in this type of talk. The Christian will carefully watch his language because he knows that Jesus said, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Be careful about your language.

The Christian will not lie. That is part of the old way of life. We must speak the truth to one another. In fact, Paul adds that we should "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Sins of the tongue are a part of the old way of life. We are done with the old way. We are dead to the old way! We are alive to a new way of thinking and living.

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The old way of life was put to death when you became a Christian. Be sure to consider your speech because how you talk demonstrates to others whether or not you are a Christian! Is a difference evident now from how you talked before you became a Christian?

A NEW LIFE (3:10, 11)

We have put off the old man with his vices and put on the new man with his virtues. Some characteristics of the new man are obvious. The Christian can be recognized by these characteristics. Christianity that does not change a man is an imperfect religion. Christianity changes us progressively, as we more completely learn it and more perfectly practice it. It is a continual renewing and a continual growing.

Paul mentioned three characteristics of that new man: "And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (3:10). The Christian is renewed in a "true" knowledge. The growth of knowledge is a never-ending process. It is an increasing need. The more you study the Bible, the more you want to study, the more you need to know. The more we grow, the more knowledge we need.

Second, we are made after the "image of the One" who created us: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The great aspiration of every Christian is to become more and more like Christ. Do others see Jesus in you?

Third, in Christ we have unity, not just the absence of conflict. To be united we have to have the right spirit. We can, with the wrong spirit, be seething inside even though we are not engaged in armed conflict. But in Christ no differences exist: ". . . there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all" (3:11). The distinctions the world has drawn do not matter. Race, peculiarities of the body, nationality or social standing do not matter. Only one thing really matters when all is said and done—that Christ is all and in all, that Christ is in us!

CONCLUSION

Do not leave Christianity in the tomb, the watery grave of baptism! Are we pious on the way to the baptistry and proud on the way out? God help us if this is true! Put off all the characteristics of the old man; put on the characteristics of the new man.

Anger

"Anger is one letter short of danger."

"An angry man is again angry with himself when he returns to reason."

Publilius Syrus

"O Lord, thou knowest that I do well to be angry, but I have mistaken the times."

George Matheson

"Anybody can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."

Aristotle

An Imaginary Conversation

A fellow was speeding down a country road late one night when his tire blew out. When he opened his trunk, he discovered he had forgotten to replace the jack the last time he had used it. He looked around and saw a light in the distance and began walking toward it with the thought he could borrow a jack at the farmhouse.

Musing to himself he opened his imaginary conversation with, "I'll just knock on the door and say I'm in trouble and would he please lend me a jack. He'll say sure, help yourself." Walking and thinking further the man noticed the light in the house had gone out. He thought, "Now he's gone to bed and he'll be mad because I'll have to wake him so I better offer him a dollar. Walking on he now mused, "What if he is away and his wife is alone and she will be afraid to open the door. Maybe I better offer five dollars."

By this time the poor fellow had worked himself up so much he said out loud, "Five dollars! All right, but not a cent more. What are you trying to do, rob a man?" This brought him to the house and he knocked loudly. When the farmer leaned out the window and asked, "Who's there?" the angry stranger yelled, "You and your stupid jack! You can keep the wretched thing!"

Warren and David Wiersbe,
The Elements of Preaching