

## PREFACE

With v5 we begin an examination of the classic “put off/put on” process to which Pastor Jeremy has so often referred. In this session we will look at a first group of those things we are to “put off.” But to be precise, the easier “putting off” or “putting aside” will come in our next session. In *this* session the process is going to be more difficult, more painful, more bloody.

## Read Colossians 3:5-7.

## v5

I always think it best to digest the text myself first, drawing at least initial conclusions without the higher conclusions of the scholars. A preferred starting point to any passage is, “What is God’s word saying to me?” before mixing in other interpretations. At times, however, a glaring difference between two or more translations will force me to the commentators right off the bat, asking them, “Well, which *is* it?”

That was the situation with v5, where virtually all common translations begin with, “Therefore put to death...,” whereas the NASB begins with, “Therefore consider...as dead.”

At first blush these seem to say two different things.

**put to death:** personally active: do the deed, kill it, strangle it, bury it; i.e., destroy something that is still living.

**consider...as dead:** *think* of it as dead; no need to kill it yourself, because it is already dead.

Which is correct? The answer is: yes. In the first paragraph of Chapter Three Paul encourages us to set our minds and hearts on things above, rather than on the things of temporal earth. Why? Because (v3) our connection to temporal things has died and our life is now hidden, safely tucked away with Christ in God. *We* have died.

Because *we* have died (with Christ), Paul commands us (v5) to put to death the evil deeds or passions of our persistent earthly body.

**Sidebar:** I find the KJVs misleading with, “put to death (mortify) your members,” which sounds as if he is telling the Colossians to start cutting off pieces of their bodies. [**members = *melos* = a limb or part of the body**] There *are*, admittedly, a few NT passages where “members” refers generally to *faculties* of people, but for what Paul is saying in this passage, I prefer those translations that make it clear that the members of the body themselves are less the problem than what those members are *doing*.

Curtis Vaughan points out that the word translated “put to death”—*nekrosate* (“make dead”)—is very strong; that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes, but to wipe them out, exterminate them, “slay utterly”—“a vigorous, painful act of personal determination.” Then he cites an illustration used by the great preacher Alexander Maclaren:

Maclaren likens it to a man who while working at a machine gets his fingers drawn between rollers or caught in the 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 is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death.”

Now, let’s reconcile the different translations, “put to death” and “consider as dead.” Once again Daniel J. Moo comes to the rescue.

There is...undoubtedly a particular connection with v. 3a: “you died.... therefore put to death.” Or, to use the language often applied to this general theological concept: “*become what you are.*” We who have died to “the elements of the world” (3:3; 2:20) and to the power of sin (Rom. 6:1-6) because of our union with Christ are to “become” dead to sin in the realities of everyday life. But this “putting to death” of sin is not only demanded by our incorporation into Christ; it is also empowered and effected by it. Union with Christ, because it puts us in a new relationship to sin and brings us into the sphere of the Spirit’s power, will impact the way we live. Ultimately, then, the imperative “put to death” in this verse must be viewed as *a call to respond to, and cooperate with, the transformative power that is already operative within us.* (emphasis added)

So the apostle presents, in v5, a list of five fleshly sins—four of which are explicitly sexual in nature.

**immorality**<sup>nasb</sup>, **fornication**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **sexual immorality**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *porneia* = harlotry (including adultery and incest); figurative idolatry :- fornication.  
[R. Kent Hughes (and below): “every kind of immoral sexual relation.”]

There is nothing new under the sun, and the sensual temptations of men and women go all the way back to the Garden. So then, as now, I believe the apostle knew that many in the Colossian church would read the first item on this list, which pertains especially to *physical* sexual sin, and say (as many of us would today), “Well, I don’t cheat on my husband or wife, I don’t have affairs with the neighbors, so I’m in the clear.” Thus Paul included the second item on the list, which, convictingly, catches every *other* form of sexual sin.

**impurity**<sup>nasb, niv, esv</sup>, **uncleanness**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *akatharsia* (ak-ath-ar-see'-ah) = from <G169> (akathartos); impurity (the quality), **physical or moral** :- uncleanness.  
[“This is wider and subtler than physical immorality, for it embraces the lurid imagination, speech, and deed of a sensual heart or filthy mind.”]

**passion**<sup>nasb, nkjv, esv</sup>, **inordinate affection**<sup>kjv</sup>, **lust**<sup>niv</sup> = *pathos* = from the alternate of <G3958> (pascho); properly **suffering** (“pathos”), i.e. (subject) a passion (especially concupiscence) :- (inordinate) affection, lust.  
[Originally *pathos* could be good or bad, but in the NT it is always presented as something sinful. (Curtis Vaughan) “The shameful emotion that leads to sexual excesses. Paul used the same word to describe the “passionate lust” of the Gentiles who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:5) and the “shameful lusts” of homosexuality (Romans 1:26).”]

**evil desire(s)**, **evil concupiscence**<sup>kjv</sup> = *epithymia* (ep-ee-thoo-me'-ah) = from <G1937> (epithumeo); **a longing (especially for that which is forbidden)** :- concupiscence [*precisely the correct word; it's just that we no longer use it*], desire, **lust** (after).  
[“wicked, self-serving, rapacious lust”]

Let's look at a passage that expands on this using the same word.

### Read James 1:14-15.

Completing this list of sexual sins with “greed” may, at first glance, seem odd. But when you think about it, it is a perfect closer. For what is greed, after all? *I want!* And at their root, what are all sexual sins? *I want! I don't care about anyone else. I want!* When King David looked on Uriah the Hittite's wife he knew his desire for her was a sin, but reason and fidelity to the Lord's law were overwhelmed by *I want!*

And giving oneself over to the baser passions of the flesh, to an insatiable selfishness, is idolatry, since we have thus placed our own self-interest before God. Instead of glorifying the Lord God, we have given ourselves over to glorifying our natural flesh.

### *Application*

Right about now in my study I regretted the lack of time we would have in class to discuss the ways and means of carrying out the command of v5. It is one thing to read it on the page, but quite another to put it into daily practice. Just how are we to do this?

But then I realized that even if we had the time for such a sharing of ideas and methods, this topic especially is perhaps not suitable for such a mixed gathering as this—mixed not just by sex, but by such disparate ages. The sins mentioned in v5 are deeply personal, embarrassing, offensive. They may be better confronted individually, or with a trusted and Biblically wise counselor.

But by way of application I *would* leave you with this: The command here to put these sins to death is brutal and bloody. Death is never pretty, and like the illustration by Maclaren, killing something so deeply a part of us will be excruciating, and will require the power of Christ and the indwelling Spirit to accomplish. On paper it sounds simple enough: Live what you already are. But in the flesh it can at times seem almost impossible. But by the power of God, it is not. If it were, he would not have given us the command.

*Douglas Moo:* Putting to death sins like these is possible...because God has given His people, through His Spirit, a new power to conform their conduct to God's holy demands.

**Read v6.**

**Sidebar:** The NASB (updated) and KJVs add “upon the sons of disobedience,” while the NIV, ESV, and NASB (original) leave it out. Two of the oldest (i.e., considered more authoritative by most scholars) manuscripts do not have this, which is why these two translations do not have it. However, a good argument can be made for its inclusion, as well—not the least is the inclusion of “you *also*” in v7.

But, again, this is one of the reasons I favor the NASB for study; in these situations there will be a margin note explaining the variance.

In the companion verse, Ephesians 5:6, the phrase is explicitly included:

**Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

It is remarkable how often God’s word—especially in the OT—puts things in terms of sexuality and/or marriage. In a particularly graphic chapter in Ezekiel, the Lord likens Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness to Him to an adulteress wife.

**Read Ezekiel 16:32-33.**

With the NT imagery of the church being the bride of Christ, it makes sense that God in His word would associate spiritual unfaithfulness to physical unfaithfulness—even prostitution.

**Read Jeremiah 13:27.**

So it is not surprising that God’s wrath would be kindled against “these things”—the itemized list of v5. After all, think how the Lord speaks of marriage—of two people, man and woman, becoming “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The relationship between husband and wife is personal, intimate, precious. It is unique, like no other relationship on earth.

If that is how the Lord God pictures His relationship with, first, Israel, and second, believers through Christ—intimate, precious—then his response to betrayal (“idolatry”) is going to be like that of a husband who has discovered his wife in the arms of another man, or a wife who learns of her husband’s adultery: deep hurt, and anger. And the Lord’s anger is translated “wrath.”

**wrath** = *orge* = from <G3713> (oregomai); properly desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy) **violent passion (ire, or [justifiable] abhorrence)**; by implication **punishment** :- anger, **indignation, vengeance, wrath.**

We need not, as forgiven Christians, shy away from this word “wrath.” If we think in terms of God’s wrath meted out upon the unregenerate in the Day of Judgment, we understand that His wrath is synonymous with banishment to hell and eternal punishment.

But it can also represent, in a way, His judgment of believers—not directed at them, but to their deeds—when they stand before Him and are held to account for their lives.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.**

Consigned to hell? No. Forgiven? Indeed. Persistent sinful behavior judged and punished (or perhaps better described as “burned up” [1 Corinthians 3:15])? You bet. “Sons of disobedience” refers specifically to those in opposition to God, but at the same time it is included here as a warning to believers.

v7

Verse seven closes the sentence of v6, illuminating the command of v5 to put to death or consider as dead “these things.”

### **Read vv6-7.**

The NASB points out that “living in them”—which refers back to “the sons of disobedience”—can also be translated “living among these”—which refers back to the list of sins.

Let me close with a Lampel paraphrase of our passage, which roughly reverses the order of the text for clarification:

You once walked in immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). The wrath of God will come upon those who *still* walk in these things. But in Christ you have died to such things, *so live who you are*: In your mind, put to death these things that tempt the flesh, so that they will no longer even *exist* for you.