

## 8. The rules of engagement of godly living – Part 1

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Before our troops go into the hostile territories, they are instructed about the rules of engagement by their commanding officers. In most cases, it is “fire when fired upon.” Americans are supposed to be good guys, not like those terrorists.

This morning the Holy Spirit is going to teach us our own set of the rules of engagement of godly living in this vile and volatile world through the apostle Paul. God doesn’t want us to act like the people in the world. He wants us to be different. He wants us to be Christlike.

We now come to the line of division in this epistle, which conforms to Paul’s regular way of dividing his epistles. He always gives the doctrinal section and then the practical section. Chapters 3 and 4 comprise the practical section of the Book of Colossians.

We have seen the preeminence of Christ in chapters 1-2. We have seen Him as He is, God Himself, a member of the Trinity. He is preeminent in creation because He is the Creator. He is preeminent in redemption because He is the Redeemer. He is preeminent in the church because He is the One who gave Himself for the church.

Now we have come to the place where Paul will insist that Jesus must be made preeminent in our lives.

We cannot just say, “I am a dedicated Christian,” and then live our lives as we please as many people are trying to do today. No, if Christ is preeminent in our lives, then we are going to live out His life down here on earth. Because Christ is really the solution to all the problems of life.

### A. THE BASIS FOR PAUL’S PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION

*Colossians 3:1-4 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. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

Paul begins a section where he focuses on practical Christian living. But practical Christian living is built on the foundation of theological truth. Because we know that Jesus is really raised from the dead, then our identification with Him becomes real.

We are told to seek those things which are above and set our mind on things above. But how do we practically seek and set?

- By spending time in the Word of God. – Study and meditation
- By spending time in prayer. – Prayer
- By spending time with things that build us up in God instead of merely entertaining us. – Worship
- By gathering with others in the Lord. – Fellowship

While we think we may be immune to the endless litany of television commercials, newspaper ads, our friends’ gadgets and gizmos, the constant admonition to spend, spend, spend, we Christians need to be alert to how satan tempts us with the temporal. It is NOT the fault of your credit cards, rather it is you who use it without control.

Doctrinal danger: Substituting the temporal for the eternal. Don't let physical and earthly "things" get between you and the things that are above.

Personal danger: Trying to impress instead of imparting the Word. We are doing God's business, not ours.

Economical danger: Spending more than you have. Before every purchase, think: Is this within my budget? Is it necessary?

Psychological danger: Believing your purchase will make things "all right." Money won't buy happiness.

Rule of thumb: If you don't have the cash, don't buy it no matter how great a deal is. Christian Money Man Dave Ramsey would agree with me.

We no longer belong to the world, but to Christ. And the sources of life that we enjoy come only from Him. "Hidden in Christ" means security and satisfaction.

*Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Christian life is a "hidden life" as far as the world is concerned because the world does not know Christ. Our sphere of life is not this earth, but heaven; and the things that attract us and excite us belong to heaven, not to earth. This does not mean that we should ignore our earthly responsibilities. Rather it means that our motives and our strength come from heaven, not earth.

V4 gives such comfort and peace to all of us that our brothers and sisters around the world can endure harsh persecutions and risk their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus.

## **B. LOSE 'EM, DUMP 'EM, GET RID OF 'EM**

*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.*

We turn now from the positive to the negative. There are some people who do not like the negative. "Give us positive doctrines!" they say. "Forget about negative warnings and admonitions!" But the negative warnings and commands grow out of the positive truths of Christian doctrine.

No amount of positive talk about health will cure a ruptured appendix. The doctor will have to "get negative" and take out the appendix. No amount of lecturing on beauty will produce a garden. The gardener has to pull weeds. The positive and the negative go together, and one without the other leads to imbalance.

We are living in the world that gratifies immoral sex. Sex is not a bad thing. It is created by the Lord to bring intimacy between biological husband and biological wife and to populate this earth, not any other way. But the media, movies, and people's unbiblical concepts promote immorality and perversion as normal. But not in God's eyes.

Fornication refers to sexual immorality in general. Uncleanness means "lustful impurity that is connected with luxury and loose living." The person who cultivates this kind

of appetite can always find an opportunity to satisfy it. Evil desires lead to deeds, appetites lead to actions. If we would purify our actions, then we must first purify our minds and hearts.

After the apostle Paul had named these sensual sins, he added, “*covetousness, which is idolatry*”. Covetousness is the sin of always wanting more, whether it be more things or more pleasures. The covetous person is never satisfied with what he has, and he is usually envious of what other people have. This is idolatry because covetousness puts things in the place of God. “You shall not covet” is the last of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:17. Yet this sin can make us break all of the other nine. A covetous person will dishonor God, take God’s name in vain, lie, steal, and commit every other sin in order to satisfy his or her sinful desires. Because that person is never happy with what he or she has from God.

*Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

These sins invite the wrath of God. The wrath of God comes as God allows men to continue in sinful and self-destructive behavior because they are determined to drag themselves down.

Simply put, the Christian should not live like the sons of disobedience. A true Christian can not be comfortable in habitual sin. I heard that a pastor who preached a series of sermons against the sins of the believers. One of his congregation challenged him one day and said that it would be better if the pastor preached those messages to the lost. “After all,” said that person, “sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the lives of unbelievers.” “Yes” replied the pastor, “it’s worse!”

### **C. PUTTING OFF ALL THE GARBAGE**

*Colossians 3:8-9 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*

The sins Paul lists are regarded by many as “little” sins that Christians can overlook. Paul challenges us to put off the old man from every area of our lives.

Please note that all the sins that were listed in v8 and 9 have to do with our mouths. Yes, our mouths cause us more problems than we care to remember.

*James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

Paul began with anger, wrath, and malice – sins of bad attitude toward others. The word anger is the same as the word wrath in v6, referring there to the wrath of God. But this word anger describes habitual attitudes, while wrath refers to the sudden outburst of anger, including temper tantrum. God has a right to be angry at sin and to judge it because He is holy and just. In fact, there is righteous anger against sin that ought to characterize the believers. But none of us have the right to “play God” and pass final judgment on others by our attitudes. Malice is an attitude of ill will toward a person. If we have malice toward a person, we are unhappy when he is successful, and we rejoice when he has trouble. This is sinful.

I’ve seen and met many Christians who don’t think twice about using foul languages. Whenever I hear them, I have to wonder about their walk with Christ. How can they

use God's name in vain? What is their excuse for using even so-called mild foul words? Why do they have to use them? Can they not talk without those words? Yes, they can. They just want to be like the rest of the world.

Some of you might argue, "How do you define foul language?" Ask yourself if you are willing to use any of these words if Jesus is standing next to you? If the answer is, "No," why would you use them when the Holy Spirit is within you?

I understand about the habit of foul language. I used to spew out a few chosen bad words before I became a Christian. With help from the Holy Spirit, it was stopped.

Again, it goes back to our choice. As the ambassadors of Christ, we can use proper language to represent our Savior to this dark world correctly or act like and talk like the rest of the world and misrepresent Him.

#### **D. PUT ON THE NEW MAN**

*Colossians 3:10-11 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*

Because we are alive in Christ, we must seek the things that are above. And, because we died with Christ, we must put off the things that belong to the earthly life of past sin. The result is that we can become like Jesus Christ.

The Greek verbs translated "put off" and "put on" indicate a once-for-all action. When we trust Christ, we put off the old life and put on the new. The old man has been buried, and the new man is now in control. But the verb translated "renewed" is a present participle – "who is constantly being renewed" which indicates our constant sanctification through the Holy Spirit.

We cannot just become godly people because we stop doing bad things. The area where we eliminate must be replaced with godly stuff, otherwise, it will get worse than before.

*Matthew 12:43-45 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. 44 Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."*

It is wrong to build the fellowship of the church on anything other than Jesus Christ, His person, and His work. Ministries that are built on human distinctions, such as race, color, or social standing, are not biblical. One of the evidence of spiritual growth and the renewing of the mind is this willingness to receive and love all who sincerely know Christ and seek to glorify Him.

The gnostic self-appointed "super believers" were trying to isolate the Colossian believers from the rest of the church, and this was wrong. Even though physically we do not lose our national heritage when we become Christians, we do not use that heritage as a test of what is spiritual. That's why we should never have cliques in the church. If you think that you are better than someone in the church, you just set yourself up as an inferior person than any others in the eyes of God.

God is a respecter of no man. The new man is part of a family, which favors no race, nationality, class, culture, or ethnicity. It only favors Jesus, because, in this new family, Christ is all and in all.

### ***E. APPLICATIONS***

1) We no longer belong to the world, but to Christ. And the sources of life that we enjoy come only from Him. "Hidden in Christ" means security and satisfaction.

2) The Christian should not live like the sons of disobedience. A true Christian can not be comfortable in habitual sin.

3) We cannot just become godly people because we stop doing bad things. The area where we eliminate must be replaced with godly stuff, otherwise, it will get worse than before.