

Wanted: Not Dead but Alive

Alan Every October 18th, 2015

Someone wrote an article entitled, “*How to Be Miserable.*” It read: “Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use ‘I’ as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to insults. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk when people are not grateful to you for favours shown to them. Never forget a service you have rendered. Avoid your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others.” Those words are not Christian. But they do reflect much of what people believe these days.

We live in a ‘me first’ society. Since the middle of the 20th century, the focus of life has largely been on us rather than on others. We’re self-centred. Now that’s a sweeping statement and you may like to disagree. Yet it’s summed up in two popular song titles, ‘*What about Me?*’ and ‘*I did it my way*’.

Another summary of our self-centredness is the ‘selfie’. Remember the selfie, that picture you take of yourself? 93 million selfies are taken every day. Australians are the world’s most prolific takers of selfies. Furthermore, Samsung reports that 36% of people will alter their selfie. I guess that they do that to make themselves look better. Clearly, some people are very busy taking them. Perhaps you and I don’t take many. So, some people will be very busy.

Am I exaggerating when I speak about our self-centredness? Well, these days the focus is on what we need to do (or have) in order to be satisfied, valued and appreciated. Sadly, some people find satisfaction in their possessions. Some find it through having power. They *must* be the one whom others look up to. “Do it my way” they cry. Others find fulfilment in sport or business. And, if the truth is known, we can feed other people’s egos by giving them hero-worship.

Is there an antidote to this viral self-centredness? Yes there is. The antidote, the answer to being self-centred is to be Christ-centred. And so I’m glad to see the titles of many recent Christian books: *Christ-centred Preaching*; *Christ-centred Counselling* and *Christ-centred Worship*. There’s even a website, *Christ-centred Gamer*.

In Colossians 3:1-11, the Apostle Paul applies the gospel cure in this way: Focus on Christ (3:1-4), and take off the old (sinful) humanity and put on the new (3:5-11). We’ve previously considered 3:1-4. So, our focus will move on to 3:5-11. First, put to death sinful behaviour. Second, rid yourself of sinful speech. And third, do not lie to one another. (Sadly, today, we’ll only have time for 3:5-8.)

Why can Paul give these commands? Well, in 3:1-4 Paul tells Christians who we are in the sight of God. ***Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

Colossians is filled with pictures of our new relationship with God. Here are a few more verses: 2:13a, ***When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...*** 2:20, ***Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...?*** And 3:3, ***For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*** These are amazing words of grace from our God.

Do you get the picture? Can you understand what it means to be a Christian? You have died with Christ ***having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*** (Colossians 2:12) Christian friends, your life is not your own. You’re not free to sin. But, you are free to live for Christ. And that’s real freedom. Before you received Christ, you were a slave to sin. You could not save yourself. For, salvation is God’s work, not yours. But now, you’re free to live for God’s glory, not yours.

I cannot stress that enough. We contribute nothing towards a right relationship with God. Listen to Ephesians 2:8, 9, ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*** Yet we struggle with this. We want to

contribute our good deeds to our relationship with God. Yet, that's the beauty of the Christian faith. It's all of God's mercy and grace. It's not what you and I have done for God. Instead, it's what God has done for us.

Now, in a new and right relationship with God we want to live for Him. And there's even greater motivation for us to do so. Listen again to 3:4, ***When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*** Christ will come again. When? We do not know. But we're to be ready for that great day.

Well then, how does Christ's return motivate us? Christian, it's not the fear of punishment. 3:6 does speak of God's wrath: ***the wrath of God is coming.*** But Christ has borne God's wrath on the cross. Ephesians 2:3b-5, ***Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***

Here is the glory of the gospel. Outside of Christ we're dead, dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Now, united to Christ by faith we're made alive and seated with Him in the heavenly places. And we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Our desire, our motivation in godly Christian living is to please God and obey Him. And we live that way in order that we might become more like our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 3:5-10 the Apostle Paul writes to all who have been converted. He doesn't expect that we'll have practiced all of these sins. But he knows that some of us have committed them in the past. And he knows that we're tempted by those sins we wish to leave behind. And so Paul wants to root out all sin, for the sake of Christ and with the knowledge that Christ will return for us.

God's word in Colossians guides us. 3:5, ***Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*** As one commentator notes, this means shifting your personality from self to Christ.

With the word ***death***, Paul uses very strong language. It's a word (in the original language) that gives us the English word *necropolis*. (A necropolis is a tomb, a 'city of the dead'.) It's also used (in English) to speak of *necrotizing* bacteria. They're also called 'flesh-eating bacteria'. And so we speak of *necrosis*, dead flesh.

Those English words vividly describe what Paul has in mind. He's not just giving us good advice. He's saying that we must kill the desires of the sinful nature. Yes. It's something we must do. But not to be saved! Not to get right with God! Instead, we do them in response to what God has done for us. United to Christ by faith, you and I have died to sin. Now, we must live out what we are in Christ.

The first four items in this list (***sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires***) are directly related to sexual sins. Here, ***sexual immorality*** ranges in meaning to include pornography, unmarried couples living together, adultery, prostitution and same sex unions. And that's just what people don't want to hear. Among the vocal minority there's a push for gay marriage. Well, God's Word doesn't approve of that. No matter how you might twist the biblical language, all forms of sexual immorality are against the word of God.

Before you accuse me of homophobia, note two things. One, I'm not afraid of gay people, for that's what homophobia means. Secondly, if we really love gay people then we'll point out that their behaviour is contrary to God's word. Now, that's hard for them, I'm sure. But far worse is an eternity separated from God. For, we read in Romans 1:32, ***those who do such things deserve death.***

The next words, ***impurity, lust, evil desires***, are also related to sexual sins. ***Evil desires***, however may refer to sinful desires in general. Even so, we've largely covered their meaning. And the final word in this first list, ***greed***, refers to 'covetousness'. As such, it covers the first four words in this list.

Greed also points us back in time to the Ten Commandments. We read in Exodus 20:7, ***You shall not covet...*** That commandment serves as a summary of the preceding nine commandments in Exodus

20. In the same way, the words '*which is idolatry*' can also refer to the list of sins here in Colossians 3:5. So, as Christians we're to avoid these sexual sins because they're the result of covetousness. And covetousness is a refusal to submit to the lordship of Christ.

Idolatry is idol worship. Anything that comes between God and you (or between God and me) is an idol. *And we will worship it.* So, here is the gospel corrective to sinful behaviour. Put it all to death.

But, you might say, 'I don't want to believe that. It's not fair! I refuse to see how these commands are part of the gospel'. St. Augustine put it well for us, **If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don't like, it's not the gospel you believe but yourself.**

Christian, you cannot choose to accept some parts of the Bible and reject others. God's word is our rule of faith and life. We stand under its authority, not over it. And that's because it is God's word to us. The Bible is to be our rule of faith and life. You and I cannot choose which parts of the Bible we like and which parts we don't like.

Consider once more Colossians 3:6. ***Because of these*** (the sins of 3:5), ***the wrath of God is coming.*** Many people don't like God's anger against sin. They argue, 'If God is a God of love, then He must accept us as we are.' Rubbish! Listen to Romans 2:7, 8, ***To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*** Romans 2 and Colossians 3 point us to the return of Christ. He alone can save us on that great and terrible day.

We find this again in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10, ***They*** (other believers) ***tell how you*** (Christians) ***turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*** It's the Lord Jesus who saves us from God's wrath.

But Paul hasn't finished with us yet. He has more sinful behaviour to address. 3:8, ***But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.*** Note once more that this is a biblical command. If you call yourself a Christian then this is not an optional extra. It's something that you and I must do.

The list in 3:5 referred to sensual desires. Now, 3:8 speaks of what comes out of our mouth. Again, these words stand against so much of life in our community today. Many books and movies are straight out pornography. And filthy language and blasphemy (using the Lord's name as a swear word) is far too common. The spoken language of the radio today is not much better.

Anger and ***rage*** overlap in meaning. Rage, however, is more of a strong outburst of passion. Anger is like a volcano, hot with massive pressure building up inside. Rage is more like the volcano erupting. It destroys life around it, just as Mt. St. Helen's did when it exploded in 1980.

Yes, there are times when we get angry. But, we read in Ephesians 4:26, ***In your anger do not sin.*** And again, in Ephesians 4:32, ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*** Paul writes in Colossians 3:13, ***Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.***

These are big issues for us this morning. Sexual sin is so important that the Bible speaks much about it. But this vice list here in 3:8 is equally important. And, it's most important for us in the church. We're all challenged to rid ourselves of evil, harsh words.

Anger, malice and slander destroy Christ's church. And it's the last word, slander that accuses us before God today. It's so easy to slander other people with what we say about them. And we slander them when we judge them without trying to understand them. And what's worse, we do it without first loving them. What do we learn when we hear someone slandering another? What we learn most is the bitterness of heart in the person who makes the accusation.

How can we avoid slandering other people? Colossians 3:8 tells us to get rid of such words and thoughts. In Philippians 2:3 we have another antidote. ***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.***

Why do we hold grudges and bear anger against other people? Why do we slander others? The answer is simple: Sin. In our sin we consider that we're better than other people. We're the ones who are worthy of praise. But that's not God's way. It's not the way of a Christian. And it's certainly not the way of God's church.

To use the Apostle Paul's words, put these evil sinful desires to death. Get rid of all unwholesome talk. He sums it up well for us in Colossians 3:17, ***And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***

If your life and mine is centred on Christ then our greatest desire is to honour Him in the way that we live. Kevin DeYoung asks: **What must we leave behind if we are to follow Christ?** The simplest answer is: Leave behind idolatry. That's the first of the Ten Commandments—***"You shall have no other gods before me."*** (Exodus 20:3) There are all sorts of gods: education, sport, sex, marriage, power, beauty, achievement. Whatever you give your whole life to, is your idol.

Consider **If only I had _____ then I would be happy.**

If only I had _____ I'd be worth something.

If only I had _____ I could truly live a fulfilled life. How did you fill in the blanks?

That's what you live for. It's what you worship. It may even be marriage, or your dream job, or to be better parents, better kids, or to be a better influence. Many of these are good, but they're not meant to be gods. Actually, there's one word that best fills in the blanks: **Christ.**

We become just like what we worship. You've been made in the image of God. But, when you worship some thing or some person other than Him, you're an idol worshipper. You exchange the image of God for what you worship. And ultimately you worship yourself. It's your needs, your desires, your satisfaction that you seek. For you define yourself in terms of what you worship.

The Bible challenges us, doesn't it? Maybe there's someone here this morning whose life is reflected in the sins spoken about in Colossians 3. If that's you, then you're not condemned to continue in sin. You're not without hope. Your hope is Christ. It's in a personal relationship with Him. And you can find real life through repentance and faith. In other words, admit that you're a sinner in need of Him. Then place your faith in His death and resurrection for you.

Christ has paid the price for your sin, on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24, ***He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*** Here is the beauty of the gospel. The Lord Jesus suffered the full force of God's wrath for you and me on the cross. United to Him we're free from that wrath to love and serve Him.

Calvin Coolidge was known as the silent president of the US. He didn't say much. One day his wife asked him what the minister's sermon at church was about. He replied, 'Sin'. 'Well,' urged Mrs. Coolidge, 'what did he say about it?' 'He was against it,' said the President. You and I do well when we feel the say way.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that there is a cure, an antidote for self-centredness: Christ. And so we must conclude this morning with the Apostle Paul's words to us in Colossians 3:1-4, ***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. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

What a glorious God we serve! What a glorious gospel God has given us! What a glorious Saviour we have! What a glorious future we have in Him! For, in Christ we're no longer dead, but truly alive. Amen

