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Sermon Notes

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Defeating the Enemy Within

Colossians 3:5-8

Malaria: Summer of 1986, mission trip to Kenya: girl dying of malaria... cyclical fever, anemia, ever-increasing weakness

Scanning electron microscope photos of the disgusting malaria parasite in the National Geographic article that summer made me aware of the nastiness of this disease... to have an enemy living within your own blood stream, destroying your red blood cells one at a time, leaving you anemic, increasingly weak, with cyclical fevers, and possibly death.

I have since learned more about this repulsive little creature, this living parasite

The malaria parasites, *Plasmodium falciparum* and its three relatives, have dodged the human immune system for centuries. The disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and kills more than a million people every year. It is a sneaky enemy of the body...

Researchers have discovered that, after infecting the liver, the parasite wraps itself in dead liver cells to cloak and transport itself back into the bloodstream, where it can do further harm... this keeps the body's immune system from recognizing it and attacking it

The scheme is reminiscent of those ancient Greeks who hid in the hollow Trojan horse to sneak into Troy....

This clever enemy actually lives within the bloodstream of its victims, destroying them from within. It is a remarkable picture of indwelling sin:

Romans 7:15-17 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

YUCK... "sin living in me"

How do you picture that? Some disgusting, green, rapidly multiplying parasite that has no business living within you?

Paul went on to say:

Romans 7:21-25 When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the

members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

As we come to this passage in Colossians 3, we come to the bitterest fight any of us will ever face

The constant fight against indwelling sin... sin residing in the members of our body

Paul is arguing that without putting sin to death, we cannot be happy, fruitful, healthy Christians

Context: Steps for a happy, healthy, fruitful Christian life...

Heavenly mindset

Battling indwelling sin

Walking together in the “New Self” in a “New Community”

Saturating Your Heart with Christ

- The Peace of Christ Ruling Our Hearts
- The Word of Christ Richly Dwelling in Our Hearts
- The Name of Christ Motivating Our Hearts
- Thanks to Christ Constantly Given by Our Hearts

I. Heavenly Mindset (vs. 1-4)

- A. Present Duty: Seek and Think HEAVEN
- B. Our Past: We Died and Were Raised with Christ
- C. Our Present: Christ is Our Life, and He is in Heaven
- D. Our Future: Christ Will Appear, and We With Him in Glory

II. Vigorous Warfare Against Sin (vs. 5-9)

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

A. Steely-Eyed Killers of Sin

Paul commands that we should be sin’s executioner, like the grim medieval men with the curved axe and the black hood, ready to cut sin’s head off at the block... we should be sin’s

assassin, as though we have been given the cold-blooded task of hunting down sin, sighting it in the cross-hairs of a high-powered rifle and pulling the trigger; we should be arraying an army of resources against sin as though we were the commanding general in charge of Allied forces crushing the life out of Nazi Germany... advancing on all fronts until the enemy surrenders unconditionally

WE MUST PUT SIN TO DEATH... WE MUST NOT SPARE IT... WE MUST NOT SHOW IT MERCY... WE MUST NOT CODDLE IT

WE MUST KILL IT

John Owen in his classic on the Mortification (killing) of sin:

“Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”

Richard Baxter: “Deal with sin as it would deal with you; spare it not, for it will not spare you; it is your murderer, and the murderer of the world: deal with it, therefore, as a murderer should be dealt with. Kill it before it kills you; and though it bring you to the grave, as it did Christ, your Head, it shall not be able to keep you there.”

B. Happiness and Fruitfulness Impossible without Warfare

1. Colossians 3: Steps to a fruitful, healthy, happy Christian life
2. Happiness impossible without active warfare against sin
3. Progress in Christlikeness and holiness impossible without warfare

John Owen: Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in his way takes no steps towards his journey's end

Imagine a trail of dead enemies behind you like Samson... this you must do to make progress in holiness... dead sins

4. We are not living in a peaceful country... we are living in a war zone

Owen: “When sin leaves us alone, we can leave sin alone.”

“The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.”

C. Understanding the Enemy Outside the Walls

1. Satan: clever, relentless, vicious, way out of our league
 - a. Likened to a prowling lion, hunting his prey
 - b. Compared to an angel of light, masquerading as something beautiful

- c. Proudful, tricky, crafting schemes
 - d. Organized, a king of a dark realm... powers, principalities under him
2. The World: Satan's masterpiece of temptation and deception
- a. As Relentless in its pull as gravity
 - b. As Deceptive in its appeal as Satan, the angel of light
 - c. Enticing us toward ruin
 - i) Lust toward sexual pleasures
 - ii) Greed toward material possessions
 - iii) Ambition toward powerful positions
 - iv) Gluttony toward appetite pleasures
- D. Understanding the Body... and the Enemy Within the Walls
1. Physical body: Created in the image of God... originally called "very good"
 - a. No biological functions are in and of themselves evil
 - b. Colossians heresy denied AGAIN: they taught the body was evil and so were all of its drives
 - c. Christ appeared in a physical body
 2. BUT a Christian's body is mixed and mingled with indwelling sin... which Christ never had
 3. Our bodies have a HISTORY with sin

^{ESV} Colossians 3:7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

"In these you also walked" = in sexual immorality, lust, evil desires, greed, lying, anger, etc.

Romans 7:5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

Romans 6:19 you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness

4. Now sin, trained through years of habit, has taken root in the members of our body

Romans 7:23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

- a. Primarily in the brain
 - b. BUT also in the way the brain responds to natural fleshly drives
5. Thus does Paul call this body a “body of sin” and a “body of death”

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

6. Thus does Paul command Christians to put to death our earthly members
- a. Not literally cutting off parts of the body
 - b. BUT cutting off the way the body’s drives tempt us to sin
7. Constant vigilance required

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

E. Understanding Salvation

- a. Justification: imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness to our account by faith; declaration by God the Judge that we are righteous in His sight, not guilty
 - b. Sanctification: gradual growth into Christlikeness through the combined efforts of the Holy Spirit and the believer
 - c. Glorification: instantaneous perfection of the Christian at death and at the resurrection... we are made perfect in soul and in body, just like Christ
2. The essence of sanctification: WARFARE... the mortification of sin

John Owen... noted the combination of Romans 8:1 with Romans 8:13

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live

The first verse teaches that all Christians are perfectly free from eternal condemnation for sin

The second teaches that all Christian must put sin to death by the power of the Spirit

EVERY DAY, THE HOLY SPIRIT DRESSES US AND LEADS US INTO BATTLE

F. Understanding Our Universal Duty to Kill Sin

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

1. This is a COMMAND from Christ through the Apostle Paul... we must be about the business constantly of putting sin to death
2. No Christian is exempt AND No sin pattern is exempt
3. No Christian has “arrived” and no longer needs to fight AND God will never come to grips with or accept any sin in us

Owen: “The choicest believers, who are assuredly free from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.”

III. Naming the Battlefields

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

A. Studying the Enemy’s Tactics and Objectives

In the 6th century B.C., Chinese military expert Sun Tzu wrote a book entitled *The Art of War*

Key principle: Know Your Enemy! AND Know Yourself!

If you know both yourself and your enemy, you will come out of one hundred battles with one hundred victories

1. Puritan writer, Thomas Brooks: *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*

Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here, nor happy hereafter. It is my work as a Christian, but much more as I am a Watchman, to do my best to discover . . . the fullness of Christ, the emptiness of the creature, and the snares of the great deceiver.

2. So... what does Satan use to trip us up? What shall we call the major battlefields of the enemy? And what is sin’s ultimate goal?

John Owen: “Sin always aims at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if allowed to have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism... It is like the grave, that is never satisfied. And herein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin.”

Satan’s ultimate goal: to ruin your soul and your fruitfulness

3. Two major categories herein Colossians: Sins of Perverted Love; Sins of Broken Relationships

B. Sins of Perverted Love

By this I mean the way Satan uses the affection, desires, drives of the human heart against us

We were born to love, born to yearn, born to desire... Satan perverts these into lust and greed

Paul goes backward, step by step, from the fruit to the root

1. Immorality: porneia... sexual sin; we are specifically commanded to flee this in 1 Corinthians 6:18; basic use of the word is either fornication (sexual relations between two unmarried people) or prostitution... more widely, the word could include any kind of sexual sin including adultery

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Sexual relations is a great chink in the armor of our souls... a tremendous weakness; and Satan directs much of his attention there

1453: Constantinople was besieged by Ottoman Turks; Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and it lasted almost 1000 years after Rome fell; it survived one attack after another from Muslims over eight centuries mostly because of its awesome walls. It had a triple wall system that was impervious to any attack... that is, until the advent of GUNPOWDER

The Ottomans hired a skilled founder who made huge siege guns, the largest of which weighed 19 tons and could fire an 800 pound ball over one mile... it could only fire 3 shots a day, but it pounded the walls of the ancient city until several breaches were opened in the wall... those breaches became the focus of the Ottoman attack... at the height of the battle, however, the Turks noticed that a single gate in the massive city walls, the Kerkoport, had been left open... Turkish troops flooded in through the open gate, and soon the city fell

So it is with human sexuality... a constant assault on our eyes, our minds... it is a gate left open for the enemy to rush in and fill our souls with sin

2. Impurity: back one step to “uncleanness”... evil thoughts and intentions of the mind; a defiled mind

Matthew 5:28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Image is one of a filthy, disgusting pipe in which pure water becomes fouled

God desires our minds and our bodies to be pure... clean, free from defilement

3. Passion: lust

- a. Likened to heat... the fire that ignites and burns out of control

Hosea 7:4-7 They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises. ⁵ On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers. ⁶ Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. ⁷ All of them are hot as an oven

- b. The root of irrational, life-destroying sexual sin is LUST... passion, desire

4. Evil Desire: God created us to desire, to yearn... sin has its roots in evil desire

- 5. Greed, which is idolatry: back at last to the root: all sin is a form of idolatry... ultimately of putting our own desires and discontent above the provision of God; Greek: "desire for more"

Greed in its simple form is usually associated with material possessions

American Corporate slogans: "Who would you step on to get ahead?", "Get rich or die trying.", "Nothing personal it's just business.", "He who has the most toys wins."

Reading recently about Tom Perkins, venture capitalist, helped make Silicon Valley in California what it is today: \$135 million sailboat, Maltese Falcon... "Mine's Bigger"... the lust for more, more, more

Clearly, Paul is saying the battle is in the HEART... in the MIND, not finally in the actions of the body

But even sexual sin has its root in greed which is idolatry... King David wasn't satisfied with all that God had given him... he saw another man's wife and wanted her too!

William Barclay: "Greed is a sin with a very wide range

C. Sins of Broken Relationships

Colossians 3:8-9 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

1. These sins are all sins of hatred toward others
 - a. Commanded to “put aside” or “rid yourselves” of these... like taking off a filthy, stinking, soiled garment and never wearing it again
2. Anger, rage, malice all have to do with heart attitudes toward other people... from flashing outbursts to cold, settled malice... all of it is evil
3. Slander is a strong word in the Greek, related to blasphemy, and it has to do with speaking against the reputation of another human being
4. Filthy language: foul speech, bad language coming from a defiled heart
5. Lying: the Bible is filled with lying... from Cain’s lie about Abel, through Abraham’s lie about Sarah being his sister, to Isaac’s similar lie about Rebekah, to Jacob’s lie when he stole Esau’s blessing, to Jacob’s sons lying to him about Joseph... and that doesn’t even get us out of Genesis... **GOD CANNOT LIE**

These are the specific battlefields mentioned here: sins of perverted love, sins of broken relationships

IV. What Is at Stake

Colossians 3:6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

A. Terrifying Warning

1. The wrath of God is God’s passionate reaction to sin
2. God is not like the Greek philosophers... some passionless thinking machine
3. Rather, God passionately loves and rewards... but He also passionately hates and punishes

God’s wrath is REASONABLE... its BECAUSE of these things that God’s wrath is coming

4. There is a coming wrath that will dwarf any display of wrath in history
 - a. Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven
 - b. Jerusalem, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s armies
 - c. Hugest of all: the entire ancient world destroyed by a flood

5. None of these will even compare with the wrath to come

B. Depicted Clearly in the Book of Revelation

1. Dreadful judgments on the earth

- a. Seven seals... Seven trumpets... seven bowls
- b. Leaves the earth a smoldering ruin, billions of people dead, every living thing in the sea dead... all water turned into blood, the stars fallen from the sky and the elements in the earth melted in the heat
- c. But that's NOTHING compared to hell...

2. Eternal judgment in hell

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 14:10-11 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

C. Christ's Death Only Shelter from the Wrath of God

1. Cuban Missile crisis, Cold War Era: Shelters from Nuclear Attack, common people built in their own backyards... COMICALLY INADEQUATE
2. Thermonuclear warheads so powerful, these pathetic little shelters would never have survived... so it is with human efforts to protect ourselves from the wrath of God
3. At the cross, God poured out His wrath on Christ... He drank the wrath of God and provided the only true shelter from the coming wrath

1 Thessalonians 1:10 Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

V. Practical Guidelines for Killing Sin

A. Come to Christ

1. Lost people have NO BUSINESS in this fight!!
2. You will misunderstand salvation if you try to fight indwelling sins without first having trusted in Christ as Savior
3. You will be led into justification by works which God has forever rejected!!

B. Determine to Fight this Vicious Battle Every Day

Owen: "There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed upon; and it will be whilst we live in this world."

BEGIN THE FIGHT!!!

C. Rely on the Holy Spirit, Not on Fleshly Means

1. Romans 8:13
2. Colossians 2:
3. Extreme asceticism, harsh treatment of the body is ineffective
4. Understand that all human efforts merely make mortification possible
 - a. Prepare for the battle... but the battle occurs at the moment of temptation
 - b. The battle is the Lord's... Christ alone has power to kill sin

D. Be Cross-Centered

1. The cross has power to make the world look as spiritually dead as it really is
2. Christ on the cross has power to kill lust within us
3. Christ's blood shed on the cross has permanent sin-killing power
4. Be much in meditation of Christ's death on the cross and sin will shrivel and the world will seem dead to us

E. Understand What Mortification Is Not and What It Is

1. it is NOT
 - a. NOT to kill a particular sin completely, for that it impossible in this life

- b. NOT to allow sin to conceal itself and then appear in a different guise
- c. NOT to develop a quiet, thoughtful, peace-loving nature
- d. NOT to divert particularly troubling sins so they are not so prevalent
- e. NOT to conquer certain sins occasionally

2. It is

- a. A habitual weakening of sin's root, as how a victim dies on the cross... gradually, slowly losing power
- b. A constant fighting and contending against all indwelling sin with no respite... both attack and defense... attack, by doing what most frustrates sin; defend by preparing for sin's sudden lunges at us
- c. Consistent success over sin, winning again and again in the moments of temptation, seeing progress in mortification

F. Resolve to Fight Sin on All Fronts

1. James 2:10

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

- 2. Learn to hate sin, all sin, any sin, sin itself, as the vile virus of evil that it is
- 3. Learn to see sin in the light of the glory of God and what an affront it is to Him
- 4. God doesn't like some sins better than others
- 5. God's work consists in UNIVERSAL OBEDIENCE...

G. Study the Lusts That Are Attacking You

When is a sin habit particularly dangerous??

- 1. If a sin habit has been in the soul a long time so that you scarcely even notice it or make frequent allowances for it
- 2. If your heart speaks peace to your soul despite the open presence of this sin habit
- 3. If the sin frequently triumphs over you... so that your affections are tied up in the sin, disappointed if you can't pursue the sin, secretly hoping for opportunities to pursue it

4. If the sin's danger rather than love of God is the prime restraint (in other words, if you could get away with it without suffering any consequences, would you do it gladly)
 - a. Such a person casts off renewing grace and is now relying on restraining grace
 - b. Like a high-wire acrobat who frequently falls and needs the net again and again
 - c. So are Christians who rely on God to bail them out again and again, rather than growing in love of Christ so that we stop falling
5. If God has hardened our hearts in reference to this sin so that we scarcely feel any conviction in the matter
6. If the sin has already withstood disciplines from God and still it remains strong
7. IF YOU SEE THESE THINGS, BE AFRAID... BE VERY AFRAID... and fall before God and beg Him for freedom in this area
8. Study also what the sin has done to defeat you
 - a. If you are prone to complaining, study an occasion of complaining and find out what led you to do it
 - b. If you are prone to arguing with your spouse, find out what led to it that particular time
 - c. If you are prone to sexual lust, and give in to temptation through the eyes, find out what Satan did to ensnare you this time
 - d. If you are prone to unforgiveness, see what the sin has done in your heart to harden you against that person

H. Labor on Your Heart

1. Increase a sense of the shame you will feel on judgment day in giving Christ an account
2. Increase a sense of the vileness of sin, of its sheer ugliness... see it in light of eternity
3. Get a constant longing and breathing after freedom from this sin... yearn for freedom, sigh after it, cry out to God for it

I. Crush Sin Early in the Battle

1. Fight hard against the first risings of temptation in your heart

“Rise mightily against *the first actings* of thy distemper, its first conceptions; suffer it not to get the least ground ... it is impossible to fix bounds for sin.”

German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel early in 1944 concerning the German defense of the impending cross-channel invasion by the Allies: “The war will be won or lost on the beaches,” he said. He went on to say that, once the Allies got a beachhead established in Normandy, they would break out and sweep across France, and the war would be lost. “The first twenty-four hours will be critical. For both the Allies and us, it will be the longest day.” So it is, says Owen, with the battle against sin. Once sin establishes a beachhead in your life, it presses on to conquer all. For the Christian battling sin, “the longest day” never ends until death brings him to heaven.

J. Deal Thoroughly with Sin in Confession and Repentance

1. When the Spirit convicts you of sin, do you feel the pain and deal with the cause or do you block it with pain-killers?
2. Don’t be too quick in confession... pause... hear the Spirit speaking His grief into your spiritual ears

K. Be Filled with the Spirit and All of His Graces

1. The Spirit fights sin mostly by making righteousness and holiness so beautifully attractive
2. The fruit of the Spirit flow from a heart FILLED with the Spirit
3. Be filled with the Spirit and sin will appear to be the repulsive thing it is

L. Be Optimistic in Christ

John Owen: Christ’s blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin sick souls. Live in this and you will die a conqueror; yes, you will, through the good providence of God live to see your lust dead at your feet!