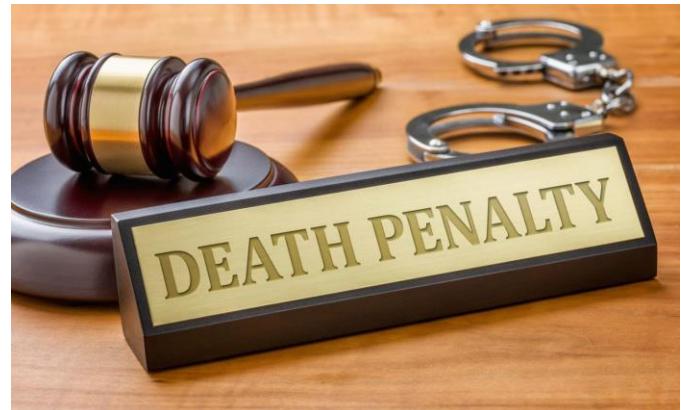


The first three words of our text in Col. 3 are rather brutal: *Put to Death. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature.*

The death penalty is a very controversial topic in the political realm. Should punishment for the most severe crimes be a life sentence in prison or the death penalty? There are slogans and high expectations on each side of the debate. And even Bible verses used to support one side or the other. Yet there does not seem to be any equivocation on God's part in terms of our God views of earthly or fleshly nature. This is what we are to put to death because it is the basis of all our sins that separate us from God and each other and took Christ to the cross.



We may try to rationalize or compromise or excuse these sins – even categorize them as greater or lesser evils – but God does not. He lumps them all together and says eliminate them – render them null and void. Kill them.

Yet, if Christ has already paid the price for all our sins, what's to worry? Why this brutal approach to aspects of our character? The issue is not dying so as to PAY for our sins. Christ has done that. The issue is dying to our earthly nature SO THAT we can live the transformed life that is God's goal for each believer. And that's our theme today from Colossians 3.

What's involved is a great Biblical principle that runs throughout scripture. We are in The Great War – the war between the Spirit and the flesh – a war that rages within every believer. Romans 8 speaks of this war, as does Galatians 5. Romans 8:7-8 describes how high the stakes are: "*The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*" Galatians 5:17 adds; *The sinful natures desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict (the word means constant conflict) with each other SO THAT YOU DO NOT DO WHAT YOU WANT.*" Have you experienced that battle within yourself and felt blocked from living a life that truly pleases God – a life governed by the Spirit? This is the problem Paul is addressing to new believers in both Rome and the area of Galatia.

The life God wants us to live is described in the next verses in Colossians 3 – verse 12: *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. He adds in v. 13+14 – forgiveness, forbearance and love.*

These are in stark contrast to our earthly nature "*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, anger rage, malice, slander and filthy language. (Col. 3:5,8)*". To that list we need to add PRIDE – another major mark of the earthly nature which can so easily rule us. The Bible tells us that *God opposes the proud but give grace to the humble.(Jam.4:6, I Pet. 5:5)*

The corollary to the great war principle is seen in the answer this question: How does our old nature affect our new nature? It blocks it out.

Celebrity chef, writer, and TV personality Anthony Bourdain, who wore a tattoo on his arm that read in ancient Greek, "I am certain of nothing," committed suicide on June 8, 2018, at the age of 61. In [an interview](#) for Men's Journal from 2014, Bourdain was asked: What are the benefits of hedonism, and what are the risks?

Bourgain replied, "Look, I understand that inside me there is a greedy, gluttonous, lazy, hippie—you know? I understand that. ... there's a guy inside me who wants to lay in bed, and smoke weed all day, and watch cartoons, and old movies. I could easily do that. My whole life is a series of stratagems to avoid, and outwit, that guy. ... I'm aware of my appetites, and I don't let them take charge."

When asked: How should a man handle regret? And what's your biggest regret?

Bourgain replied, "Regret is something you've got to just live with, you can't drink it away. You can't run away from it. You can't trick yourself out of it. You've just got to own it. I've disappointed and hurt people in my life, and that's just something I'm going to have to live with. ... You eat that guilt and you live with it. And you own it. You own it for life." *Sean Woods, "Anthony Bourdain on Writing, Hangovers, and Finding a Calling," Men's Journal (2014).*

That's hopelessness.

Suicide because there were no sufficient answers. Bourdain knew the war. So Let's go down through the list of character traits – of the flesh and of the Spirit and see how that plays out:

Sexual immorality. This appears at the top of every list in the New Testament. It includes lust, impurity, and pornography. It includes living together and having sexual relationships outside of marriage.

Kevin, a 24-year-old recent college graduate from Denver, wants to get married someday and is "almost 100% positive" that he will. But not soon, he says, "because I am not done being stupid yet. I still want to go out and have sex with a million girls." He believes that he's figured out how to do that: Girls are easier to mislead than guys just by lying or just not really caring. If you know what girls want, then you know you should not give that to them until the proper time. If you do that strategically, then you can really have anything you want ... whether it's a relationship, sex, or whatever. You have the control.

Kevin was one of 100 men and women, from a cross-section of American communities that my team and I interviewed five years ago as we sought to understand how adults in their 20s and early 30s think about their relationships. He sounds like a jerk. But it's hard to convince him that his strategy won't work—because it has, for him and countless other men.

People like Kevin expect to make the transition from this selfish outlook to a committed relationship, but it isn't that easy. Psychologist Scott Stanley of the University of Denver sees visible daily sacrifices, such as accepting inconveniences in order to see a woman, as the way that men typically show their developing commitment. It signals the expectation of a future together. Such small instances of self-sacrificing love may sound simple, but they are less likely to develop when past and present relationships are founded on the expectation of cheap sex." *Adapted from Mark Regnerus, "Cheap Sex and the Decline of Marriage," The Wall Street Journal (9-29-17)*

*Let me give one more illustration because this is a major issue: this one from Tim Keller:*

Tim Keller was once asked to identify a few obstacles to revival in the contemporary church. Drawing on his experience in Manhattan, Keller started with one issue—the fact that almost all singles outside the Church and a majority inside the Church are sleeping with each other.

"Keller illustrated the point by talking about a tactic, one that he admitted was almost too unkind to use, that an old college pastor associate of his used when catching up with college students who were home from school. He'd ask them to grab coffee with him to catch up on life. When he'd ask about their spiritual lives, they'd often hem and haw, talking about the difficulties and doubts now that they'd taken a little philosophy, or maybe a science class or two, and how it all started to shake the foundations. At that point, he'd look at them and ask one question, "So who have you been sleeping with?" Shocked, their faces would inevitably fall and say something like "How did you know?" Keller pointed out that it's a pretty easy bet that when you have a kid coming home with questions about evolution or philosophy, or some such issue, the prior issue is a troubled conscience.

Keller concludes that if the Church is going to see serious spiritual renewal, especially among the younger generations, we need to present an alternative view of sex that is beautiful, but different than the one offered in the dominant cultural narratives; a view of sexuality that affirms its goodness while placing it within God's intended framework." *Adapted from Derek Rishmawy, "Who Are You Sleeping With? My Conversation with Timothy Keller," Patheos blog (4-11-13)*

I found some graphic images here but thought better than include them because they will stimulate this very area. So instead we have the admonition from scripture: FLEE sexual sins – and their temptation that leads to those sins. Erase pornographic sites from your computer; don't get into a one-on-one situation with someone of the opposite sex where you can act of attraction and arousal; don't capitulate to the cultural norms of cohabitation. FLEE. And then more disastrously KILL this part of your earthly nature.

The opposite of these, of course is holiness. Scripture tells us to *purify ourselves from all these areas of sexual immorality that we can perfect holiness in the fear of God*. When we don't kill our thoughts and acts of sexual immorality, beloved, then we do block the Spirit's transforming work and our hope to be made holy in thought word and deed.

Second – evil desires – these are everything that blocks the love of God and the love of others in our lives. Sometimes, it is seen in power plays when we “bite and devour one another and thus destroy one another.” When we let these evil desires control us, then we have blocked God’s work of love for God an others. This can happen in our families, you know beloved. Johnny Carson, former host of NBC's The Tonight Show, once offered this cynical take on Thanksgiving: "Thanksgiving is an emotional holiday. People travel thousands of miles to be with people they only see once a year. And then discover once a year is way too often." *Johnny Carson, during an episode of The Tonight Show*

Greed and idolatry. The image is the golden calf that the Israelites created to worship when Moses was up on the Mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God. That golden calf symbolizes any idols that come before God – family, success, fame, money, approval, control, culture, Idols become our focus and thus our worship and are in direct disobedience to the First great commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me. But when we do, we block God’s work in our hearts.



And the list goes on: anger or rage. We act out of the emotion of hurt or woundedness or someone critical comment or offensive act and the words that flow from our mouths (or are just churning in our minds are like knives that cut others. Its opposite is patience to wait out the trouble – to see the problem from another's perspective. To stop before we act and speak destructively. The graphic is helpful: “a moment of patience in a moment of anger saves you a hundred moments of regret. Remember if you don't put your anger to death, you have blocked God's fruit of the Spirit of patience, love, and goodness.

*Closely tied to these is jealousy. I love this graphic – it is part of the comparison obsession many of us have – when we compare our performance, or skills with another's and think badly about them or even about ourselves in that comparison. It's opposite is humility. When we don't have an inflated view of ourselves but recognize our own weaknesses and seek to serve others like Jesus did. Put those thoughts of jealousy and comparison to death as soon as they appear, so you don't put to death, instead, the spirit of humility.*



*And finally: Party spirit. Paul talks about this sign of the earthly nature in his letter to Timothy. We have all seen how that spirit of us vs. them has polarized and poisoned our own government; it breaks up churches, can destroy teams or committees at school. It is the black and white thinking of a closed mind and closes the door to the Spirit's work of forgiveness. When you don't deal with that root sin, then you block one of the most essential trademarks of the Christian – forgiveness.*

But there's good news. Both Romans and Galatians talk about our being crucified with Christ. God sees the depth of these earthly nature traits and took them to the cross – not only for our forgiveness but also for our deliverance from them: Paul says in Gal.2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I (the old nature me) who lives but Christ who lives in me and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

The Romans passage details this further: *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin MIGHT BE DONE AWAY WITH, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.* Yes. Yes. Yes. This is the reality we want to live in, beloved. Jesus has already put to death all our sinful nature. Now He asks for us to agree with Him and put it to death ourselves each time a thought or word or deed comes to mind that is against the Spirit. HE gives us the POWER TO RESIST. We do that *by counting ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom.8:11)*. That's awesome. But, if even that seems too hard, we have the promise that God can work in us “to WILL and TO DO of His good pleasure. This isn't a pull yourselves up by your bootstraps religion. This is transformation made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us.

The command is to Put to Death whatever belong to your earthly nature. *The promise is that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I know all of us want to live like that. And it is possible. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 9/9/18