

PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION (PART 1)

THE NECESSITY OF MORTIFICATION

A SURVEY OF COLOSSIAN 3:5-11

Introduction:

The culture of Paul's day was decrepit! One does not have to traverse far to hear a modern preacher bemoan our American culture as being pragmatic, tolerance driven, and culturally relevant. This is often followed up with a statement alluding to this being the worst possible age to “raise the next generation of Christian youth!” While we have witnessed the degeneration of our once “Judeo-Christian” country (the positives and negatives of that can be debated another day), we are a far cry from the sheer paganism of the Roman world. The time period in which Paul wrote Colossians was filled with pagan practices that were just as perverse – if not worse, then our own postmodern culture. In paganism (in Paul's day and our own),

1. Divine Sovereignty become Fatalism
2. Grace become Indulgence
3. Righteousness become Conformity to arbitrary rules
4. Worship becomes Empty Ritual
5. Prayer becomes Selfish Begging
6. Supernatural degenerates into Superstition

In essence, then, paganism seeks to pervert God's original revelation to mankind. This can be seen specifically in the text at hand. Paul warns the believers to put off the sinful practices that were associated with pagan worship. Pagan worship involved temple prostitution – a form of worship. This was not the way the Colossian believers were to “walk”.

I. Sever the Root of Sin!

Paul begins explaining the external effects of the gospel in the lives of the Colossians, by stating that there were to first “put off” or “mortify” their “members.” To mortify, or better, to put to death, refers first to a *past act* that is seen in 3:3. Paul states that, as believers, “we have died”. If this is the case, we are to then put to death the vestiges of the “Old Man” remaining in our flesh. The operation of mortification is only possible because of the reality of 3:3 in the life of believers. So, what then does it mean to truly mortify? As is often the case, we will view the negative first, in order to better understand the correct picture. Mortification is NOT

1. An external act of sacramentalism (penance, confession, Eucharist, or church attendance).
2. Strict adherence to . . . moral codes or standards (as if removing one's TV from the house will cure lust).
3. The “bad feeling” of getting caught.

4. Merely declaring war on the fruits or evidences of sin in one's life.
5. Ever totally completed in this life.

Mortification Defined: Mortification is the systematic and habitual process of weakening sin through the enablement of the Holy Spirit (as defined by John Owen).

Put Off. . .

The list of sins or vices given by Paul all refer to perverted forms of sexual worship. He begins by naming sexual immorality or perhaps better prostitution. He moves on to implore the believers to cast off all forms of impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness (or greed specifically in relation to another man's wife or even prostitute). These practices are to be stripped as one would peel off old, smelly clothes. The second set of sins listed refer more to inter-personal or relational aspects in the church Colossian church. Paul states that they were to cast off anger, wrath malice, slander and obscene talk. Unlike the way the world practiced relationships (with hate and backbiting), the church was to be much different – Christ like!

Motivation for Mortification

1. First, Paul reminds the believers of the need for mortification by inciting the coming wrath of God. One might wonder as to the need to fear this wrath if, after all, one must only believe. Is not salvation an act of faith alone? We need not fret the wrath of God – even if our actions are as perverse as this text states. One need only turn to Romans 8:13 which states that “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*.” The fight of mortification is a fight for your very Spiritual life! It is not that mortification saves, but only that mortification is the result of regeneration. The effective working of God in the new birth will become evident in a life of constant mortification.
2. Secondly, Paul reminds the believers of their former position – they used to walk this way. The implication, then, is that there should have been some change from their former way of life and their current life. II Cor. 5:17 is instructive on this point: “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

II. Stop Being Hypocritical!

After describing the specific sins which were prevalent in the Colossian community, Paul again encourages the believers with the truth of their position. The Old Man had been put off and the New Man had been put on. There was to be no questioning that fact. Paul is alluding to the fact of the believers death with Christ and their resurrected life – that was a reality they were to ponder (ie. 3:1-4). The Old Man is dead – not dying, but actually dead! We are not to picture him as being “partly alive” but as crucified – the image is one of death, not life! The act of casting off sin is then an act of faith in the redemptive work of Christ. As opposed to wearing their old “clothes” or sins, Paul charges these believers to stop lying to each other and by faith put to death (or put off) these aspects of their flesh.

Christ is All

This section is concluded by Paul in the statement – “Christ is all and in all!” When Christ is all in your life, you will mortify sin. The person who is enraptured and enamored with the Savior is the person who is putting off the deeds of the flesh! This is true faith – faith that has seen Christ as Lord in salvation (not only positional but progressive and ultimate).

Conclusion:

How is this mortification carried out? How do we put off our fascination with sex and greed and laziness? As opposed to diminishing the sin or merely “trying harder” take your sin, your vice to the cross.

1. Cast yourself upon the sovereign grace of our God. Mortification and victory will only come through His good pleasure!
2. This grace will manifest itself through the work of the Holy Spirit. . .
3. He will open your mind and heart to the Word. . .
4. Where you will behold the magnificence of the our dear Savior – the LORD JESUS CHRIST!