

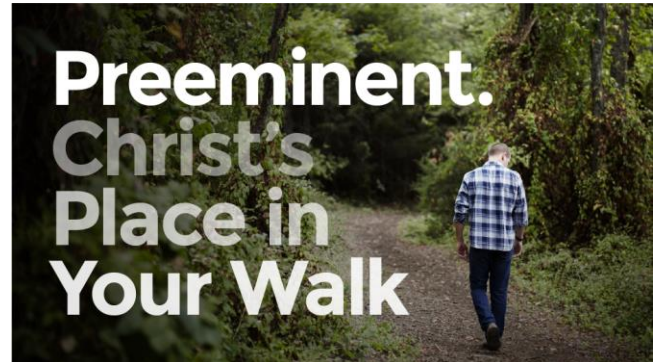


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

What Are You Wearing?

Preeminent. Christ's Place in the World | Part 12
Tim Badal | March 8, 2015 | Colossians 3:5-11



We have made it through the first half of our series, which focused on the false teaching and other things that were infecting the Colossian church. Paul addressed those issues and struggles, clearly proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Preeminent. He is full of the Deity that now dwells bodily in human form. He is equal with the Father. He must be first in our lives. Paul emphatically reminds the Colossians to make Christ preeminent in all that they do. As we begin to understand the theology of Christ's preeminence, it should make an impact on how we live our lives. It should affect our walk with Him.

Now we are turning the corner as we encounter chapters three and four, seeing how Christ must be preeminent, not only in the world that we live in, but also in our walks. This means our personal world: every decision that we make, how we relate to the people who are close to us, how we relate to strangers, how we interact with believers and non-believers. Christ must be preeminent in all of those areas. As we live out these truths each and every day, we must bring glory and honor to Him.

As we look to our Scripture, we come to Colossians 3:5-11. Before we read this passage, I want to challenge you. This is going to be a tough message. It has been one of the most difficult messages for me to prepare in this series. As a pastor, it reminds me that I am a sinner. There are things in my life that absolutely have to change if Christ is going to be preeminent. As I worked through this passage and learned what it means, I was reminded that I have not arrived. Christ is not preeminent in everything I do. There are other things in my life that become number one. I don't want them to be. I wish that wasn't the case, but it is. I am going to believe that I'm pretty normal and pretty average.

I believe that we are all in the same boat. We desire and long for the things of God. We gather together as a church body because we want Christ to be preeminent in our lives. However, there is something running through our veins. Right when we think we've got everything figured out, we make that decision. We turn on that program. We allow things into our hearts and minds. We allow things to come out of our mouths. We allow thoughts to fester. We allow anger, wrath and slander to come from our hearts and onto those we love. We hate ourselves for it. We beat ourselves up because we think we've come so far and that the particular sin we thought was buried is still alive and well.

Paul has words for us today. He has words for you as the congregation and words for me, your preacher. It is so important, as we look at a passage like this, that we don't look down the row at the person we think really needs to hear this message. Don't think about your teenager, your mom or your dad. Don't think, "Man, I hope Tim really brings it because they really need conviction." It is so vitally important that we allow the Word of the Lord to do a work in our lives. Don't look to the left or the right, but allow the Word of God to center its bulls-eye on your heart and ask yourself some questions. My prayer for all of us is that we would be open to hear the Word of the Lord and that we would be honest with ourselves about the cancer running through our veins. We need the Lord's help and the Spirit's empowerment to deliver us so that we may live a life that proclaims Christ's preeminence.

I am going to begin by reading the passage that we worked through last week because it is a great reminder of the truth that we can have victory in the midst of cancerous sin. Colossians 3:1-11:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

This past week I was in a doctor's waiting room, bored out of my mind. Even though caterers need to be on time all the time, a doctor can be an hour and ten minutes late and never need to apologize. As I was sitting in the waiting room, I had gone through all the apps on my phone which was about to die. Now I was getting frustrated because I didn't have anything to entertain me. So I went to the old way of being entertained and picked up a magazine from the coffee table. I picked up *People* magazine. It has been a long time since I picked up one of those. This particular edition was on the Oscars and everything that you needed to know about that night. I have never watched the Oscars. I'm not sure why people are infatuated with them. Perhaps some of you like it. I don't get it. Give me a football game. Give me a good war movie. The Oscars don't do anything for me.

There was nothing else to do and I had half an hour of waiting to go. So I read the articles and thought to myself, "Maybe they'll talk about some of the movies that came out last year. Maybe they'll talk about why these movies were picked and not others. Perhaps it will include some biographies about the actors and actresses. Maybe the articles will be about their difficult childhoods or their lives as celebrities." I couldn't find anything like that. The articles were only about what people were wearing that night. The secondary article was about whom the best dressed and the worst dressed people were on the red carpet. I began to ask myself, "Is this even about the movies or only what people are wearing?" From the perspective of *People* magazine the Oscars are all about the clothes.

What is so important about our clothing? What is it that attracts people to the cloth in which we dress our bodies? No doubt, clothing is important. We need clothing to cover our bodies. But what is it about our clothing that makes it important to human beings? Clothing has a way of making a statement about who we are. We can find out what a person likes and doesn't like by what he or she wears. We can find out who a person is by the clothing that he or she chooses. We can learn a lot about a person's job or occupation by the clothes they wear to work. We judge people all the time by what they wear. It's become part of human nature to observe clothing. Clothing also says a lot about you spiritually.

In our text, Paul tells us that what we wear not only communicates our spirituality to others; it also communicates our spirituality to God. Clothing in the spiritual sense tells the world and God what is important to us and what we enjoy the most. The clothing that we wear defines who we are. It defines whether or not we are followers of Jesus Christ or followers of our own passions and desires.

Why would Paul bring this up? In the days of the Colossians there was a disconnect. A group called the Gnostics said that they had a righteous, vibrant and healthy walk with God. They claimed a closeness with Jesus. However, their clothing said something totally different. They said that they were righteous and holy, but their lives were filled with immorality. Their lives were filled with all kinds of sins of the mouth, the body and their internal passions. They said, "I can love God on the inside and do whatever I want on the outside." We need to understand the hypocrisy in what the Gnostics did. We cannot say that what is happening on the inside is different than what is taking place on the outside. We cannot say that something good is happening on the inside when all we see on the outside is bad. Paul makes it clear that a good indication of what is going on in our hearts can be seen by what we wear on the outside. If Christ is going to be preeminent, you must don Christ each and every day.

We have been raised with Christ. We're no longer dead; we're alive. We've been rescued from the tomb. This brings to mind the image of Lazarus being resurrected from the grave. Remember the story in John 11 where Lazarus has been dead for days? Jesus came and Lazarus' sisters were upset with Him. Jesus could have come earlier, but He didn't. He didn't want anyone to doubt that Lazarus was actually dead. Jesus came and wept before the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus, on that momentous occasion—a moment that should be reminiscent of everything that has been done for each Christ-follower—went to the tomb and said, "Lazarus, come forth." Then that dead body had new life breathed into it. Lazarus came out, covered in his grave-clothes. The first thing that Jesus told the onlookers was, "Get those clothes off him. He should no longer wear the clothes of a dead man. He is alive."

Likewise, we have been raised from the grave. We no longer need to wear our grave-clothes. Our attitudes and actions, the things that we wear in our lives, need to change because we are no longer dead. We are alive. Paul has a word for the Colossians and a word for Village Bible Church and a word for you and a word for me. There are two things that I want to address today. If what we're wearing is going to look like what's going on inside of us, then we must:

1. Get rid of our dirty clothes

Colossians 3:5 says, *"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."* Paul begins this passage by reminding us that we have been raised and one day we will appear with Christ. Because of that, we have a specific calling. The first step to that calling is getting rid of some things. Paul uses the words, "put to death."

Paul is using some of the most powerful and graphic language available to him to speak about the struggle with sin. He doesn't say, "Try to keep in check your sexual immorality, impurity, passions, evil desires." He doesn't say, "Try to do these things in moderation." He doesn't say, as our culture does, "If it feels right go ahead and do it. If you believe that this is your orientation, do it. If you believe that God has given your biological synapses that fire for those sorts of things, do it." No. Paul says very clearly, unequivocally, "Put to death. . . ." Its synonyms are: "Kill it. Destroy it. Decimate it. Beat it into total submission. Rid yourself of it."

This phrase comes from the Greek word, *nekroó*. It is an imperative phrase, which means that we must do it. It is a definite command which should produce a definite result. We use imperatives when we are upset with our children. It's not a suggestion or a request to think about it. We are called to do it. We must do it as quickly as possible. Because this verb is in the imperative mood, we must do this without hesitation. It is an urgent order from your Commanding General regarding a sinister enemy within your camp who has the power to destroy you given the opportunity. This word, *nekroó*, comes first in this sentence. Put to death. This is the emphasis of the sentence. It grabs our attention. You can hear Paul shouting from his Roman prison cell, "Kill sin before it kills you!"

I know that there are some people in our midst who have received medical reports of cancer. That is a horrifying word that we don't want to hear. "There is something malignant growing within you. It will continue to grow and affect your life. Little by little it will eat away at your organs and at your very life so you need to do something about it." What does the doctor say? "Well, you know what? Let's not worry about it. Is it hurting right now? If it's not hurting right now, you don't need to worry. Are you enjoying life right now? When you start to not enjoy life, we'll address the cancer." No, any good doctor will say that if there's cancer in your system, it needs to be killed now. Your oncologist isn't going to say, "You know what? I'm deeply concerned that you will lose some of your pleasure and pleasant living so we won't do the radioactive treatments that we need to do." No, they'll tell you, "This is going to hurt. This is not going to be fun. It will cause you pain. It will cause you discomfort."

Just like with that cancer, we are willing to endure discomfort and pain in order to kill the enemy within us. Paul is telling us that the sin inside of us is cancerous. It is eating away at our souls. Perhaps we don't feel it right now. Perhaps the symptoms don't register. However, if we don't take care of that sin, it will grow and spread. At some point it's going to take our lives. We need to deal with it.

How do we deal with it? We do the only thing that should be done with such an enemy: we kill it. Anyone who has served in the military knows that they are conditioned with the instinct to kill. While that may seem gruesome to civilians, the army knows that if soldiers hesitate for even a second on the battlefield, it will be too late. They invest time and energy into our young men and women to train them to focus on their response to the enemy on the battlefield. When our soldiers fight these wars and face the enemy on the field of battle, they don't swap emails. They don't make friends and they don't ask the enemy who they are or where they grew up. No questions are asked. It is kill or be killed.

Without sounding too dramatic, Paul uses this same imagery in Ephesians 6:10-18. We're in a battle. We don't wrestle flesh and blood, but we battle against the spiritual forces of hell and the devil. There are spiritual forces waging war against us in this world. We can't kill the devil. That is something God will do in His own time and in His own way. We are called to put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11), to resist the devil (James 4:7) and stand firm in the faith (1 Corinthians 16:13).

What is Paul calling us to kill? In this text we are called to kill one of our greatest weaknesses: our flesh (Colossians 3:5). Since the days of Adam in the Garden, the people of God have had a traitor in their midst. This traitor knows all of our defense

mechanisms, all of our strategies, and betrays us anytime it can. What is this traitor? That which is earthly in you. The flesh. The old man. The carnal you. Romans 8:7-8 gives us a glimpse of this enemy. *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*

If you are living for your flesh, then you can't live for God because your flesh is in total rebellion against God. Your old flesh is the old you, the one who was a rebel against God, the one who was hostile and insubordinate against God and His ways. In your old flesh, you hated to admit that you were sick with sin. You would defy the need for the Great Physician to make you well. In your flesh, you trusted your own wisdom, not God's wisdom. You trusted your own ways, not God's ways. Everything that you did in the flesh did not please God; it only angered Him more. Everything you did in the flesh was apart from faith because the flesh is your old, self-reliant, faithless, insolent, rebellious self. It is living within you. It is doing all that it can to do away with you.

In Colossians 3:3, Paul says that this part of a believer has been put to death. It no longer has its former position in our lives. We have the ability to say, "No" to the flesh and turn from it. However, we have a tendency to go dig up the grave and put on the old flesh because it feels so good. It feels so right. However, Paul says that we must rid ourselves of it. He tells us that there are three things we need to rid ourselves of. Ridding ourselves of dirty clothes means that we need to:

Destroy our old passions

The first thing that we need to rid ourselves of is sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires and covetousness. Commentators believe that all of these things are in the sexual realm. Because of where Paul places sexual immorality, he is linking all of these vices. In a sense, Paul is saying, "sexual immorality comes from impurity, which comes from passion. Passion comes from evil desires and evil desires come from greed." Greed says, "I want something no matter what it costs me or someone else."

Let me be clear: immorality is unbecoming of a believer. However, Paul does not say that sexual relations between a husband and a wife are forbidden. Paul never says, "You know what, husband and wife, ease up in the bedroom category. Come on. There's a limit to things." Every time sexuality between a husband and wife is spoken of, the Bible celebrates it and applauds it. It says, "That is God's calling for you as a husband and wife." God is the biggest fan of the sexual union between the husband and wife because He created it for our good and enjoyment. This is a wedding gift for a husband and wife, so that they might be fruitful and multiply. Two people become one flesh in a union that God has created.

However, Paul isn't talking about that. Sexual desire is a powerful thing in our world and culture. Don't the Scriptures blow you away? This was written two thousand years ago, but could have been written yesterday. Paul could have been watching what is on our cable network shows and written the same thing. The issue of sexuality has not come out of the blue. It's been around long before we came on the stage. Sexual immorality wasn't just a New Testament thing; it was prevalent in the lives of the Patriarchs and other men and women of faith who struggled with their sexuality as well.

What causes this insidious battle with this thing that God created for our good? Why is it that we've made it so bad? Why have we made it so depraved and perverted? While these feelings are natural, good and God-given, we are created as sexual beings; this world has taken those feelings and desires and tempted us to move away from God's intended plans and purposes. They tempt us to fulfill these desires on our own terms. Because of that, we have turned the world of biblical sexuality upside-down. We wonder why there's disease. We wonder why there are broken relationships. We wonder why there are unwanted pregnancies, why there are abortions. The reason is that sexual immorality comes from impurity, which comes from passion, which comes from evil desires, which come from covetousness. Paul writes a word of warning for us in Colossians. He urges us to cut it out before this cancer kills us.

Some of you might think, "Tim, you're only addressing the men in our congregation." You would be right. Far too many of us have been broken by this sin, but this sin is no longer a just male-only issue. Every study and survey tells us that immorality is an issue for both genders. It affects us all. Did you know that people do more searches for pornography than for anything else combined? You don't think that our culture has a problem with this? The church is no different in our struggles with sexual immorality.

The word "immorality" is the Greek word *porneia* which is where we get the word pornography. Paul was talking about pornography before Playboy magazines and the Internet. Pornography was alive and well in the city and the church of Colossae. It was in the church! Paul was writing to a group of Christians saying, "Hey Christians, put this to death!" He's not talking about

the outside world. Paul is talking to the church saying, “Christians, you cannot be raised with Christ, hidden with Christ and one day appear with Christ, all the while living lives of immorality. You need to stay away from it.”

When the word “immorality” is spoken, it often falls on deaf ears, so in times like this it is necessary to speak bluntly about what this word means. It means no sexual wrongdoing, no premarital sex, no friends with benefits, no extramarital sex of any kind, no messing around, no being faithless to one’s spouse, no homosexual acts, no pornography in any form, no fantasy novels, no books or magazines full of innuendos and sexually descriptive situations. These are all sexual immorality and should be off limits. These things have one purpose: to turn someone on. They turn on the illicit buzz within you that says, “My sexuality is preeminent, not Christ. My feelings, my desires are more important. They are number one, not Christ.” Christ repeatedly says throughout Scripture that if something causes you to sin, cut it off, kill it and get rid of it (Matthew 5:28–30; 18:9). Likewise, Paul says, “Put to death sexual immorality” (Colossians 3:5). All of these things must be gotten rid of once and for all.

You can’t reduce these urges to mere feelings. Your sexuality runs deep. We hear that from our broken friends and family members. Even believers who struggle with same-sex attraction say, “This is who I am.” My response is this: You were not created for that. We were not created for sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:13). We must understand that our sexuality runs as deep as anything in our lives. It’s not easy. These feelings that we have, these desires that we have—though they were God-given—allow the work of the devil to corrupt us.

As important as our sexuality is, the Bible says that it should never define you. It should never identify you or consume you. In 1 Corinthians 6:12–13, Paul says:

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

When someone, especially a follower of Jesus Christ, tells you that God made them this way, take them to 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 and say, *“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”* First Corinthians 6:15–20 says:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Follower of Jesus Christ, what rings true about your life today? Is it your sexual desires and wants? What have you allowed to creep into your life? What have you allowed, for the sake of entertainment or feeling good, to corrupt your soul? Paul says that this must die. It is unfitting for a child of God to live like this.

Disregard our old practices

After addressing our proclivity to fulfill our sexual urges outside of the will of God, Paul moves on to our practices. In Colossians 3:8–9 Paul lists them, *“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.”* Paul puts these things into three categories. As we look at these three categories, it is important to make note of the source of these practices. If you are rude to people and speak to them in an ungodly way, the problem with your mouth has nothing to do with your mouth at all. It has everything to do with your heart (Matthew 12:34). The hurtful, painful and sinful things that you say come from a heart of anger and wrath. When you are angry and filled with wrath, things are going to come out of your mouth. You will say:

1. Words that defame others. Malice and slander are things that detract from the reputation and good name of others. We do this with gossip: “Did you hear that so-and-so is doing this or that?” You don’t know if it’s true or not, it just feels good to say. This kind of speech comes from an angry heart because someone else is receiving something you think you deserve. The Pharisees were guilty of this sin. When they saw Jesus, their only desire was to defame Him. They didn’t like that the crowds were following Him. They didn’t like that He was the talk of the town. They didn’t like that people were calling Him the Messiah. They wanted themselves to be preeminent, not Jesus. What did they do? They said that Jesus was doing the works of the devil. Out of jealousy, they defamed Him. We do the same thing. Someone gets a promotion and we defame him or her. Someone is more popular than we are and we defame him or her. Someone has a role or an opportunity that we haven’t received and we defame him or her. We use our words to deliver the blow.

2. Words that defile others. Paul mentions obscene talk. A believer should never be guilty of telling defiling stories. Nor should a believer use language that is unbecoming of a believer. This means that if the world has defined a word as a profanity, we probably shouldn't be using it. I know that some popular pastors have made their name by being "cool" and using bad language. It is immature and unbecoming of the pulpit of Jesus Christ. We need to be careful of this. We need to be careful of the words that come out of our mouths. Paul will say in Colossians 4:6 that the conversations of Christians should always be full of grace, sprinkled with salt. Salt there represents utter purity. Unbelieving people around us shouldn't see us using the same language, talking about the same things. It's not just the four-letter words that I'm talking about. The words that proceed from our mouths should be words that build up and encourage others, not tear them down or beat them up. What does your speech say about you? Does it sound like the world or your Lord? Does it glorify God?
3. Words that defraud others. Paul tells us not to tell lies. God hates lying (Proverbs 6:16-19). It is the endorsed weapon of His enemy, the devil, who is the father of lies (John 8:44). Yet, as believers, we lie for so many reasons. Children lie to their parents to cover wrongdoing. Businessmen and women lie to get a deal. Politicians lie to cover themselves and get elected. We are telling lies for whatever reason in order to cover our tracks and make sure that our preeminence goes unchallenged by our circumstances. We think that we more important. If we have to cover ourselves because we're the most important people in the world, then we will do so. Here's the thing: even as believers we tell lies when we tell someone that we will do something and don't follow through on that commitment. God is a God of truth, honesty and faithfulness in all of His words. This should be true for His children as well. There is a story about a bishop named Warren Candler who was preaching about the lies of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. He asked his congregation in a loud, thundering way, "If God still struck His people dead for lying, where would I be?" Some in the congregation began to laugh until the preacher said, "I'd be right here preaching to an empty church." Ananias and Sapphira lied to God and they died. How many deaths would we have died this week because of the things that came out of our mouths? Aren't you thankful for grace?

Drop our prejudices

At the end of our text, it's easy to ask, "Paul, where are you going with this?" After talking about the need to turn from sin, Paul reminds us that there are no human distinctions: *"Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."* We need to put to death anything within us that thinks there is a human distinction or difference that precludes someone from full fellowship within the church. This is talking about racism, sexism and all of those "isms" that destroy the fabric of our fellowship with one another. Paul says that in Christ all of these things should disappear. In Christ there are no nationalities. We are all strangers in a strange land. In Christ, none of us carry a place that is more special in the heart of God than another. We are all God's chosen ones and beloved (Colossians 3:12). No matter what rituals we've done, there is nothing that separates us. There are no cultural differences, no matter how barbaric some of us may be. There are no social-economic divisions that elevate the rich over the poor in the church.

Paul says that we are all poor and dead and Christ is the One Who made us rich and alive. There is an important thing that we must learn as a church from Colossians 3:11. Village Bible Church can only be built on the Word of Jesus Christ. If we build our church on the Word of Jesus Christ, then we cannot build our fellowship on artificial and sinful measures like: race, color, ethnicity or social standing. All of these go against the heart and Word of God, which tells us that Christ is in all (Colossians 3:11). We must be known as a church with open arms. We must be known as a church that loves. When the people of Sugar Grove and the Fox Valley area hear of Village Bible Church, they should be able to say, "They receive all and love all because of Christ."

Paul says that this catalogue of sins must go. If we're really honest with one another, we know that Paul is right when he says, "All of you used to walk in these ways. Some of you still do." How do we address this issue?

2. Replace them with clean clothes

Get rid of the old, dirty clothes and replace them with clean clothes. In Colossians 3:10, Paul says that we must put on these new garments. Look at the end of Colossians 3:9-10: *"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."* So when we come to Christ, we come with soiled clothing. We are corrupted. We're dirty. We are on the red carpet of the world, wearing these dirty

clothes and we announce to the world, "We're filthy. We're dirty." Here's some solace. You are dirty just like the rest of the world. I'm dirty. You're dirty. We are all dirty. It is easy to judge others and say, "My stains aren't as dirty as yours. My stains are only here and here. They're not on my pants or my shoes. I only have a few stains. They have a lot. Mine aren't as bad. Mine aren't as gross."

Here's the problem. Jesus comes out of the limo on the red carpet and He is brilliantly clad in shining white garments. He's without spot or blemish. The only thing we are reminded of in that moment is not how we compare to one another, but rather how we compare to Jesus. Because Jesus is clean and pure and holy, we can look at our garments and see that any degree of filth is insufficient next to Jesus. We are filthy to the core.

Here is the great gospel: the One Who is righteous, the One Who is clean, the One Who is perfect became filth on our behalf. He took our garments and put them on Himself. He died a sinner's death on the cross. He did that so He could raise us anew with new garments so that we might be as bright and as white as snow. He does this so that we can put on the new self. What does this involve? This involves a:

Conscious decision

Brother and sister in Christ, you must make a decision today. Are you going to wear the filth of sin or will you wear the righteousness of Christ? The idea of putting on and putting off means a decisive decision. You must make a decision. You might be struggling with sin because you've never put a stake in the ground, saying, "I will not live like this any longer. I will not do this because this makes me preeminent, not Christ." You must take off the old things. However, you are powerless to do so. How do you do it? Christ does it for you. Now as Christ has empowered you to be able to do this, you must be willing to change. You must make a conscious decision to take off the old and put on the new. When you got up this morning, you made a decision. I know that you made a decision. You're not wearing your pajamas. You said to yourself, "I will not go out into the world wearing my pajamas; I am going to take off these clothes and put on new clothes because that's what's fitting." The Christian must tell himself or herself every morning, "I need to take off the old clothes and put on the new clothes. If I'm going to have any effect on the world for Christ and His Kingdom, I can't go around wearing the garments of dead people. I must put on life. I must put on Christ."

Continual practice

Colossians 3:10 says that we are being renewed. The idea here is that this change is ongoing. You might say, "I've done this before!" My response is: do it again and again. You will get dirty. Ask for forgiveness. Christ will make you white as snow. Continue this process. You might say, "Why in the world would I go through this process?" Paul promises, "*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6). As you struggle along, Christ promises that when you appear with Him in glory, you will be like Him (1 John 3:2).

So He is teaching you, molding you and making you more like Himself. He is renewing you through knowledge. Knowledge means that you know what your sin is, you recognize it for what it is and you understand that you have a Savior Who deals with sin and has the power to defeat sin if you live in accordance with His Word. So each day you must wake up with a desire to honor God and honor Him in all His ways. Be willing to say "No" to self. When was the last time you told yourself "No" so that you could say "Yes" to Christ? This means that you need to renew your faith each and every day. Do you see your sin the way Christ sees it? Do you acknowledge that His ways are better? That His timing is perfect no matter what your body is telling you? His ways for you and your life—whether it's the words that come out of your mouth or your sexuality or anything else—are best. If you follow Him, He will bless you. It is only then that you will be able to fight off the schemes of the devil.

Commitment to God's plan

God has a purpose. He wants to renew you into the image of your Creator. When God created people, He created them in His image. However, sin and rebellion marred that image. The purpose of salvation is to restore God's image in you. The reason He doesn't immediately take you away to heaven when you ask Christ to be your Savior is because of the purpose of salvation. That purpose allows you to recognize that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). What has God done? He foreknew you. He predestined you. Now He is conforming you to the likeness and image of His Son. God wants to change you each and every day in every way so that you will become more like Jesus. That means that each day when you get up, your goal shouldn't be to take care of yourself, but to knock yourself off of your throne and put Christ there and acknowledge that He is in charge.

3. Action Steps

How do we do this?

- **Sin is serious business; don't play games with it.** Do you play games with cancer? No. You kill it. Colossians 3:6 says, *"On account of these the wrath of God is coming."* God is angry at sin and you should be, too. Whatever sin you are struggling with today, see it as God does: a serious offense against His holiness and something with which you should not play games.
- **Seek the help of other believers; find a partner in your fight with sin.** Do you have someone in the battle with you? In Colossians 3:11, we are reminded that though we are all different, sin affects us all. We need brothers and sisters in our lives to help us in this process. If you are fighting sin alone, you are losing the battle. If no one knows about this sin that you have in your life, you are losing the battle. There is no way that you can fight that battle on your own. You need a band of brothers and sisters to come alongside you. You won't be able to do it alone. You need others around you. So many of you are told by the devil that if you share or speak, people will think that you are weird because you're a sinner. No, we are all sinners. The most unremarkably lame thing that we can say as believers is that we're sinners. That should be understood; of course you do those things. Why would you think anything less? That's why you need a Savior. So find a partner, find someone you trust with whom you can share your heart and say, "Brother, sister, I'm struggling with these things. I need help. I need accountability. I need you to lock arms with me. I don't need you to judge me; I need you to help bear my burdens with me because the sin is wreaking havoc in my life. I need someone to help root out this cancer."
- **See Christ as the best; get passionate about Him.** Some of you are coddling your sin. You're growing in your relationship with sin. You've made your sin preeminent. But Colossians repeatedly states that Christ is preeminent and you need to get passionate about Him. Maybe that means turning off the TV; maybe that means stop reading certain books; maybe that means stop hanging out with certain people because they are affecting your character. Whatever that means, whatever gets you closer to Christ, you need to see Him as the best, not your sin. When Christ is preeminent, when He is number one,

As the song writer says:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

(Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus by Helen H. Lemmel, 1922)

If you're struggling with sin today, the problem isn't that sin is all that glamorous. The problem is that your view of Jesus isn't that glorious. Make Him the best because that's what He is.