

Colossians 3:6–11

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

Sons of Disobedience — What These Things Are

Verse 6 names those upon whom the wrath of God comes for these things as sons of disobedience — Darby's rendering, as in Ephesians 5:6. Children speaks of nature; sons speaks of a matured course. The man has grown up in this path of disobedience — has come to full expression in it. And in verse 7 the apostle reminds the Colossians: *in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them*. They had not merely visited these things occasionally — they had lived in them. The whole horizon of their lives was bounded by them. That was their world. The contrast is now absolute: their position is entirely changed, and the marks of that new position are to be upon them.

The Order — Put Off First, Then Put On

There is an important order in the chapter. Verse 8 is put off; verse 12 is put on. The negative comes before the positive, and this is characteristically the order of God's word. The world prefers the opposite — it does not like to hear the negative, the putting away, the judgment of self. But God's order is repentance before faith, self-judgment before the putting on of grace. Confession means to say the same as God says — to agree with God against oneself. That is where true repentance lies: sitting in judgment on oneself with God's judgment. Only then is one prepared to put on.

The Six Things to Put Off — Returning to Gilgal

Verses 8-9 list six things to put off: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, and lying. Six — one short of seven — the number connected throughout Scripture with man and his falling short. These are distinct in character from the five of verse 5. Those were things of unbridled desire, of the heart's captivity to earthly objects. These are things of the mouth, of the tongue, of malice toward others. James 1:19-20 supplies the context: *let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* The wrath of God works the righteousness of God. The wrath of man never does.

Anger may be more immediate and passing. Wrath is a subtler and more lasting disposition of mind. Malice is harder to detect — it is the ill-will that works inwardly like leaven, as 1 Corinthians 5:8 connects it with the leaven of malice and wickedness. Blasphemy here is not directed against God only — it is injurious, defamatory speech against one's fellows. Filthy communication is foul-mouthed abuse. Lying closes the list — and the reason given is: *seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.* All of these are the deeds of the old man, and the old man has been put off.

The analogy of Gilgal helps here. Israel was circumcised once at Gilgal — not repeatedly, not in the flesh again and again. But they returned to Gilgal after every battle to be in the present good of what was done there once. So these things are to have been put off once, as a completed act — and the returning to Gilgal is the continued maintaining of that character, the present enjoyment of what was settled in the past. There is no need to start them up again in order to stop them again. The aorist tense — have it done with — means they were stopped, and stopped they remain.

Old Man and New Man — Not Old Nature and New Nature

It is important to hold to what Scripture actually says and not substitute another phrase for it. Scripture says old man and new man. It does not say old nature and new nature. The old man is Adam — the first man, the responsible man whose trial was conducted throughout the Old Testament and completed at the cross. The new man is Christ — the second man, the man of God's purpose. We have been taken out from under the headship of the first man and placed under the headship of the second.

This is not the same as saying the old nature has been eradicated. The old nature remains — it cannot be burned out — and every teaching that has claimed otherwise has ended, historically, in moral collapse. What is true is that the old man — our standing in Adam — has been crucified: our old man is crucified with Him (Romans 6:6). That is a positional truth with a corresponding practical demand. The old nature has still to be reckoned with — which is why the mortifying and the putting off are needed. But those commands are given in the light of what is positionally true, not in ignorance of it.

Christ Is All and In All

Verse 11 is the summit of the passage. Having stated that in the new man there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free — four pairs that together cover every human distinction of blood, religion, social status, and economic condition — the verse closes: *but Christ is all, and in all.*

These distinctions remain in the world. They remain to the present day and men invent new ones. But in the new man, in Christ, they are swept away entirely. Not by levelling up or levelling down, but because Christ is everything. When Christ is everything, all those other things by which men define themselves — nation, religion, culture, class — are displaced from the centre. And He is *in* all — in all who have put on the new man. Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27). It is not merely that He is the standard, the ideal, the goal — He is in each one who has been brought into the new creation. That is the simplification of the Christian's life: not a complicated system of distinctions, but Christ as everything.

— *Study ends* —