

The Negative And The Positive Side Of The Christian Life.

Text: Col 3:9-10

1) The Negative Side of the Christian Life

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Positive Side of a Christian Life

371, 494ALHB, 336, 377, 347

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Colossians 3:9–10, ⁹ *Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,* ¹⁰ *and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

At a meeting of the International Congress of Psychology some years ago one of the speakers reported on a psychological test that was held among a group of several thousand children to find out how far the knowledge of the Bible influenced their character.

The result of this test indicated that mere knowledge of the Bible does not influence the character of the children. Some of the children who rated very high in their knowledge of Bible-stories stood at the bottom of the ladder when it came to honesty and truthfulness, while other children who knew very little about Bible-stories were nevertheless honest and upright. The conclusion was made that religious training does not influence character nearly as much as is commonly believed.

This is a faulty conclusion. There is a great difference between the knowledge of the Bible and Christian training. We read in James 2:19, ¹⁹ *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!* The fact that the demons and the devil know there is a God does not make angels of them. Unless your Bible knowledge develops into faith and love and devotion, it is of little practical value for your life.

If we want to evaluate correctly our knowledge of spiritual things, we must test its influence through faith upon our life. For this reason we find in Scripture so many admonitions to flee from sin and to lead a godly life.

In our text St. Paul reminds the Christians at Colosse that they have put off the old man of sin and have put on the new man, renewed in knowledge after the likeness of God who created them.

St. Paul in these words presents — *The Negative and the Positive Side of the Christian Life*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Negative Side Of The Christian Life.

If we want to live a Christian life, we must get rid of some things. What are these things? St. Paul calls them *“the old man with his deeds.”* If we look at *“the deeds”* of the *“old man,”* it will not be difficult for us to see why St. Paul speaks of the *“old man”* that is in us.

Shortly before our text he says^{1 5} *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, [and] filthy language out of your mouth.

The activities of the *“old man”* are recorded in the catalogue of sin. We find many similar passages in the letters of St. Paul. Turning to his Letter to the Ephesians, we read in Ephesians 4:25–31, ²⁵ *Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”* ²⁶ *“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer ... 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth ... 30 ... do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you*

And in his Letter to the Galatians we read in Galatians 5:19–21, ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness,*

revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Where do we find the origin of all these evil things in man? Was man always so? We hear Jesus say that *“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,”* and then He lists the same catalogue of sin which we find in St. Paul’s letters. We read in Matthew 15:19, *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

We read the verdict of God in Genesis 8:21, *the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.* How did this come about? St. Paul gives us the key to this mystery in his Letter to the Romans, saying in Romans 5:12, *“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men.”*

Sin, then, was not always present in the world. Sin entered into the world. It entered into the world by one man. That one man was Adam. He was created in the image of God, holy and sinless. But he sinned. His sinning was not an isolated act of disobedience. His sinning consisted in his turning away from God. He was now a changed man. He was no longer pure and holy. He was now thoroughly sinful. The result of his sinning is seen immediately in his descendants.

In the second generation of mankind already we find one who kills his brother. And so the process goes on and on. Being descendants of a common ancestry, we all have the same sinful nature.

And now, after we have seen the activities of the *“old man”* and having traced it all the way back to its origin, it is not difficult to see why St. Paul calls sin within us the *“old man.”* Sometimes we call it the old Adam. He is making reference to the fact that this sinful nature which we shall put off has come down to us from Adam, the man through whom sin was brought into the world.

We Christians are to *“put off”* this old man, says the apostle. He likens the old man to a garment. As we put off dirty clothes, so we should get rid of the dirt and filth of sin in our hearts and in our lives. This is not an easy process. On the contrary, it is very painful and often very difficult.

St. Paul says we are to crucify the sin within us. Death by crucifixion was not a sudden, quick, painless death, but it was a gradual torturous method of putting away the evildoer and criminal. And so it is a slow, painful, torturous process to get rid of sin. Luther says in his Catechism that the old Adam in us should be killed and drowned by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we resist and overcome evil desires.² Day by day this process must go on.

The method of getting rid of sin is contrition and repentance. Contrition, sorrow over your sin. And repentance, the turning away from your sin. As day by day you observe and examine your life and see in it so many things that ought not to be, remember that sin cuts you off from God. Those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Remember that sin was the cause of your Saviour's suffering and death. Remember that Jesus paid a price for you, His own life, in order that you might no longer be a slave of sin. Remember the love of God which gave you the Saviour, so that you may again become a child of God.

And in so meditating upon sin and its bitter consequences, and upon the mercy of God and its blessings, you will be filled with sorrow over your sin, turn away from sin, and with the help of God mortify the sin which is within you.

2. The Positive Side Of A Christian Life.

The Christian life has also a positive side. The Christian life is not like a blank page. It is the record of the activities of the "*new man*." St. Paul puts it this way in our text, "*put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*." Here St. Paul is referring to the image of God in which man was created originally. The image of God shall be restored in us.

What is the image of God? Much has been said and written about the image of God. If we want know what the image of God is, we must know who God is. The seraphim surrounding the throne of God sang "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!*"³ The outstanding characteristic of God which shall be renewed in us is that sin has no room with Him.

When some of the angels sinned, they were put away from the presence of God. When man sinned, he was driven out of the Garden of Eden. When Moses

sinned, he was not permitted to finish his task which had been assigned to him. He did not cross the Jordan to enter the promised land.

When Saul sinned, he could no longer remain in the service of God. God is holy. And in this image of God man was created. Man was holy. He was clean and pure. This is the image of God which shall be restored in us. We shall again be as man was originally when he came forth from the hands of his Maker.

In *Luther's Small Catechism* the image of God is explained in Question 106, *What is the image of God?* The image of God was this: Adam and Eve truly knew God as He wishes to be known and were perfectly happy in Him. They were righteous and holy, doing God's will.

In other words Adam and Eve knew God and were perfectly happy in such knowledge. They were perfectly holy and blessed.⁴

The image of God was not a physical, but a spiritual likeness. It did not consist in this that man, as distinguished from the animals, had a rational soul, but rather in the conformity of man's spiritual nature with God.

Man knew God, His will, and His works, which knowledge he did not acquire by much study and observation, but which he possessed by nature, and which filled his heart with supreme joy and happiness

The heart and will of man was not, as it now is, at variance with the will of God, but in full harmony with it. It was natural for man to will and to do those things which he knew were pleasing to God. Thus his life was perfectly righteous and holy.

In the beginning man was not a savage, which by a process of evolution gradually became civilised, cultured, and refined, and who is still advancing towards higher levels of knowledge and righteousness.

Rather, there was a decided change for the worse when man fell into sin, and never again in this earthly life will he ever attain that state of perfection which Adam and Eve possessed when they were still clothed with the image of God.

Because of this image of God man is also immortal. We have a beginning but no end. We are alive for all eternity.

The restored image of God must show itself in our daily lives. St. Paul says in connection with our text, ¹² *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,*

put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.⁵

In his Letter to the Galatians we find this catalogue of Christian virtues recorded in Galatians 5:22–23, *²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.*

Again St. Paul calls attention to the fact that this process of sanctification is a slow and a gradual process. We must not imagine that overnight we can become perfect in our Christian lives. We must not believe that in a Christian's life there is never anything which ought not to be.

Be *renewed* says the apostle. He uses the present tense, and that has the force of a constant activity. You are not renewed once for all and then come out of this process of renewal a perfect Christian. Every day you must be renewed. Every day you must grow in your Christian life. Every day you must become a better Christian.

When the Holy Spirit brings sinners to faith in Jesus through the Gospel, He re-creates that lost image of God in their hearts. As long as believers live here on earth, however, our sinful nature clings to us, constantly opposing and battling against the new nature, constantly seeking to reassert its authority in believers' lives — and often succeeding. Daily, therefore, the new man must be renewed in believers.

Like a growing plant, the new nature must be tended and nourished. This happens as believers use the means by which God created the new nature: the

means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. Through diligent and faithful use of the Gospel, believers grow in faith and in spiritual knowledge.

The more our faith grows, the more it will produce the fruits of loving deeds in our lives. As we experience growth in our faith and our spiritual lives, believers can more effectively defeat the old Adam, with its temptations and evil desires. When we arrive in glory, the old nature will be cast off forever and the new nature will be made perfect. In the light of eternal glory, believers will finally know God perfectly, even as they are known.

This is a source of great comfort to us. Let us not be discouraged when time and again we find in our lives, things that ought not to be. The mark of a Christian is not perfection, but the mark of a Christian is the daily struggle against sin.

The more we struggle with sin, the more we shall be humbled because of our own inability, and the more fervently we shall fall down at the foot of the cross, seeking help and strength to overcome.

Again, how patiently we ought to deal with one another as we see in our lives the many things that ought not to be. How we ought to support one another! How we ought to strengthen one another!

Then at last, when this mortal shall have put on immortality and this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, we shall sing with the great apostle: ***“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***⁶ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Colossians 3:5–8

² *Luther’s Small Catechism* Q256, What Baptism Indicates (Q 259 Significance of Baptising with water)

³ Isaiah 6:3

⁴ *Luther’s Small Catechism*, Koehler, Q 113

⁵ Colossians 3:12–17

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:57