1. Introduction

Christian Character. In the book of Colossians Paul teaches you how to be a Christian. In chapter 1 he directs your attention to Christ your Savior. In chapter 2 he warns you against taking on the world’s non-Christian worldview and lifestyle. And now in Colossians 3 Paul teaches you how to have a Christian character.

How to be distinctively Christian in who you are and how you behave. He gives you the proper ground of Christian character in 3:1-5, and then teaches you to put off the old man of non-Christian character and put on the new man of Christian character. What characterizes the old man is a love of self on the inside, and a hatred of your fellow man on the outside. And what characterizes the new man is selfless love on the inside, and thankful blessing on the outside. In our passage today Paul teaches you to put to death your love of self on the inside. And centrally, he exhorts you to put evil desires to death.

2.

This is square one of having a Christian character. If you aren’t doing this, you
shouldn’t claim to be a Christian. And if you don’t do this, in the end you will not go to heaven. Our passage implies this last point in v. 6. But Paul makes this point perfectly explicit in Ephesians 5:3-5, where he says:

1. 

**Ephesians 5:3-5** 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

2. 

You cannot live unrepentantly in any sin, and expect to go to heaven. And so it is absolutely vital that if you claim to be a Christian, you follow Paul’s exhortation today to **put evil desires to death**.

3. 

**Sermon Outline.** We will examine this passage under the following headings.

1. 

What you should put to death: Evil Desires v. 5

2. 
Why you should put them to death: God’s Evaluation and Response v. 6

3.

How you should put them to death: In Your Walk and Your Life v. 7

1.

Body

1.

What: Evil Desires v. 5

1.

First, what should you put to death? Evil desires. Paul gives a list of them in v. 5:

1.

Colossians 3:5-7 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
2.

**Therefore**

1.

**Ground.** Paul begins with the word “therefore,” referring back to the ground of Christian character in 3:1-5. In those verses Paul exhorted you to “Set your minds on things above.” You may remember that the things on which we should set our minds are God, Christ, eternal life, salvation blessings, Christian virtues, and anything that is morally pure. The reason why we should do so is that our life is bound up with Christ our Savior, and so we must give our attention and devotion to Him, to His kingdom and His righteousness. And if you are devoted to Christ in this manner, if you set your
mind on Christ, today Paul tells you how your life needs to change in the most practical of ways.

2.

**Connection.** Amazingly, Paul connects our most grand, mystical union with Christ with our most plain and practical moral obligations as Christians. Would you rather have Christian doctrine, or the Christian life? Paul tells you in this word “therefore” that you cannot have the one without the other. Your life is not Christian if you are not committed to the doctrine that Christ is your life. And your doctrine that Christ is your life is worthless if it does not change the way you live.

3.

**Application.** The way you should change is this: If your mind is set on things above, then you should put these evil desires to death. They are sensual in their focus, earthly in their tempting origins, intended objects, and
resulting actions. But your governing desires should be spiritual in focus, desires that find their origin in Christ, seek the objects He intends, and the actions that He approves. James puts this contrast in the starkest of terms, and the conclusion we must draw is that our desires, our character, our lifestyle, either come from Heaven or Hell. James says,

**James 3:14-15** 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
Put to death

1.

If your life comes from heaven, then you must “put to death” the evil desires that remain in your heart. Paul has already told you that “with Christ you died to the basic principles of the world” (2:20) and that “you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3), and so now he tells us that while in respect to God’s sovereign initiative we were passive participants in that death to sin, nevertheless we now have an active role to carry out in furthering that project. Sinful desires continue to spring up within you, and you need to put
them to death. They are the weeds in the good soil of your heart, the termites in your walls, the rats in your basement, the cancer in your bones, and they need to die. Otherwise, they will be the death of you.

2. **Illustration.** Alexander Maclaren gives a fitting illustration.

“Suppose a man working at some machine. His fingers get drawn between the rollers or caught in some belting. Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up
an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist. It takes some nerve to do that. It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death. I know of no stimulus that will string a man up to the analogous spiritual act here enjoined, and enjoined by conscience also, except participation in the death of Christ and in the resulting life.”

Maclaren’s last comment brings out the very important truth that evil desires are desires. They are your desires. This means that of your own will and your own strength you will not desire
put these desires to death. Only Jesus Christ living in you is able to give you the strength to fight this battle.

Members. Paul speaks in v. 5 of “your members that are on the earth.” What are these “members?” They are spiritual members of a spiritual body
1. Spiritual members. In Greek this word “members” means “body parts.” So Paul is telling you to put your “body parts” to death. Now certainly your physical body parts can be used improperly as instruments for unrighteousness, but Paul is not speaking about your physical body. This is evident because when he enumerates these “body parts” in v. 5, he does not
give a list of physical body parts, but a list of sinful desires. Granted, these desires are experienced in your physical body, but in themselves they are more spiritual than physical in nature.

2. Spiritual body of flesh. You see, Paul is speaking of a spiritual body
He often refers to it as the “flesh,” which means the sinful nature that is the origin of evil desires within us which are often called the “lusts of the flesh.” Paul calls this “flesh” a “body” in Col. 2:11:

Colossians 2:11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.
So now in 3:5 Paul speaks in terms of this same concept of “the body of the flesh” and tells us to put to death the “parts” of this body—its hands and feet and arms and ears and legs. In a real sense the vital organs of this body have already died, because Christ has put off your body of flesh, made a decisive break between you and it, so that it is no longer your identity, it is no longer
the core of who you are. You are not the old man, but are the "new man, created according to God in true righteousness and holiness."

(Eph. 4:24)

But though its vital organs are dead, its "body parts"--its "desires" and "manner of life"

(Eph. 4:22)

--still arise from it and must be exterminated lest like the
spasmodic hands of a dying man
they grip your heart and ruin
the course of your life. Your old
heart is dead, so let the body
parts die off too. Paul exhorts
you in
Rom. 8:13


Romans 8:13 13 If you live
according to the flesh you
will die, but if by the Spirit you
put to death the deeds of
the body, you will live.

- Listed

Let’s examine this list of
evil desires. Because this list is so general, I believe you and I actually have each one of these desires within us, otherwise Paul would not command you to face them. The question is not whether you have these desires, but whether you seek to slay them when they rise up in your heart. I want you to ask yourself, “In what particular way do I have each of these desires?”
and then I want you to commit to pray to God for help to stop that desire the moment you next experience it.

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On p. 277 of his commentary Alexander Maclaren says “The series recounts various forms of evil love, and is so arranged as that it starts with the
coarse, gross act, and goes on to more subtle and inward forms. It goes up the stream, as it were, to the fountain head, passing inward from deed to desire.”

- Deeds
Sexual immorality

First is sexual immorality, which covers every kind of sexual act other than those between a husband and wife which are approved by scripture.
Examples:

- premarital sex, extramarital affairs, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, lust

- pornography, lewd thoughts, words, or looks
Second is uncleanness,
or impurity, “which embraces every manifestation in word or look or deed of the impure spirit, and so is at once wider and subtler than the gross physical act.”

Examples:
foolish talk, crude joking, vulgarity, swearing, vulgar gestures

dirty, vile, dead, mangled, perverse
Desires

“Then follow ‘passion’ and ‘evil desire’
’; the sources of the evil deeds. These are again more inward and more general than the preceding.” Passion is more passive, evil desire is more active. “The ‘lusts of the flesh’ are in the one aspect kindled by outward temptations which come with terrible force and carry men captive, acting almost irresistibly….On the
other hand they are excited by the voluntary action of the man himself. In the one the evil comes into the heart; in the other the heart goes out to the evil.”

3

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Passions
pa, qoj is passive, as opposed to evpiqumi, which is active. It is “ungovernable desire.”

May have a cause in view
Examples:

anger, rage, envy, jealousy, malice, pride, conceit, enmity, rivalries, drunkenness, orgies, hatred toward God,
quarreling, hostility, hatred, selfish ambition
Evil desires

strong impulse or desire
Has an object in view
Mark 4:19 “desires for other things will come and choke out the message.”
Desire itself is not wrong
This word for “desire” is used positively in Luke 17:22, 22:15; 1 Thess. 2:17; Heb. 6:11.

Asceticism is not the
right response. The right goal is not to destroy the physical body and its good desires, but the old spiritual body and its evil desires.
Lastly, Paul mentions greed.
Definition. Greed is the desire to acquire an object that is not rightfully yours.

Greed is spiritual idolatry. This means greed is worse than is commonly thought.
You cannot serve God and money.
It is often true that someone who has been addicted to sensual desires will also become addicted to this desire to acquire. Maclaren says on p. 278, “How many respectable middle-aged gentlemen are now mainly devoted to making money, whose
“youth was foul with sensual indulgence?”

“The lowest form of idolatry is the giving of supreme trust to a material thing, and making that a god. There is no lower form of fetish-worship than this.”
Greed is “the fierce and ever fiercer longing of the creature which has turned from God to fill itself with the inferior objects of sense.”

“To such a god there is given the first thought of the morning, the last wish of
the evening, and the action of every waking hour.”
Why: God’s Evaluation and Response v. 6

1. Why should we put evil desires to death?
The reason Paul gives is that these evil desires—even the same evil desires that are within your own heart—are the reason God’s wrath is coming.

1.
6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming [on the sons of disobedience].

2. Sons of
disobedience


2.
Origin that indicates a state. This is the state of unbelievers – they live in disobedience.

3.

Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged
from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

4.

Result is that God’s wrath comes on them
Ephesians 2:3
among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath
, like the rest of mankind.

- Ephesians 5:6

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of...
these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
Wrath

1. Evil desires pose a great threat to you.
2.

“This ovrgh. is more than chastisement...it is direct and punitive indignation frequently inflicted here in the form of...
physical debility and disease, remorse, and stupefaction.”

3.

Will God’s wrath come on you if you
are a believer? No, not if you have placed your faith in Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.
1 Thessalonians 1:9-10  you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he
raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
But the earthly consequences of sin are the same for both the elect and the non-elect.
These desires wage war against your soul.

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you
as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
James 4 tells us that our evil desires are the reason we fight, and war.
and kill.

These desires bring forth death.
Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully
grown brings forth death.

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Evil desires will
kill you — this is the goal of the prostitute in Rev. 17. Those who dwell on the earth are drunk with her sexual immorality (
Rev. 17:2
)
, and she is "drunk with the blood of the saints."
(Rev. 17:17
)
Not only are the earthly consequences of
sin the same for the elect and the non-elect alike, but the eternal consequences of sin come on all who will not
repent.

The consequences are eternal.
Galatians 6:8

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap
corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
Evil desires will keep you from inheriting the kingdom of God.
1 Corinthians 6:9
Do you not know that the unrighteous will
not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor
men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will
inherit the kingdom of God.
Evil desires will take you to hell.
Revelation 21:8  But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually
immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur,
which is the second death.
Illustration: Gollum
The ring:
“My precious!”

Put it on, and you gain
the power of being able to hide in invisibility, but it shows you a world of evil that is more
powerful than you, and which threatens your life.
At the end, Gollum clutches the ring as he falls over a cliff into a burning lake of fire.
How: Your Walk and Your Life v. 7

1.

How then
should we put evil desires to death? Paul hints at the answer in v. 7, saying
1. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.
2. Paul says that before you came to faith in
Christ you had an old walk and an old life, and by pointing them out Paul is telling you to avoid that old
walk and that old life whenever you are tempted to take them up again.
3.

Walk

1.

First Paul
speaks of your former walk.

2.

Most likely this is saying
you walked in the desires listed above in v. 5, and it does not mean you walked among the “
sons of disobedience

3.
“Once walked” implies you now walk in a new era of life, in a new sphere with
which you are identified and within which you move.

4.
It refers to your active life—what you do and the direction in which it leads you.
5.

Life
1.

Paul then speaks of your former life.
2. This refers to the root of your life. Tying your old walk
and life together, Maclaren says “Your active life was occupied and guided by
these sins in that past time when your inward being was knit to and nourished by them. Or to
put it plainly, conduct followed and was shaped by inclinations and desires.” (283)
3.

This "life" does not refer to dwelling in a location, a
house, a dwelling, but to the principle of life within as it comes to expression in all of your
experience. What drives you? A desire to sin? Or a desire for Christ? In what do you
find supreme enjoyment, so that you engross yourself in it? What is the thing that
you fancy will give you the greatest gratification? In what do you so revel that you can
say you “live” in it?

- Sexual
immorality

- Lust
Impurity/Uncleanness
Col. 3:5-7 - Put Evil Desires to Death

Written by Tim Black

- TV
Passion/Evil Desire
Alcohol
Drugs

- 

Food
Work, children, toys
Greed
Possessions
Conclusion

1.

You once lived in what
you must now put to death. These desires are not your life, and are contrary to your spiritual
life in Christ. They are contrary to Christ, who is your life.
2.

Make it your ambition

1.
1 Peter 4:2-3

2 to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human
passions but for the will of God.
2.

You will suffer as you seek to fight against the evil desires in your
heart. But remember that

1. Romans
5:3-5 suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and
character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's
love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
2. And
1.

Philippians 1:6 he who began a good work in you
will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
Maclaren,
275.

2Maclaren, 277.
3 Maclaren, 277.
4 Eadie, 223, quoting Trench, New Testament Synonyms,
24.

5Eadie, 223.
Eadie, 224.