

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians
Chapter Fourteen
Mortification of the Old Man

“⁴ When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. ⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: ⁶ For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: ⁷ In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. ⁸ But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. ⁹ Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:4-9).

The daily test of a resurrected life

Since the believer is “risen with Christ” (3:1), God expects the believer to walk and live in the power of a resurrected life. It is from this perspective that we continue in our studies in chapter 3. Verses 2 and 3 establish that the believer is to be completely occupied with Christ. Verse 4 summarizes that idea with the conclusion that “Christ is in our life.” When the believer is completely occupied with the risen Christ, he will live in the power of the Spirit of God and will walk in the power of His holiness.

Before we can continue and understand the balance of the epistle there is one singular principle that is necessary for our comprehension of the text. **We do not live the life of Christ. He lives our life.** When this takes place, there is always a tendency for a self-righteous attitude. It is necessary to maintain a proper perspective of who and what we are in our “flesh,” we need to get a view of God like Isaiah did and then compare ourselves to God rather than other people.

“¹ In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:1-5).

Isaiah’s vision of God in His glory resulted in two appropriate evaluations; one of himself and the other of those he ministered to.

1. “I am a man of unclean lips.”
2. “I dwell among a people of unclean lips.”

The practice of “Christ our life”

When Christ is our life as a spiritual reality (practice), it will be our desire to “mortify” the sin nature (Colossians 3:5).

“² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:2-4).

We should never confuse our practical responsibility with our concrete position in Christ. Our position never changes and is unaffected by our response to God’s expectation. It is our love for God and thankfulness for that eternal position (“complete in Christ”) that should motivate us to obedience.

The word “mortify” is not talking about suicide. It is talking about putting the *carnal mind* (the sin nature) to death. Since our mind and thoughts control our bodies, the mind of which Christ is in control will control the body He possesses.

“³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; ⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (II Corinthians 10:3-6).

In Colossians 3:5, the word “members” refers to the parts of the body as they are employed in life actions (in this case, sin). These “members” employ themselves in certain described sinful practices.

1. “Fornication” is sexual intercourse outside of the confines of a husband\wife relationship.
2. “Uncleanness” is any moral impurity resulting from the gratification of selfish desires.
3. “Inordinate affection” is described in Romans 1:26-32; especially referring to sexual perversions.

“²⁶ For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: ²⁷ And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. ²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; ²⁹ Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, ³⁰ Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: ³² Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:26-32).

4. “Covetousness” carries climactic force in the Greek and could actually read “especially covetousness.” It is a category of sin that stands by itself called IDOLATRY. Covetousness is the greedy desire to have more than a person needs. It is the epitome of ungratefulness. It is the religion of the discontent; the complainer.

Our incentive to “mortify” the desires of our flesh should be the return of Christ (Colossians 3:4). The Lordship of Jesus is not a visible sovereignty. Unless our lives’ actions (culturally and distinctively in the areas of personal holiness) make His Lordship visible, His Lordship will remain invisible. Jesus is personally hidden from the lost world because believers refuse to live the “life of Christ.” When we sin, we are hiding Christ from the world He died to redeem. It is a wonderful truth to know the all-sufficiency of Jesus, but it is a sad fact that we all too often do not manifest the all-supremacy of Jesus.

The problem between position (complete in Christ) and the practical (Christ our life)

Positionally the believer is “risen with Christ” (v 1), but practically we live in a tension between what Christ has already completed and what is not yet complete (our glorification, v 4). We are regenerated to be a colony of holiness in Christ and God expects us to manifest His holiness to a culture of evil corruption. We are to be as bright as a lighted city set on a hill.

When our lives are no different from the rest of the lost world, we lose our distinctiveness as the residing place of the Shekinah Glory of God in the indwelling Holy Spirit. As a result, those dying in the darkness of spiritual blindness cannot see the light. Friends, if you will dedicate your lives to Christ Jesus, your city may not like you, it may not break down the doors of your church to get in, but they will know your church exists “to seek and save the lost.” Those in the darkness will be able to clearly see the “city set on the hill” distinctively different, distinctively separated and, distinctively holy.

Colossians 3:5, any sin in our lives denies the Lordship of Jesus over lives.

When we allow the sin nature to rule in our lives, we actually displace Jesus from His place of rule with our willful selfishness. Any form of immorality is an opposite of Biblical love. Any form of immorality is nothing more than manipulative, willful and exploitive selfishness.

Colossians 3:6, chastening is intended to correct in order to restore the brightness of truth and maintain the believer's spiritual distinctiveness.

“¹ Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; ² And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. ³ But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; ⁴ Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. ⁷ Be not ye therefore partakers with them. ⁸ For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:1-8).

If you are deceived into the ways of life listed in Ephesians 5:3-5, you become a son of disobedience and you can expect God's chastening.

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Hebrews 12: 6).

The “wrath of God” never comes on a child of God. The kinds of practices listed in Ephesians 5:3-5 reveal the life of an unbeliever (“children of disobedience;” Ephesians 5:6). The word “them” of Colossians 5:7 specially refers to unbelievers. Colossians 5:8 expands upon “them” referring to them as being part of the “darkness.” Therefore, it is completely abnormal for a child of God to be involved in anything listed in Ephesians 5:3-5; even manifesting self-deception regarding salvation and being “born again.”

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1. What statement of Colossians 3:1 gives us the perspective of the expectation of God for the rest of the epistle? _____

2. What statement of Colossians 3:4 summarizes verses 1-4? _____

3. What singular principle is necessary to understand before we can understand the expectations of God in the balance of the epistle? _____

4. What is the *Isaiah Complex* (Isaiah 6:5) and why is it necessary that the believer maintain it when Christ is living His life through him? _____

5. According to Colossians 3:5, what will be the result when “Christ is our life”? _____

6. Why should we be careful to distinguish between our practical responsibility and our concrete position (“complete”) in Christ? _____

7. Read II Corinthians 10:5. How does this verse clarify God’s expectations of the word “mortify” in Colossians 3:5? _____

8. What are some ways a person’s “members” are employed in sin according to Colossians 3:8-9? _____

9. When Christ is not our life, why is He hidden from the world? _____

What is the believer supposed to be (*when Christ is his life*) that reveals Jesus to the lost world? _____

10. When a believer allows his sin nature to rule in his life, what happens to the Lordship of Jesus? _____

11. Read Hebrews 12:6. What happens when a believer sins? _____

12. What does the word “them” distinguish regarding those practicing the things listed in Ephesians 5:3-5 as one of the “children of disobedience”? _____
