

Paul never warns us just about false teaching and then leaves it at that. He always gives with his warning a positive teaching, something that we should focus on, something that we should look to. And in this way, this is what he's doing right here in this part of Colossians. Having given his warning against false teaching, he now points the Colossians to seek the things which are above, where Christ is, where their life is now hidden in him. And he gives us this same message too. To seek the things above, not the things below, because you also are alive in Christ.

Because Christians, the things which are below are worldly ideas. The same things we've been talking about all throughout Colossians. They are things which make us like the world, things which lead us away from God, and therefore things which should be avoided. For the Colossians in particular, that was their false teachers. These men who were telling them all of these things that were leading them away from God. By listening to them, the Colossians were being led into unbelief. But for us, that could be any number of things. It could be false teachers, just like with the Colossians. But it could also just be worldly ideas, the ones that we've been talking about, or even just a desire for the things of this life. Covetousness, greed, desire for the things of the world, something which keeps us focused on the things which are below. And Paul calls for us to make a break with them, to put them away, to have nothing to do with them. Notice he is not just saying, "Just try really, really hard, and maybe you'll be able to get rid of these things." No, he tells us: have nothing to do with them. Avoid them he commands us, because otherwise, focusing on the things which are below will lead us to suffer the wrath of God. So we should be focused then on the things above, where Christ is, and not on the things of this life.

Because Paul says in verse 3: "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory." Christians, you have died to the world. You have died to the things which formerly held you to this world. Your life is now in Christ. As Paul says in Romans chapter 6: "We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." So in other words, by your Baptism, Christians, you have died to the world. And if you have died to the world with Christ, then you will also rise with him. And if through your Baptism you have risen with Christ, you are a new creation in him, one which is able to follow after him, one which is able to seek the things which are above. Because that's where your life is! Having been baptized, you are now alive with Christ in heaven. So look to him in all things and seek those things which are above.

But Paul also shows us how to do this. Because it wouldn't be very good for him to just say "seek the things that are above" and then not tell us exactly what he means. And that's exactly what he does in most of our reading for this evening, to show us exactly how we should seek the things which are above. And the first command which he gives to us comes in verse 5, when he says: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." That's pretty stark language, isn't it? Put it to death. Notice he doesn't say: "Just try really hard, and maybe you'll be able to overcome it." He doesn't say, "Just resist it to the best of your ability," or something equally soft. No, he gives us a hard command: Kill it! Kill the sin which still clings to you. Kill it, because to hold on to it is dangerous. As John Owen, a famous theologian, once put it: "Be killing sin, or it will kill you." We are engaged in a war, Christians, a war against the evil that is still within us, against the sin that is still within. We are called to kill it before it kills us.

And Paul gives examples of what these sins are in verse 5. He says: "Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." If we live in these things, if we hold onto these things, then we will be led away from God. They will kill our soul. This is the warfare that we are waging against. Because if we are so focused on these things, these things which are below, then we cannot continue to follow after Christ.

But Paul also gives us another reason in verse 6. He says: "On account of these, the wrath of God is coming." God will judge sin. God's wrath will burn hot against all of these things which are below, against the things of this world. And if we are in the things of this world, if we are still caught up in the things which are below, then we will suffer his judgment too. To be in these things is to suffer God's wrath. But Christians, you are no longer in them! You are in Christ. Having been baptized into him, you have been set free from these things, so that you can kill them. You can put them to death and fight against them with all that you have. So the wrath of God need not fall on us, because we are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But Paul gives a second command in this reading too. Verse 8: "But now you must put them all away." Put them away, he says. Don't have anything to do with them. Don't hold onto them, keeping them close to you, even if you say that you hate them. Because the more that you hold on to them, the more dangerous they become. It's kind of like holding a fire too close to your body. You're going to get burned. Or being careless with a knife. You're very likely to end up stabbing yourself in the process. These things are dangerous. For that reason, we must put them away. We must have nothing to do with them, so that they will not hurt us. Get rid of them, Paul says! Get rid of them before they kill you.

And what are these things again? He says, verse 8: "Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another." These things, as before, are sins, the things which are below, the things which will lead us away from God. And if we're holding onto these things, saying that we have to do them or we just can't seem to shake them, then we're going to end up suffering God's wrath as before.

But why should we put them away? Paul tells us: "You are a new creation. The old man has been put to death, along with his desires through Baptism. You are now alive in Christ." And because you are a new creation in Christ, Christians, you are able to put these things away. You are able to walk in him. He has made you new, and for that reason we can fight back against these things.

But just in case we get to the end of this and say, "Well, that all sounds good, but maybe it doesn't actually apply to me, because I struggle too much, and it seems like I can never quite shake these things," Paul gives us one more verse. Verse 11, he says: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all." What he means by this verse, Christians, is that all of these things that he has just got done saying, talking about the importance of killing sin and of seeking the things which are above, is something which is true for all of us who are in Christ Jesus, regardless of who we are. Because this list that he gives of all of these different kinds of people in Paul's day would have been a pretty mixed bag. On the one hand, you have the people they would consider to be good, the kind of people you would expect to do the right thing. These would be like the Greeks, the Jews, the circumcised, and the free. They're the kind of people who are upstanding, virtuous, good people.

The kind of people you could rely on. But on the other hand you have the other people, the uncircumcised, the barbarians, the Scythians, and the slaves. They were the bad kind of people, the people you couldn't trust, the people you expected to be wild, have no self-control, to do all the wrong things. Probably the very worst out of this list would be the Scythians, the people who were living in the far north that they would consider to be wild, completely barbarous, the kind of people who could only do bad things, and that's all you could expect of them. And for a Scythian to become a Christian, he might say: "Well, what you say sounds good, Paul, but I'm a Scythian. I was born this way. I can't help it if I fall into sin. I can't seem to shake these things, because this is just who I am. So it sounds good what you're saying, but maybe it doesn't apply to me." Of course, you hear this all the time in our world today too, Christians. How many times have you heard people say, "I was born this way, and for that reason, you can't expect me to fight back against my desires. Or for that reason, I'm just gonna keep doing these things, and maybe it really isn't sin. Or maybe God isn't going to judge it quite as harshly." But Paul says: "No, that doesn't matter. What matters is that you are a new creation in Christ. The old man has been put to death." And all of these things which he calls for us to do is meant for all of us, because we are in Christ, and Christ is all and in all. And because we live in him, we all, regardless of who we are by nature, can do the thing that is right. Because even the Scythian is not born so that he can continue sinning, but has been reborn in Christ to do the things which are above.

So Christians, as Paul says, seek the things which are above, where Christ is. Put to death the things which are earthly within you. Because you are alive in Christ. And because you are alive in Christ and are in him, when he appears you also will appear with him in glory. He has made you a new creation, one which is able to do the things which are above. So follow after him and listen to his voice, so that you can fight back against sin by the power of God within you.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to make us a new creation in you. We pray that you would lead us always to seek the things which are above, where Christ is, so that we may do what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.