

“Be Killing Sin or it be Killing You”

Colossians 3:5-7 *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce*, pictures a man standing before one of God's angels. The man has a lizard on his shoulder. The lizard pictures the sin nature. As the angel seeks to kill it, the man shrinks back, because he fears if the lizard is killed, it will kill him too; the lizard on his shoulder has been with him for so long. The lizard whispers to him that he needs it, and he should not allow it to be killed. The man argues with the angel as he approaches the lizard to kill it, the fiery heat of the angel's hands burning the man's neck. The man says, “You're hurting me.” The angel replies, “I never said it wouldn't hurt; I said it won't kill you.” The man agrees, and as the angel deals with the lizard, the man shrieks in pain, and then it is over. The man is transformed, and in fact, so is the lizard. C.S. Lewis was picturing the fact that something very much a part of us must die if we want to live the risen life.

We are told to put to death our members that are on the earth. That's a striking phrase for two reasons. Firstly, we are told to kill something, which is a drastic action. Second, we are told that the thing we must kill is something in us, or a part of us. So what is meant by this rather odd phrase 'your members that are on the earth'?

1. The Description of These Members

A member of your body is a part of you. A lung, a finger, a hair – is one of your members. So the first thing we learn is that whatever we have to kill is somehow still part of us.

The instruction is to put to death those parts of you that *are on the earth*. At first, that sounds strange. Every part of me is on the earth, right? Well, the context of these verses has put a different meaning on *above* and *below*. Look at verses 1 and 2

Colossians 3:1-2 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things **above**, not on things **on the earth**.*

We have been raised with Christ, so we seek what is above *where He is* – what is eternal, what is permanent. We have died with Christ, so we continue to die *to what He died to*.

What is that? What is part of this evil world system in opposition to God. Its focus is temporary; it seeks immediate gratification at the expense of eternal joy.

Paul goes on to describe what these members are in real terms:

Fornication. This refers to any kind of unlawful sexual activity; extra-marital sex, pre-marital sex, perversions, pornography, self-sexuality. It includes unmarried couples who engage in activity that is not the completed act of union, but is otherwise dabbling in physical sexual activity.

To use God's gift of sex in any other way than He intended belongs to what is below.

Uncleanness. This refers to any kind of impurity. It is a word which Jesus used to describe the souls of the Pharisees. Outwardly they appear beautiful to men, but inwardly they are full of uncleanness and dead men's bones. The idea is that the mind is being corrupted, polluted, dirtied. It speaks of a mind set on the fornication we just spoke of, in one sense. We know of people who cannot view anything in life, or hear any kind of sentence or phrase without their mind putting a dirty connotation on it. In another sense it is any moral uncleanness in the soul.

Passion. This word translates the Greek word *pathos*, which if you ever studied debate or rhetoric

or communication, is used to refer to the emotions. Most translations choose the word *passion*, though some use the word *lust*. The idea behind this word is that of being controlled by your appetites. The craving for food, or for drink, or for sexual pleasure, or for material comforts, or for applause, or for the driving beat of loud music – it is being controlled not by your mind set on things above. In fact, Paul spoke of people like this in Philippians.

Philippians 3:18-19 *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things.*

Actually, the Old King James Version has one of the best translations of this word, though it is one that might sound strange to our ears. It translates it '*inordinate affection*'. If something is ordinate, it is fitting and appropriate. Inordinate is the opposite. So inordinate affection is when you love the wrong things, and you love in the wrong way. It is when you do not love the right things the way you ought to, to the degree you ought to. A man who loves his TV more than Christ is guilty of inordinate affection – he wants the immediate thrill of amusement, not the greater joy of communion.

Romans 1:26 *For this reason God gave them up to **vile passions**. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.*

Evil Desire. This seems to flow out of the last one, passion. The Bible is not against strong desires. The more lovely something is, the more we should desire it. Since God is infinitely lovely, those who know Him best have the strongest desires: “*As the deer pants after the water brooks so my soul pants after You, O Lord.*” What makes a desire evil?

It is when what we desire is forbidden; when we desire something more than we should. Desiring success in your studies or your job is a good thing, but when it chokes out your time with Christ, it has become an evil desire. Desiring that your children be disciplined and on a good schedule is a good thing, but when it prevents you from ministering in the local church it has become an evil desire. Desiring that your body be fit and healthy is a good thing, but when it prevents you from meeting your spiritual obligations, it has become an evil desire. Any time we want something more than it should be wanted, or far more than something else we should want, we have evil desires. They are not ultimately set on things above.

Covetousness, which is Idolatry. Covetousness is discontent turned outward. Coveting is more than desiring something. Coveting is when you are discontent with what God has given you. You are discontent with your money, your car, your salary, your wife, your husband, your parents, your children, your possessions. You feel that you have been short-changed, maybe even robbed. You deserve better. And so you turn your craving to fill that discontent outwards – to another man or woman, to that item to be purchased, to that house, to that salary which will provide you with the buying power. It is a strong craving to have what you do not have – so as to feel fulfilled. In fact, when you should be content, and you still want more – what do we call that? We call it greed. Covetousness is greediness – a rebellion against what God has given you.

Why is it idolatry?

It is idolatry because when we are discontent, we are saying that Christ Himself is not sufficient. And since He is not sufficient we must turn somewhere else to substitute for Him, or maybe even supplement Him. But when we supplement Him, we are putting Him on the level of other things. It is idolatry, turning our trust and our love toward things.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He

Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Wanting to fill the void that can only be filled by Christ is seeking the things below – the things temporary, worldly.

2. The Danger of These Members

The Bible now tells us how dangerous these things are. *"Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience"*. 'The sons of disobedience' is another way of saying – unbelievers - those people who belong to a spiritual family in rebellion to God. Unless they turn and trust Christ, they will experience God's anger - His holy fury burning forever in a lake of fire.

In other words, consider that you have something which is still part of you which sends people to hell. If you were not saved by the grace of God, these things would condemn you. But the fact that the very thing which condemns people is still some part of you should lead you to want to get it out of you, kill it.

Consider the difference between finding a butterfly on your hand, and finding a tarantula. The one you would hardly pay much attention to, the other you would shake off violently. If you realise you have, as some part of you, something which provokes God, what should you want to do with it?

We speak of a bull seeing red. If you were in the streets of Pamplona, Spain, when wild bulls are allowed to run through the streets, and you were caught in an alleyway between yourself and the bull; and you realised you had a big, bright red scarf around your neck – what would you do with that scarf? God is far more wrathful at sin than a bull is at the colour red. And while the wrath of God has been taken by Christ on the cross, we are still able to provoke God as a Father with these things. We should hate them.

Verse 7 helps us understand our past relationship to these things, and our present relationship to these things.

There was a time when these things were our life. The Bible tells us, we lived in them and walked in them. As an unbeliever, you can't be separate from these sins, because they are your life. They are the air you breathe – you live by pleasing self.

But once you are saved, that is supposed to be in the past. You are no longer living in these sins, walking in them. You died to them. Because you are not yet glorified, you still have something of remaining sin. Call it a sin nature, the flesh, the old man – something is still part of your soul that must be put to death.

Romans 7:23 *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

Sin used to be like your vital organs – your lungs, heart, stomach, blood. But now God disconnected you from that life-support system and connected you with His Son's life. Sin is now like a cancerous tumor, like a malignant growth. You cannot leave it, or it will spread. But it is not your life anymore. It is the last remaining remnants of the old, and it must be put to death.

3. Dealing with these Members

Firstly, notice that this is a command. You have to do this. God instructs us to.

Secondly, notice, that this is something you must do. It is not something that will be done to you. You cannot do it alone, but it is something you must take responsibility for.

Why is the command so severe? Why must I kill these sinful tendencies that remain in me?

Here are John Owen's words:

“...the choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin...Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you. Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work.”

As some of you know from personal experience, a deadly disease must be fought with deadly means. Cancer cells do not peacefully co-exist with the other cells in your body. They spread and destroy, and if they are not stopped, they can cause death in the person afflicted by it.

And so the way cancer is treated is with death. Radiation is applied to the area, which kills the cells; or very strong toxic drugs which poison the cells are prescribed. Often the patient must experience great pain and sickness because the process of killing a disease inside you affects the healthy cells.

Why is the treatment so radical? It is because the disease is deadly. The only way to deal with a deadly disease is to kill it. Kill it, or it will kill you.

As terrible as cancer is, sin is worse. Sin is also deadly. The wages of sin is death.

James 1:15 *Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

While cancer will end a life prematurely, sin brings a death that will last forever. And the only way to deal with a deadly thing like sin is to kill it.

But how many Christians have simply chosen to accept their sin, and call it personality. How many Christians have made peace with their sin and have called it 'just the way I am'. How many call their sin 'weakness' or 'mistakes' or 'immaturity'. Cancer patients don't call their cancer 'some extra matter' or 'some naughty cells' or 'a rather enthusiastic growth' because they know what is at stake. How many of us know what is really at stake with our sin. *Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.*

How?

You can kill sin because you have died. Usually present events go back into the past. In the Christian life past events run forward into the present. The past event of dying to sin is the power in the present to kill it. If you believe it by faith, the Holy Spirit connects you with Christ's 'once for all' death to sin, and you have the power of Calvary to kill sin. If you were still alive to sin, you couldn't kill it. But now you can.

Romans 8:13 *For 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.*

What are the ways we kill sin in our lives?

I. By fleeing temptation.

The Bible tells us to flee from sin. When you flee, you are trying to get away from something, which is probably stronger than you. You flee a man with a gun; you don't flee a child with a toy. So if we flee from sin, does that mean Christ is not powerful enough?

No, it means you have an enemy within that you dare not expose to temptation. Christ conquers sin, but not when we go up to it and expose ourselves to it. At that point, we are already so involved, we cannot pull back. Sin is like the south pole of a magnet, and your sin nature is the north pole of a

magnet. They attract. Get your sin nature too close to the sin, and the attraction is soon irresistible.

There was a young man who did not understand this truth of one side of a magnet being in his nature. We learn about him in Proverbs 7:4-23.

Proverbs 7:4-23 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," And call understanding your nearest kin, ⁵ That they may keep you from the immoral woman, From the seductress who flatters with her words. ⁶ For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, ⁷ And saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, A young man devoid of understanding, ⁸ Passing along the street near her corner; And he took the path to her house ⁹ In the twilight, in the evening, In the black and dark night. ¹⁰ And there a woman met him, With the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart. ¹¹ She was loud and rebellious, Her feet would not stay at home. ¹² At times she was outside, at times in the open square, Lurking at every corner. ¹³ So she caught him and kissed him; With an impudent face she said to him: ¹⁴ "I have peace offerings with me; Today I have paid my vows. ¹⁵ So I came out to meet you, Diligently to seek your face, And I have found you. ¹⁶ I have spread my bed with tapestry, Colored coverings of Egyptian linen. ¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. ¹⁸ Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with love. ¹⁹ For my husband is not at home; He has gone on a long journey; ²⁰ He has taken a bag of money with him, And will come home on the appointed day." ²¹ With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. ²² Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, ²³ Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.

This is why the Bible says in **Romans 13:14** *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

Don't give yourself space to sin. Don't open the door. Don't give yourself opportunities to sin. If the TV is a stumbling block, switch it off or watch it with others in the room; and the same for the Internet. If you are battling food issues, don't walk past the food court. If you are battling purity, don't be alone together in a house or flat. If you are battling resentment, envy, gossip, don't give yourself hours of free, unoccupied time every day. If you are battling covetousness, do not take extended walks through the mall or page through brochures.

If you give sin a finger, it will take an arm. If you flee even the temptation, you are extinguishing the sparks before they grow into flames.

But when you flee something, you must follow after something else. You flee from temptation to follow after righteousness. You put off, and then you put on.

II. By feeding your new nature, and starving your old nature.

A recently converted Red Indian was asked how he experienced his new life in Christ. He said, 'It's like there are two dogs inside me. The old evil dog, and the new good dog. And they are always fighting, always pulling me in different ways.' The missionary asked him, 'Which dog tends to win?' He replied, 'Whichever dog I have been feeding the most.'

The same is true of your old sin nature, and your new Christlike nature. Whichever one you feed the most, grows stronger. The one you feed the least tends to weaken. The way you put sin to death is by starving it

There are some things a lion will not eat, and there are some things a rhino will not eat. Lions will not eat lettuce, and rhinos will not eat biltong. They have been made by God to digest meat and vegetation respectively.

Your sin nature cannot stomach truth about God, His attributes, or the Word of God in general. The diet of Philippians 4:8 is nauseating to it – whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely,

commendable, excellent, praiseworthy are not the things it wants to see, hear about or experience. It wants, according to Galatians 5:19-21, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, evil desire, idolatry, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries.

It feels nourished when it has these things. Your new nature on the other hand vomits these things, but craves the milk of the Word, it craves the Philippians 4:8 diet.

So you have to be so discerning with the TV, the cinema, magazines, books, music and the Internet. It will not do to say, "There's only a little bit of fornication, there's only a few scenes of hatred and contentions, it's only a small amount of idolatry." The truth is, any amount is feeding your sinful nature. And to feed it in one area, is to feed it in all areas.

If you feed yourself movies about egotism and selfish ambition, do not be surprised if you find yourself struggling with fornication or drunkenness. You cannot isolate one sin from another. To feed it in one area is to feed it in all.

So the simplest rule is to ask, 'Would Christ sit with me and watch this?' 'Would Christ sit in the car and listen to this station?' 'Would Christ flip through this magazine?' 'Would Christ stay on this website?' 'Would Christ enjoy this conversation?' 'Would Christ be comfortable in this place?' 'Would Christ be comfortable with this activity?' If the answer is no, the chances are, it is feeding the old nature.

Starve the old nature, but make sure you feed the new. Take time to soak yourself in the Word of God. Enjoy His presence in prayer. Be with God's people every time we meet. Why would you forsake the assembling of the church to go home and switch on the TV? Replace useless magazines with Christian books. Get Christian books on tape or CD, get the Bible on CD and listen to it in your car. Embrace the kind of music and literature that promotes what is true, noble, just, pure, and lovely.

If you want the python in your lounge to die, stop feeding it mice. Put it in an enclosed tank, and starve it. If you want to put sin to death, then stop giving it food to munch on.

III. By forcefully refusing sin at the point of temptation.

If you do not feed sin, you will minimise the amount of temptation in your life. If you flee temptation, you minimise even the minimised temptation. But if you have done all this, there will still be points at which temptation confronts you square in the face. Get angry at your husband or don't. Covet the product on that billboard or don't. Lust after that passing woman or man, or don't. What you do with sin at the point of temptation determines whether it will truly die, or live to haunt you another day.

The Bible has many words for what to do with sin when it tempts you, which all really mean the same thing.

Peter says "Abstain from fleshly lusts" (I Peter 2:11)

Paul says "Do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin" (Romans 6:13)

Paul says "Abstain from every appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22)

But perhaps the strongest words came from our Lord Jesus.

Matthew 18:7-9 *Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! ⁸ "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting*

fire. ⁹ "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Jesus was not calling for us to maim ourselves. He was calling for us to be ruthless with ourselves. If you are fleeing from hell, and the door of hell catches your hand, you leave your hand behind; you do not stay in hell for the sake of your hand.

Whatever the sin is, you must be ruthless and radical with it at the point of temptation. You must be willing to suffer some loss, some tearing, some disappointment – which is what your sinful nature will feel as you turn from the sin.

Temptation squeals for you to give in, like an animal stuck in a trap. It pulls on you like gravity. Killing sin means hardening yourself to its cries, turning a deaf ear, saying no to it, and yes to obeying Christ.

If it were easy to say no to sin, the Bible wouldn't speak of killing it. It is painful to deny something that is still a part of you.

Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife as she grabbed onto him. Abraham was tempted to just give up and refuse to go through with sacrificing Isaac. But at that critical moment they chose the tearing, the pain, the cries of their sinful natures, they received grace.

There is a tearing, pain, kicking and fighting, and then it is over. You have put sin to death again, and weakened it overall.

As we have said before, the grace to say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to righteousness does not come a moment before the choice to obey. God gives you desires; He gives you His Word; His Spirit prompts you, but the grace to obey comes the very moment you turn from sin and turn to righteousness.

The Spirit is there at any moment to enable us to flee sin, feed the new nature, and to firmly resist temptation.

The way you deal with sin reflects what you believe about it. If you see it as a friend, you welcome it. If you see it as a normal part of life, you co-exist with it. If you see it as unfortunate, you might pick a fight with it now and then. If you see it as a deadly spiritual cancer, you will kill it, before it kills you.