

Held Together:
The Practices that Hold It All Together
Colossians 3:5-17

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Text Introduction: We are working our way through the book of Colossians. A key phrase of Colossians comes in Colossians 1:17, “And by Him all things hold together.” I love this phrase. This phrase speaks to the preeminence of Jesus. He is all things. If He is all things, He must be first place in my life.

We have now moved on to the application section of this letter. The application of the theological content could not be more clear than what we have in this passage before us today.

Text: ⁵Therefore, put to death what belongs to your worldly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.⁶ Because of these, God’s wrath comes on the disobedient, ⁷and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must also put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. ¹¹In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

¹²Therefore, God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. ¹⁴Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵And let the peace of the Messiah, to which you were also called in one body, control your hearts. Be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Introduction: Most believe that Paul had probably never been to Colossae, but that some disciples of Paul started the church there. Regardless of the exact relationship that Paul had with them, he wrote to them primarily to encourage them to follow through in their faith. As a way of summary, you could say that Paul’s chief aim in this letter is to explore every aspect of the supremacy of Christ for life. In this brief letter you will note first that Christ is supreme in every area of life. He is supreme in creation (1:15-16), supreme in the church (1:18), and supreme in the family (3:18-22). As a result of the supreme nature of Christ, we should set our minds on Him to such a degree that “whatever we do in word or deed, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17).

Last week, we saw in Colossians 3:1-4 several promises related to how we have been given the power to live lives focused on Jesus. We talked about those powers being the resurrection, residence, resources and revelation of Christ. But, today, we realize that our struggle is not over in this life. Just because we have the power to do something doesn’t mean that we always do it. We must tap into that power.

There are a lot of ways to get at the practical implications of this text. We could get at the meaning of this text by examining the ...

3 Imperatives Dominating this Text

1. Put to Death
2. Put Away
3. Put On

All of these imperatives point to actions. There is a tension here and throughout Scripture. God, in Christ, gives us the power, but we must take specific action to appropriate that power.

2 Illustrations Driving This Text

1. Dying versus Living
2. Changing Clothes

The key to these analogies is that each shows us an extreme and decisive action.

1 Indicative Deriving from this Text

The indicative is in verse 11.

Christians don't behave this way, and do behave this way! And there are lists to support what these ways are.

But, wait, there is more....

I am not sure that you needed me for that lesson. I mean by that—you already knew that. Our trouble is not knowing what to do; our trouble is doing the right thing. Our difficulty is not as we said a few weeks ago, knowing that, as believers, we are to walk in Him. Our trouble is “walking in Him!”

So What? 3 Principles that Really Challenge Us in this Text:

1. Get serious about sin.

You can't read this passage without acknowledging the seriousness of sin. God's wrath comes on the disobedient. (3:6)

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, spoke about the seriousness of sin. In challenging his listeners about adultery and lust, Jesus said:

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell! (Matthew 5:29-30)

Jesus picked up this same idea as recorded in Matthew 18:6-9. Here, He is talking about the woe that comes over the one who causes the downfall of a child.

2. Get serious about all sin, not just some sin.

Another principle that we find in this passage in Colossians is that we are to get serious about all sin, not just some sin. That's the reason for the sequence of moving from what we might call "big" sins to "little" sins.

Jesus had a story about this. We sometimes refer to this story as the Pharisee and the Publican or Tax Collector.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else:¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple complex to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.¹¹ The Pharisee took his stand and was praying like this: 'God, I thank You that I'm not like other people —greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, 'God, turn Your wrath from me—a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

We ought to see ourselves in that story. That story also points us to the third principle.

3. Get as serious about your sin as you are about their sin.

And Jesus had something to say about this also in the Sermon on the Mount. I think you remember the saying: "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3)

One of my favorite stories ever communicates the principle that we must deal seriously with our sin. A certain man wanted to sell his house. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door. After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So, the first owner went out and found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the nail he owned. After much protest, the original owner said, "That's my nail, I can do with it as I please." Soon the house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail. The conclusion is rather clear: If we leave the Devil even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation.¹

So How?

¹ From *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, Craig Brian Larson, editor, p. 37.

Let's add a question of application this week. You are familiar with the "So What?" But I want to add a note here of "How are we going to do the 'So what?'" Because again, isn't that most of our trouble? The Colossians passage helps us, I think.

1. Let the peace of God direct you.
2. Let the praise of God dominate you.
3. Let the Word of God dwell in you.
4. Let the Worship of God define you.
5. Let the Will of God discern for you.

Here is the ultimate test of our discipleship. Here is the ultimate test of whether Christ has come to have first place in our lives. Can we say that this (whatever this is) brings glory to God?