

Main Idea: If we’re going to have maximum joy in our families, we need to learn how to fight God’s way in our homes. That’s the message of Colossians 3:5-11. Specifically, we need to fight to get rid of three things, and in so doing, we’ll experience the kind of communication God intends.

- I. We must fight to get rid of moral sins (5-7).
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    2. We are being renewed.
    3. Our standard is Christ.

Make It Personal: Two questions to ask yourself before you speak...

1. Would Christ say that?
2. Would Christ say it that way?

We need to learn how to fight in our homes. Our joy depends on it, and so does God’s glory.

Sound strange? It’s true. We can’t be passive if we want to do family God’s way. Why do I say that? Listen to the language of today’s text. “*Put to death,*” says Paul in Colossians 3:5. Those are fighting words, and that’s a family text (Paul will address wives, husbands, children, and fathers directly beginning in verse 18). We’re supposed to be killing some things in our homes.

Last week we began a spring series entitled, “*Putting Christ on Display in Our Homes.*” We might call it, “*How to Maximize the Joy of Your Life and Family.*” The two subjects go together. Putting Christ on display is the key to maximum joy.

Our text is Colossians 3. Last time we talked about priorities. In verses 1-4 we learned that if the world is going to see Christ in our families, we need to “seek and think about above things rather than earthly things.” Simply put, God calls us to live by biblical priorities. Our joy and His glory depends on it.

To help us assess how we’re doing, I gave you the following priority grid. Number one, we are to seek to be God’s kind of *person*--nothing’s more important than that, according to God’s Word. The rest of the grid flows out of the first--to be God’s kind of

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partner, parent, parishioner, provider, and player. If the world is going to see Christ in us, we need to live in light of these priorities.

Now we move to a second critical area, the one Paul addresses in verses 5-11. If the world is to see Christ in us, we need to *communicate in ways that honor God*. Or put negatively, we need to eliminate the kind of communication that displeases God.

That's where the fighting comes in. Communicating God's way isn't natural for sinners, even redeemed sinners. We're so prone to miss the mark in our communication.

I read a story about something that happened at the Henry Street Hebrew School. Mr. Goldblatt, a new teacher, finished his lesson one day and opened up the class for the usual question period.

Little Joey spoke up, "Mr. Goldblatt, there's something I can't figure out."

"What's that Joey?" asked Mr. Goldblatt.

"Well, according to the Bible, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?"

"Right."

"And according to the Bible, the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?"

"Er-right," replied Mr. Goldblatt.

Joey continued, "And the Children of Israel built the Temple, right?"

"Again, you're right."

"And the Children of Israel fought the Egyptians, and the Children of Israel fought the Assyrians, and the Children of Israel fought the Babylonians, and the Children of Israel was always doin' something important, right?"

"All that is right, too," agreed Mr. Goldblatt. "So what's your question, Joey?"

"What I wanna know is this," demanded Joey. "What wuz all the grown-ups doin'?"

I'd say there was a breakdown in communication somewhere, wouldn't you agree? When that happens, sometimes it's funny. But sometimes it's not funny at all. In fact, one of the main causes of pain in family relationships is this improper communication. That's why we so much need what God's Word has to say to us in this message.

If we're going to have maximum joy in our families, we need to learn to fight God's way. That's the message of Colossians 3:5-11. Specifically, we need to fight to get rid of three things, and in so doing, we'll create an atmosphere for the kind of communication God intends.<sup>1</sup>

#### I. We must fight to get rid of moral sins (5-7).

"Put to death, therefore." Remember the context. How we *live* is determined by where we *sit*. Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven (1). If we've come to know Christ, we've died, and our life is now hidden with Christ in God (3). Positionally, we are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6).

But position leads to practice. Doctrine results in duty. So after spending the first two chapters of Colossians addressing the subject of our position in Christ, Paul now moves to lifestyle implications.

By the way, morality must have a foundation. It's futile to talk about "getting morality back into our schools" apart from addressing the more fundamental issue of *authority*.

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<sup>1</sup> You'll notice three imperatives in verses 5-11: verse 5--"Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature;" verse 8--"Rid yourselves of all such things as these;" and verse 9, "Do not lie to each other." Each imperative pinpoints something that *must go*.

Who's morality are we going to "get back?" Are we going to follow your standard or mine? Are we going to take a poll? The biblical answer is this. There is one God, the Creator of the universe. This is His world, and He has revealed Himself in His authoritative Word. His Word is the standard of morality. But it's impossible for sinners to keep His standard on their own strength. You can't impose morality from the outside. It doesn't work and doesn't last.

Thankfully, God in His grace provided a Perfect Helper, Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our failure to keep the standard, and who energizes our lives so we can live according to the standard.

Friends, the audience Paul has in mind in today's text are people who are *in Christ*. If you're not in Christ, you won't be able to apply the truths we're about to learn. If you are in Christ, you can and must. Your change in position must lead to a change in practice.

And here's where it starts. If we're in Christ, we must fight to get rid of *moral sins*.

**A. Here's how (5).** "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry." We're commanded to "mortify" (*nekrosate*) some things. The verb means "to render as dead, to regard as impotent." In Romans 6:11 Paul uses the same word, "Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin (KJV)."

If you are believer, you cannot eliminate the influence of the flesh, but you can treat it as a morally impotent force in your life.

What specifically are we to put to death? The NIV says "whatever belongs to your earthly nature." The KJV offers the more literal rendering, "your members which are upon the earth." What are "earthly members?" In verse 2 we were commanded to think about the "above" things, not the "earthly" things. Earthly things are the opposite of "above" things, the things that please the Lord.

Paul mentions five "earthly members" that we need to kill. You'll notice that all five have to do with sexual sin (either directly or indirectly). They are all perversions of something that God intended for His glory and the good of His creation. If we engage in any of these five vices, we are not seeking the above things. Indeed, the five items Paul lists place as much emphasis on heart issues as the actions the heart produces.

We're to put to death "sexual immorality" (fornication, KJV). The Greek word is *porneian*. It's a general word that depicts any sexual sin. It's based on two Greek verbs which convey the idea of selling bodies for lustful purposes. It includes pre-marital sex and extra-marital sex. This is a call to kill every trace of illicit sexual thought or behavior in our lives, not because God is harsh in His restriction, but because He knows that sex is only meaningful and joyful when experienced between a loving husband and wife.

Next is the word "impurity" (uncleanness, KJV). It refers to moral impurity in all forms. Robert Gromacki explains the word, "It is marked by a filthy mind, full of sensually suggestive thoughts and humor. It reads illicit sex even into the most wholesome situations. Marked by perverted fantasies, it is expressed today through pornographic literature and movies. Caused by the lusts of the heart, it leads to the dishonor of bodies."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gromacki, p. 132.

Thirdly, "lust" must go (inordinate affection, KJV). The Greek word is *pathos* which depicts erotic love and depraved passion. It encompasses both illicit heterosexual and homosexual activity.

Also, "evil desires" must be given the death blow (evil concupiscence, KJV). It's literally a "wicked desire." Sex itself is a good gift from God to be enjoyed by a husband and a wife in the bonds of a marriage covenant. But man perverts God's good gifts.

Lastly, we must mortify "greed" (covetousness, KJV), a word that simply means "to have more." You say, "Why does Paul say greed *is* idolatry?" Answer this. What is idolatry? It's worshipping the image rather than the One who created the image, right? An idolater isn't satisfied with God. He wants something *more*, and so he worships the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

Beloved, here's where the fighting must begin in our families. We who belong to Christ need to fight to get rid of every trace of moral sin. We must track it down and put it to death.

You say, "How do we do that?" Let me give you a couple of practical suggestions.

1. *We may need to change what we call entertainment.* I'll put it bluntly. You don't kill *pornei* by watching a movie that glorifies it in living color right before your eyes. Nor am I mortifying "impurity" when I rent DVDs that celebrate what God forbids. Nor am I putting to death "lust" when I read magazines and novels that feed it.

Am I overreacting? Consider this. Several years ago the magazine *Christianity Today* surveyed a thousand of its subscribers: 23 percent said they had had extramarital intercourse (that's one out of four), and 45 percent indicated they had done something they themselves deemed sexually inappropriate (that's nearly one in two). What's even more shocking is to realize that *Christianity Today* readers tend to be church leaders, elders, deacons, Sunday School superintendents, and teachers.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, sexual sin doesn't just happen. If you're entangled in sexual sin, there's hope for you. But you must be willing to submit your life wholeheartedly to the authority of God and His Word. And you must choose today to kill sexual sin, not rationalize it. And that may mean a change in what we call entertainment. A second suggestion...

2. *We may need to practice radical amputation.* In the context of addressing the sin of lust, Jesus said (Matt. 5:29), "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Jesus isn't telling us to maim ourselves. He is telling us to take drastic action to eliminate contributors to sin from our lives, to practice *radical amputation*. As someone has said, "It's better to limp to heaven than to run to hell."

You say, "I thought Christ made us new. Doesn't the problem of sexual sin leave the moment a person becomes a Christian?" Yes, we are new, but no, the problem doesn't vanish. Please remember that Paul is talking to Christians here in this call to get rid of all inclinations to sexual immorality.

Beloved, there should be no trace of sexual sin in us, not in our the jokes we tell, not in the entertainment we choose, not in the way we relate to the opposite sex. Not a trace.

This isn't legalism. Legalism is imposing man-made standards upon people and giving them divine authority. This is simply taking serious God's commands.

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<sup>3</sup>Taken from Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 22.

You say, "But society says that what I do with my body is my own business, nobody else's. Is this really that big a deal?" Yes, and here's why...

**B. Here's why (6-7).** Two reasons...

1. *Such sin brings the wrath of God (6).* "Because of these, the wrath of God is coming." I can just hear some talk-show host saying, "Ah, come on! This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You're not going to insist we live by the words of a prudish bachelor that lived twenty centuries ago, are you? What right does he have to impose his moral standard on us?"

The truth is, Paul didn't create this moral standard. Who did? The One who created sex in the beginning, and everything else. This is our God speaking. And what does our God say is the consequence for violating His standard? It's His *wrath*.

Notice that verse 6 doesn't say God's wrath "will come" just in the future, though it will, but that it "cometh" (KJV; "is coming" in the NIV). The present tense verb suggests that God's judgment for sexual sin is not only a future event, but a present reality. In Romans 1 terminology, the wrath of God is being revealed right now against godlessness (1:18). As Herbert Carson observes (82), "God does not stand as a spectator viewing the consequences which man's sin brings upon him; but rather intervenes in a judgment which may manifest itself in leaving men to wallow in the filth of their own lusts, so that they are worthy objects of the final condemnation."

But there's a second reason for getting rid of moral sin.

2. *Such sin is what used to characterize us (7).* "You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." There's incredible hope in those words, *you used to walk*, because it implies, you don't any more! And why not? Jesus Christ set you free!

Beloved, we were under the wrath of God, and we deserved it. But Jesus Christ went to the Cross to take the wrath we deserved. He became our substitute. And because He did, instead of wrath we received mercy. God forgave us. Christ liberated us so we could live a new life. And that's why we can and must get rid of moral sin. It was that sin that *used to* characterize us, and for it Jesus gave His life.

Dear friend, remember this...

- There's no room for big heads in the church. Paul's words are sobering, "You used to walk in these ways," but you didn't get what you deserved.

Perhaps you're thinking, "But I've never done the things listed in verse 5." Really? You never lusted? You never coveted your neighbor's car? You never took a second look at a suggestive commercial? Let's not deceive ourselves. Maybe because of God's protecting grace, our heart sin never broke surface and became a lifestyle sin, but it was still sin, and it brought the wrath of God upon us.

And there's something very beautiful, very hope-giving in those words, "You *used to walk* in these ways." They remind us that...

- No one is beyond the reach of grace. No one. "You *used to walk* in these ways in the life you once lived," until you experienced God's saving grace. And the grace that saved you from sin's penalty is now yours for salvation from sin's power. And that's a process, as we'll see even more clearly as we come to verse 8.

You may be thinking, "I thought this message was going to be about communication! What does sexual sin have to do with communication?"

I've counseled many men who've been struggling with pornography. Any guess as to how their communication was with their wives? There's our answer. What we're hearing right now has everything to do with creating an atmosphere for good communication in our homes. If we want good communication at home, then we must fight to get rid of some things, for if they're there, you can be sure there won't be joyful communication. First, we must fight to get rid of moral sins. Secondly...

## II. We must fight to get rid of interpersonal sins (8).

Verse 8 begins, "But now." In the lives of people who've been rescued by grace and spared the wrath of God, something needs to happen *now*. What? A second imperative. "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips."

Paul lists five more vices that must go, and they have to do with interpersonal sins. G. Campbell Morgan called these "the sins in good standing." These are the sins we can easily excuse.

"What do you mean I have a problem with anger? You're just too sensitive!"

I want you to notice something about Paul's two lists of vices. In verse 5 he calls us to forsake sensual sins, and in verse 8 he confronts social sins and makes it clear that it all needs to go. Sin is sin.

Warren Wiersbe remarks, "We are so accustomed to anger, critical attitudes, lying, and course humor among believers that we are no longer upset or convicted about these sins. We would be shocked to see a church member commit some sensual sin, but we will watch him lose his temper in a business meeting and call it 'righteous indignation.'"<sup>4</sup>

Paul doesn't coddle interpersonal sin. He calls for its elimination. The picture he uses is of changing clothes. He says we are to "put off" such things (8), and "put on" other things (10). Ephesians 4 uses similar terminology but gives more detail.

My friend, interpersonal sin has the power to destroy your home every bit as much as moral sin. It, too, must go. Verse 8 tells us how.

**A. The problem begins in the heart.** Where do anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language originate? In the heart. Listen to Jesus, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34)." "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Matt. 15:18-19)."

We're not talking about cosmetic changes, but heart changes. "Anger" must go (*orge*, hot temper, impulsive action that leads to revenge). So must "rage" (*thumos*, wrath, KJV, passion, fury, a passionate outburst). Anger is like the pressure cooker, while rage is like a match in a pile of straw. We must strip off both.

With that in mind, let me make a couple of observations...

1. *Anger is a big problem in Christian homes.* Anger itself is not sin. It's merely a God-given emotion that kicks in to tell us action is needed. Ephesians 4:26 actually commands us to "Be angry and sin not. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath." Anger, though not inherently sinful, becomes sin when it's not handled in a Christlike manner.

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, p. 135.

You say, “I struggle with anger.” The truth is, we all do. Some of us tend to be blow-uppers, while others adopt the more justifiable “clam up” approach. But in either case, we’re failing to deal with problems in a God-pleasing way.

Let’s be honest. Anger is destroying family after family these days, including Christian families. Angry dads. Angry moms. Angry teens. Angry kids.

Let’s tackle one aspect of the problem. What causes angry kids? I think we’ll find a root cause in Ephesians 6:4, a familiar text we’ve greatly neglected. “Fathers, do not *exasperate* your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

How do parents exasperate their children? Here we see two ways. First, don’t give them what they need. What do our kids need according to Ephesians 6:4? They need two things, parental “training” and parental “instruction.” Or, as the KJV puts it, they need “nurture” and “admonition.” A sure way to exasperate a child, then, is to refuse to give him what he needs. He needs training (nurture, i.e. discipline and structure), and he needs biblical instruction (verbal teaching). And the phrase “of the Lord” indicates the goal of our training and instruction. My child needs to know the Lord and what pleases the Lord.

Dads and moms, if we’re not giving that to our children, we are cultivating the soil of exasperation. To survive in this life, and certainly to experience eternal life, our kids need Christ. Without Christ they don’t have the power to deal with the anger in their hearts, any more than we do.

But there’s another way to exasperate our children. One is failing to give them what they need. The other is to always give them what they want. That’s implied by the term “training” (KJV “admonition”) in Ephesians 6:4 (*nouthesia* in the Greek). A child needs more than just words. He needs structure and boundaries, which includes confrontation and discipline. He needs it because he’s a sinner, just like us.

But if you want to exasperate your child, just ignore this. Pamper your child. Defend him when a teacher disciplines him. When his youth leader confronts a sin in his life, tell the child he’s a “good boy” and insist the youth leader doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

You say, “Well, I can see how that might spoil a child, but how does doing that contribute to anger?” Let me put it this way...

2. *It’s not good when children grow up thinking the world revolves around them.* Why not? Because the world *doesn’t* revolve around them, and if they expect it to, they’re heading for heartache before they ever leave the nest.

We have a generation of kids who’ve grown up hearing that they have a right to be happy. But guess what happens when a child doesn’t get what makes him happy? He gets angry. Anger shows up in lots of ways. He may sulk, or resort to manipulation, or even turn to violence. But it all started with anger, and the anger began in his heart, and it remained in his heart because, in part, his parents gave him everything he wanted yet failed to give him what he most needed.

Please realize that heart problems don’t stay in the heart, as the second part of our list indicates. Verse 8—“anger, rage, *malice*, *slander*, and *filthy language from your lips*.”

**B. The problem surfaces in the mouth.** Anger and rage need to go. But so does “malice” (*kakian*, baseness, depravity, a general term for moral badness). This trait often shows up in hard feelings towards people or with malicious words about people.

Get rid of it. And we must get rid of "slander," too (*blasphemia*). The word means, "to denigrate, to slander, to speak abusive words, words that injure rather than help."

Finally, "filthy language" must be eliminated too. That's dirty talk, disgraceful speech, words that should produce shame for both the speaker and the hearer.

You say, "You're talking about me. My mouth gets me in trouble all the time. What can I do?" For starters, don't miss the connection here. Where do speech sins originate? In our *hearts*. So if sinful words are coming out of your mouth, it's because sinful desires are lurking in your heart. The solution? You need Christ to clean up your heart and give you holy desires. Memorize verses like Colossians 3:8-10, and ask a friend to pray for you and hold you accountable to put off the old and put on the new.<sup>5</sup>

You can't be passive. We must *fight* for this. We must fight to eliminate *moral sins*, and we must fight to get rid of *interpersonal sins*, and thirdly...

### III. We must fight to get rid of conversational sins (9-11).

In verse 9 Paul picks one example of the "filthy language" he mentioned in verse 8, and in essence says, "This specifically must go." Guess which sin he picked? *Lying*. "Do not lie to each other."

**A. We must not lie to each other (9a).** Why this particular sin? It's not that big of a sin, is it? And even if it is, we don't struggle with lying do we? We are Christians!

The truth is, it is a big sin. And yes, Christians do struggle with it. It's significant that in the sister letter to Colossians, in Ephesians 4:25, Paul confronts this same sin of lying at the head of his teaching on communication. Lying must go.

Lying actually shows up in our homes in a variety of ways. Let's talk about three.

1. *We do it by avoiding issues.* A wife walks out into the garage and asks her husband, "Dear? Are you upset with me?" And he replies curtly, "No, I'm fine!" You can be sure there's some lying going on in that garage.

How do you deal with interpersonal problems in your family? Ephesians 4:15 calls us to speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4:27 indicates that when we let the sun go down on our wrath, we are actually giving the devil a foothold. So this is serious.

Let's talk about another common way lying shows up. The first is by avoiding issues.

2. *We do it by exaggerating.* A mother tells her teenage son, "You *never* listen to me when I'm talking to you." Granted, he may have a problem, but is that true? What goes through a teen's mind when he hears those words? "What do you mean, *never*? I listened to you last week that one time." Usually, words like "always" and "never" aren't true, and they end up short-circuiting production communication. Here's another way...

3. *We do it by misrepresenting the facts.* Like when dad asks his daughter, "Did you clean the garage like I asked?" And Sally responds, "Yea, dad. I cleaned the garage." But when questioned further she admits, "Well, no, I didn't clean behind the boxes like you asked, but I cleaned the garage!" Misrepresenting the facts is another form of lying.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Okay, I can see that lying isn't a good idea in most cases, but what's wrong with stretching things now and then? Quite honestly, in my house, it's easier just to lie at times. It keeps the peace. So why get rid of lying?"

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<sup>5</sup>For further help I recommend a book by Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children*.

**B. Here's why (9b-11).** Paul mentions three reasons in verses 9-11.

1. *We are new.* "Do not lie to each other, *since* you have taken off your old self [old man] with its practices [like lying], and have put in the new self." Why not lie? Why not talk like you did before you became a Christian? Because we are new! Positionally, we've stripped off the old man--that's what we were in Adam--and we've replaced it with a new wardrobe, the new man--that's what we are in Christ. As Isaiah 61:10 says that God has clothed us with "garments of salvation" and arrayed us in a "robe of righteousness."

So reason #1 for not lying is this. We are new, in Christ. A second reason...

2. *We are being renewed.* What's true of the new man? Verse 10 tells us, "Which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Notice that though we are new positionally, we are being renewed practically. In this renewal process, we have a means ("in knowledge") and a goal ("in the image of its Creator"). God's intent is to use the knowledge of His Word to transform us into the image of His Son.

Which brings us to our third reason...

3. *Our standard is Christ.* Nothing less than Christlikeness is acceptable for the person who is in Christ. God wants His children to resemble His Son, and He doesn't want anything to obscure the reflection of His Son. Indeed, notice how radical this new-man transformation is, according to verse 11.

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." In the new man, race doesn't divide us (Jew/Gentile). Ceremonial acts don't divide us (circumcision/uncircumcision). Culture doesn't divide us (barbarian, Scythian). And social status doesn't divide us (slave/free).

The point is this. If those things don't divide us, then nothing should, including our communication. If Christ is powerful enough to reconcile natural enemies like Jews and Gentiles, if He can bring together such cultural opposites as refined Greeks and backwoods barbarians, if He can unite the top and the bottom of the economic pile, then you can be sure He's intent on transforming our mouths and everything else about us, so that He is put on display, for all to see!

And what's He intends, we are to pursue. We are to *fight* to get rid of conversational sins. And that means, conversely, we are to fight, as enabled by His grace, to put on speech that resembles Him in every situation.

Let's make it personal. Let me give you a little practical assignment, something to do this week.

Make It Personal: Two questions to ask yourself before you speak...

I'm convinced these two practical questions will revolutionize our family communication. Before you ever speak a word, ask yourself...

1. *Would Christ say that? And two...*
2. *Would Christ say it that way?*