

## Having a Clear Out

## Colossians 3:1-11

It's spring – although we've scarcely noticed it. Traditionally this was the time of year to get things moving around the home and garden in readiness for the summer months. It's all about both throwing out all that stuff we've been hoarding, getting the dust out of those hard to reach places and maybe also to freshen up the paintwork or even do a full redecoration of a room or two.

In this part of Colossians, Paul is encouraging the Colossians to give their spiritual lives a spring clean: to clear out all the rubbish that they'd been encouraged by religious people, whether influenced by Greek or Jewish thought.

But what was that rubbish. We started to look at it last time. It was legalism: laws and customs that looked spiritual, even sacrificial - "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" - but were all human in origin and were of no value in spiritual terms. At the beginning of chapter 3 Paul encourages the Colossians to be heavenly minded - since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Don't be religious but fix your minds on heaven. Why? Because our faith is all about Jesus and where's He currently? Seated at the right hand of God. Therefore our church life and our spiritual life should be all about Him. We saw last week that the problem is that so often we make church an end in itself, or worse make the tools we use to worship, serve and witness the focus of our religion – buildings, services, ministries, relationships. That is always the focus of legalism – the things become more important than the purpose. The flesh becomes more important than the Spirit. It's something we have to consider from time to time as it's an error so easy to fall for.

And a good place to do it – at the regular Christ appointed place where we remind ourselves of the focus of our faith – around the communion table to remember the centrality of Jesus and His finished work.

Some have described Paul's attitude to the law as being antinomian – rejecting law. But that's just not so. His rejection of law was what the world had made. Instead He places focus on what we have been made in Christ. We have died to the world, to the old man. Therefore if our minds are centred in heaven – in Christ – then we make sure we're rid of the world.

Therefore we make sure we kill off that which we have died to. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. We are new people, citizens of heaven. Next time we will see how Paul compares this to a set of clothes.

When I was young I would often come in from playing covered in dirt. I was immediately sent to the bath. And when I came out there was a new set of clothes waiting to be put on. Why? It doesn't make sense to have a bath and then clothe ourselves with the dirt we've been cleansed from.

So in this passage there are two ideas. Get rid of the mess. But this isn't law as we shall see next time.

So let's deal with the first bit this evening. Have a spring clean. Put to death, therefore,

whatever belongs to your earthly nature. What we should get rid of falls into two categories. The first relates to ourselves and the second to our relationships.

### **Ourselves**

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

We live in a society that seems to be almost obsessed with things sexual. Whether it is infidelity, pornography, gay rights or paedophilia, people always seem to be talking about it. Worse, there are so many double standards to it. And Christians are often a target in the media. We're told people aren't interested in Christianity any longer because we are against certain things – sex outside marriage, living together outside of the marriage bond, homosexuality. Yet on the other side they lament all the problems that derive – broken marriages, sexually transmitted diseases and all the other wreckage that comes with these things. Why do you think the Bible is full of verses like Colossians 3:5?

However, the answer isn't the kind of repression of previous decades where these things were rarely talked about and people were never faced with their sin because talking about it was taboo.

So being faced with these words, what do we say? I'm an older Christian so it doesn't affect me? One thing that getting older has underlined to me is that no-one can ever say that. We all have the capacity to harbour attitudes and actions that affect ourselves and others. And the list doesn't just include sexual things anyway we've also got impurity, lust, evil desires and greed'

Impurity – impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living. It's more about profligate living – doing it all for oneself.

Lust – Greek pathos – a passionate but negative emotion

Evil desires (evil concupiscence) – as it says

Greed – covetousness.

All these things are about me and what's important to me. In the end it all falls down to selfishness/self-gratification and what's important in life to me. Paul sums it up in one word – idolatry.

Each time we put the focus on ourselves then it's idolatry. I'm sure none of you have ever bowed the knee to a idol, followed another religion, but we've all been guilty of idolatry. Why? Because idolatry is putting what we want before Jesus.

Worse, as with idolatry in the OT, it isn't a case of rejecting God and doing something else. In many ways it's worse – it's sharing our affections with Jesus. And we all do that to a greater or lesser extent.

And we all need to repent. Why? Because it makes God burning angry! Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. Never play down sin that's idolatry. God's anger burns against it. It's time to repent if we're running a two speed faith.

But there is a second aspect here.

## **Others**

7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

We've died to the old man. In Christ we have been made clean. We do not put out old clothes on. And that applies to our relationships as much as it does to ourselves: rid yourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other.

Being heavenly minded affects our relationships. I never enjoy seeing Eastenders. In fact, I never watch it. All the characters seem to be covered by these words – except the filthy language as it's before the watershed. Actually true Eastenders aren't like this – they're not all foul to one another but the language can be a bit more colourful! Our attitudes to one another should be different than the world's standards. We'll see our standards next time. That set, the reverse term I could use to cover this lot are the words of Jesus: “love one another as I have loved you.” Again, it's all about killing off self and making the exalted Jesus the focus of our lives, from which everything should proceed.

So in Christ as we come around the table, let's remember how we have been cleansed and made alive: in Christ because of His broken body and shed blood. We should be dead to the world and its actions and values.

But we've got to realise that we need to do some spring cleaning. As we meditate in these we can see that we have been idolatrous because we can recall how we have had times that we have put ourselves first, and not the risen Christ. Then there are those people whom we have harboured bad feelings about. Those whom we have gossiped about. Those times we have been angry or unforgiving. We are all guilty. Let's come in repentance before God. Let's confess them. We have been cleansed – lets get the dirty clothes off.

## **Confession**

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