

# The Antidote to Living in the Flesh

**Bible Reading – Colossians chapter 3 verses 1, 2, and 5 to 17 NLT**

*“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God’s right hand. <sup>2</sup> Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.*

*Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. <sup>8</sup> But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behaviour, slander, and dirty language. <sup>9</sup> Don’t lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds.*

*<sup>10</sup> Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. <sup>11</sup> In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

*<sup>12</sup> Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

*<sup>16</sup> Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”*

## SERMON

This afternoon, I want to reinforce to you what we have heard in the Scripture reading that I have just read to you from Colossians chapter 3.

The New Testament letter of Colossians was written by Paul to the members of a Church established in a city called Colossae in modern day Turkey, a short while after Christ's death.

This city was not far from Ephesus and Laodicea, where two other Churches were established.

According to the first chapter of the letter, it is most likely that the Church was established by Timothy and Epaphras.

Epaphras lived in the city, as did another man mentioned by Paul in the New Testament; his name was Philemon.

In 500 BC, it was a place of great importance, but during the first century AD, the town was apparently hit by a major earthquake and many residents began to move away to other towns and cities until, in time, the once great city of old was downgraded to a village, by the local authorities.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the church was destroyed by the Turks, and Colossae soon disappeared off the map altogether. Ruins of the Church and other buildings can still be seen today.

It seems the purpose of the letter was to correct some wrong teaching that people in the Church were following. We can see this in chapter 2 where Paul says, "Do not let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking, and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ."

In Ephesians chapter 6 Paul tells us that when he talks about 'spiritual powers' he is talking about demons. And we can therefore deduce that he believed some of the wrong teaching his flock were hearing, was from 'so-called teachers' who Paul believed had been influenced by demons. He goes on to talk about some rules that they were following that were not of God, but of human minds.

Sadly, we still hear teaching based on man-made thoughts rather than the Word of God, in some church quarters today.

What I want to do is look at the section of Chapter 3 that I just read to you.

As Christians, we have been 'raised to new life', says Paul.

As a result, he says to us in verse 2, we are to think about 'the things of heaven', not the things of earth.

We must put to death, he says, everything in us that is 'earthly'.

Writing to the Galatians – chapter 5 and verse 24 he put it this way:

***'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'***

Jesus understood how hard we find this, especially when we are tired or weary. During Passion Week, He told His disciples (who were tired and not able to stay awake when He needed their company and support), ***"Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak."***

An American author, David Diga Hernandez, talking about how to overcome sin, says we have to 'kill the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh'.

The lust of the eyes and the flesh? - Well that basically means we need to 'stop looking at things we shouldn't be looking at and wanting, or coveting those things – they are things that are bad for us.'

Paul now gives us examples of the very **earthly things, fleshly things** that need putting to death, or crucifying:

He helpfully lists some of these things from verses 5 through to 9:

Sexual immorality.

Impurity.

Lust.

Evil desires.

Greed.

Anger.

Rage

Malicious Behaviour.

Slander.

Dirty Language.

Telling lies.

Paul says we used to do these things before we came to Christ.

So, let us have a think for a moment. Do we still do any of these things today, even if only occasionally?

In verse 6 we are warned:

‘Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.’

Paul is giving us all a WAKE-UP call!

The last sin listed here, is the sin of lying.

On 16<sup>th</sup> April, Michele read to me a news item concerning a couple in Canada who were foster parents. She read it to me from a Christian web site. The couple, David and Frances Baars, were fostering two young girls. The company who placed the children with this couple took the children away from them, when it was reported that the couple refused to tell the children that the Easter Bunny was real.

The worker insisted that Mr and Mrs Baars teach the children that the Easter Bunny is real and that it was an important part of Canadian culture.

Mrs Baars was quoted as saying, "My husband and I were confused, I asked the worker if she actually believed in the Easter Bunny or realized it was fictitious. After evading this question initially, she finally admitted the Easter Bunny was not real, but she did not consider it lying to tell children it was real; she believed it to be an essential part of every Canadian child's experience."

Can you believe it? Doesn't it sound more like an April fool's joke? Well, so far as we are able to confirm, this is a true story and it ran in a Canadian newspaper called the National Post.

The foster father told the foster company he and his wife - members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America – had a no-lying policy. The couple have had to file a law suit to try to get the foster company to hand the children back to them.

It seems to me that political correctness is becoming something that now seriously threatens our right to do and say what we know to be Godly and

truthful. My fear is that it is just a matter of time before such nonsense becomes an every-day event here in the UK...

That couple knew what pleased God – they have a no-lying policy...

In John chapter 8, Jesus, speaking to His followers, which includes you and me, said:

***“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”***

If you want to walk in freedom; speak the truth and it will set you free!

Read the Bible regularly and you will discover the truth.

Beginning with verse 10 of today’s Scripture passage, Paul tells us the truth of what we need to do, **instead** of the things we used to do before becoming Christians.

Firstly, he says our ‘new self’ needs to be continuously renewed in the image of God.

What does he mean, ‘our new self needs to be continuously renewed in the image of God’?

When we become a Christian, we may try to behave differently, but if all we do is say, ‘I will try to be a better person from now on’, the likelihood is we will fail.

When Paul talks about a ‘new self’ he is talking about a person who is now living according to his or her ‘spiritual self’ and no longer by the flesh. We need to become full of the Holy Spirit (born again) and we need to be topped up daily by the Holy Spirit, to have any chance of being able to naturally do the things of God and **stop** the default condition of following our own sinful ways, the ways of the world, and the ways of the devil.

In verse 12 we learn that, as Christians, we are holy. Becoming a Christian means in God’s sight we are now holy. He looks at you and me but sees His Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, in us.

So, in order to demonstrate to others that we are holy, what should our behaviour look like?

Well, in verses 10 through to 17 we are told very clearly what Godly behaviour looks like and how to behave:

We must be tender-hearted.

We must be merciful to others.

Kind.

Humble.

Gentle.

Patient.

We must make allowances for others' imperfections.

And forgive anyone who offends us.

The statement 'to forgive others' is repeated to show how important this is to God. It says 'Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.'

Then Paul says, "above all, LOVE others, this will bind us together in perfect harmony".

He goes on:

Let peace rule your hearts, and live in peace with others.

Always, he says, be thankful.

Meditate on the message about Jesus, and fill your lives with Christ.

Teach and counsel each other with God's wisdom.

Where do we find God's Wisdom? – In His Holy Word – the Bible. So if we are going to teach and counsel with wisdom we must read and know the Holy Scriptures.

Paul goes on: '***Sing to God, psalms, hymns and spiritual worship songs – and do this with a thankful heart.***'

Finally, we are to speak as if we are speaking on behalf of Christ – so before we speak, we should ask ourselves, 'Will what I am about to say, bring glory to God' and if not, then we mustn't say it!

So these things are the antidote to living fleshly lives. This is what God expects of us, His children.

As I said earlier, it is very difficult to naturally walk in the spirit and obey God. Our fleshly desires are frequently at war against the things of the spirit. We need to be born again in order to live according to the spirit.

When we are born again and God fills us with His Holy Spirit, it can still be difficult at times to be Christ-like, but as we press on and overcome, then living our daily lives in the spirit becomes easier and more natural.

If you, like so many, find it difficult to be tender-hearted, merciful to others, kind, humble, gentle, patient, make allowances for others' imperfections, or forgive anyone who offends you - and the other things Paul mentions in this passage - please don't be afraid to ask for prayer. Only God, can do for us and through us, what we find so hard to do in our flesh.

AMEN!

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