

Men and Morality Myton 15th October 2005 Colossians 3:1-17

Introduction

- Christian morality – what is it?
- Christian morality – the struggle for it?
- Christian morality – how do we grow in it?

Now if not a Christian or not sure this morning, Christianity has a lot to say about morality, an awful lot. Morality, moral behaviour is vital to the Christian life. The Christian life is never less than a moral life. Look at this passage here – sexual immorality, impurity, greed, evil desires (our sex lives), anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language (relationships), v11 refers to racism and nationalism, home life in v18-21, work life in 22-4:1. If we went to other passages we would see that the Christian has moral obligations when it comes to the State, when it comes to issues of justice, care for the poor, the unborn, the dying, and the vulnerable. There is a lot of morality in the Bible.

So, if you are not a Christian or not sure, let me be absolutely clear that if you were to become a Christian it would have implications for the way you live your life. I am sure you have seen that from friends who are Christians, but worth spelling out. Some of the words we use in the vocab of the Christian life are words like holy – separate to God and come to mean like God in moral purity and righteousness.

So, for Christians here this morning – men and morality is a vital topic, God is very much interested and concerned with how we live. This passage envisages a significant change. The contrast is there in the passage and a great vision is given to us.

Christian morality – what is it?

What is distinctive about Christian morality? Every religion has a moral code. Every philosophy has one too. They are based on how a higher power thinks we should live. Now that higher power might be philosophy or thought e.g. Aristotle and his virtue list, it might be Allah, it might be reason such as the UN convention on human rights, it might be experience such as ‘be true to yourself’, the cry of the existentialist.

And, there is nothing initially special about the behaviour of the Christian compared to those people who belong to other faiths or philosophies. Take the Ten Commandments you can find all of them in other moral codes. So what makes Christian morality distinctively Christian?

There are two points. The first is to do with **motivation**. Now here is a vital piece of information for those of you who may not yet be Christians and a reminder for Christians too. That being a Christian, becoming a Christian is not primarily a sign up to a moral code through which we become acceptable to God.

Our default mechanism is to make Christianity only about morality and religious behaviour. If asked population of Leamington Spa what it means to be a Christian - being good, being moral, going to Church, being nice, not doing things that we would broadly define as wrong (although any consensus of what the good is being lost in our culture). So we might say that a common misapprehension is like this: behave in order to be acceptable to God.

But Christianity is the utter opposite. You could not get further from Christianity than that. Christianity unlike any religion in the world says this: believe, be accepted, behave. The difference is the difference between drinking water and acid, life and death. It may look very similar on the outside. So a good Muslim should not kill, commit adultery, lie steal, just like a Christian. But every religion I know, philosophy etc – behave in a certain way then acceptable to the deity. So a Muslim, I must behave this way otherwise Allah will reject me and I will spend eternity in hell. He has two recording angels on each shoulder and even then Allah could still say no. But Christianity – believe the Gospel and you are made utterly acceptable before God. Then out of **thankfulness** behave or live in a way that pleases him because we have received his grace.

This is what Paul is teaching here in this letter to the church in Colosse. He has spelled out to them all that Jesus Christ has done for them. 1:21-23. Here Paul says that were enemies of God in our minds which expressed itself in evil behaviour. As enemies we were alienated from God. But through his death on the cross, his physical body, Jesus Christ has bought reconciliation between God and us and we now stand before God holy and without blemish and free from accusation.

In other words if we have believed in Christ we are seen as He is seen by God – he treats us as he treats his son, holy, without blemish and free from accusation. This comes from believing. We are seen by God that way not because we behave that way all the time but because we believe the good news of the Christian faith.

Paul expresses it in another way here in Ch3:1-4 Where he says that when we believe we share in Christ's death and resurrection. We have died to our life which was evil and alienated from God and we are raised with Christ to new life, the life of heaven the life of the world to come.

All this is by faith, it is by believing in what Christ has done that a person is made acceptable to God. This distinguishes from all other religions. Then out of the truth of this behaviour follows.

You will see in this passage in v5 because of all that God has done for us in Christ, live differently put to death that which belonged to your old life because you have a new one. V11 No racism in the Christian life why? Because of what Christ has done – he has called people from different tribes to himself and he is in them. V12 because you have been dearly loved by God who has shown incredible mercy be loving. Look

at v23 – our attitude to work – should be hard working as for the Lord and not to get as much as we can because we know we will receive an inheritance from the Lord – inheritance of eternal life. So work hard now. 4:1 if a boss recognition that you have a master in heaven and he has been so merciful so be merciful.

We see this all through the pages of the Bible. Why be a loving husband? Because Christ loved us and presents us to the Father without blemish. So husbands love your wives. Why honour God with money? Paul says that he was rich yet became poor... 2 Corinthians 8; why forgive when hurt? Jesus – you have been forgiven a huge debt so it would be crazy not to forgive. So John says, we love because he first loved us 1Jn3.

The distinctive mark of Christian morality is first of all motivation. It is not fear that I might not make the mark, it is thankfulness that Christ has made the mark for me. The freedom for that is wonderful and it implies that the more I grow in my understanding of what Christ has done, the more my thankfulness and my moral conformity to God's righteousness will grow also.

So the basis for all moral behaviour in the Christian life is NOT to gain acceptance before God, that comes by faith in what Christ did on the cross. Rather it comes from joyful gratitude for all that he did for us, so we respond with loving obedience. E.g. Jonathan lamb story.

Christians apt to forget this – they make their sanctification their justification.

The second distinctive mark of Christian morality is that it is **not an external code of moral conduct only**. Look at the passage and see the inner demands of Christian morality. It has behavioural demands for sure.

But it has much more. And it is so demanding – Christian morality hits you at the point of your motivations and desires – lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice and demands compassion, patience, kindness, humility and gentleness. Then it gets even tougher, over all these moral virtues put on love, which binds them all together, in complete unity.

You see Christianity teaches that it is not Christians that have a monopoly on morally virtuous behaviour. You can live a moral life – not steal, not commit adultery, be faithful husband, always pay your taxes, never lie. But that is way insufficient below the level of Christian morality. Paul makes this clear in for example 1 Corinthians 13: 'If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to the flames but do not have love, I gain nothing.' Here is someone who gives away their wealth – so generous with something that is perhaps the hardest thing to do!

Christian morality goes beyond this to love. Love defined in that passage as patience, not proud and boasting, it always honours others not itself, it doesn't seek the best for

itself, it is not easily angered, it is forgiving, delights in good, never keeps a record of wrongs, rejoices in truth, it always protects, trusts, hope and it never, never fails.

We see it in this passage too. Look how many internal words there are. Christian morality is about who you are in public, who you are in the State, at work, home, in relationships and you are on your own. It is a life that pleases God in all these realms of our life

Who are you in private? What would your wife say about you? You can present to us a very moral person. But true Christian morality is beyond external conformity to moral standards. It is way beyond public expressions. If you happen to be self disciplined enough any one can do it. **It is that**, but goes beyond it to real heart change. A heart, the seat of the personality that is not given to fits of rage or anger, that is not haughty or proud but humble, that is not harsh with others but gentle and one that never falls down, never gives up, never stops, like the tide comes pouring on and on and on and no matter what comes up against it – keeps going.

This is Christian morality – it comes out of real heart change not merely external conformity. In fact, if there is no love the moral change, the goodness is worthless, it gains us nothing. And of course there are plenty of moral pagans.

We are talking about something massive, something profound here and of course it is transformational. It is the difference between a faithful marriage – plenty of people have those and a delightful marriage based on Christian love. It doesn't just mean providing your kids with two parents, a roof, food on the table and new Nike trainers, it means not embittering them but loving them deeply, nurturing them, not taking out your hang ups on them, never falling down, patience, gentleness, kindness with them.

Summary

Now isn't that utterly terrific, what a vision for our moral lives.

That is what we are talking about this morning. This is the distinctive Christian morality. Yes it has external characteristics, it involves our relational life, sexual life, work life, home life, life in the state, life in relationships, life in relation to issues of justice, ethical issues such as the right to life and so on.

But it is so much more. It is distinctive in its motivation It is not behaviour to be accepted by God. It is behaviour that come out of being accepted first. It is motivated by a deeper and deeper appreciation of Gods grace in the death of his son. It is motivated by the promises of the Gospel especially in relation to our future in heaven.

It is characterised not by external moral behaviour though it is not less than that. But it is characterised by love. This is the love that was seen in Jesus Christ. So, 'live a life of love just as Christ loved you and gave himself up for you.' Eph 5:2. Such a life

comes from an inner transformation so that our deeply held attitudes, values etc are challenged and changed.

So, take for example a guy who has had a terrible relationship with his dad, who always criticised him and makes him a skivvy. Consequently, though not always, this guy has a bass note in his life, something that is felt rather than heard. The bass note is that something will go wrong and when it does, that was expected. 'There it goes again, I knew they wouldn't like me, there you go I knew I would fail at that.' This person is falling down all the time, with relationships with jobs and so on. When he becomes a Christian the real hard work of character change happens. He is not only more moral in his behaviour but his whole understanding of himself is changing so that over time the bass note is taken away and this guy sticks at things, he is faithful to tasks, not overwhelmed by difficult challenges, he is faithful to people.

That is what Christian morality is.

Second Christian morality – the struggle for it?

If only loving as a Christian were easy in our moral lives! We could all relax but it is not it is a battle. It is a struggle. We are specifically told that the Christian has three enemies that battle against us honouring God in our moral life. First the world – the culture that exists in rebellion against God. So John writes in 1 Jn 2:15-17 'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, the love of the father is not in you. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful people, the lust of the eyes, and their boasting about what they have and do – comes not from the father but the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.' You can see what he means – the world, the culture created by people in rebellion against God is characterised by lust, sin cravings, boasting, visual not unseen and eternal. In direct opposition to the father, not eternal but will pass away.

The Devil one of whose tactics is to tempt in to immorality. For example 1 Cor 7:5 'Do not deprive each other except perhaps by, mutual consent and for a time, so that you might devote yourself to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self control.' Here Paul saying that married couples make themselves vulnerable to satanic temptation by not have sex on a regular basis.

Then the third is mentioned in this passage. Here is Paul writing to Christians and he is saying in v5 'put to death' literally 'kill off that which belongs to your earthly nature or your nature before you became a Christian, and some of those things are external and some internal. You now are raised, no longer belong to the earth, but to heaven, v10 a new nature is made possible through being united to Christ.

So moral growth does not happen instantly but is a process involving some struggle against considerable opposition.

Now I want to focus on one aspect of our moral lives as illustrative of what goes on in us. I want to pick up on the area of sex and sexual immorality. It is right there in the passage.

Kill of what belongs to the earthly nature – sexual immorality, impurity – riotous behaviour, greed related to sexual greed. Now the Bible talks about this a lot – Eph 5: not even a hint of sexual immorality, it is improper to even speak about what people do in secret, 1 Thess 4: ‘It is God’s will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lists like the pagans who do not know God; and in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or a sister.’ 1 Thess 6:18 ‘Flee sexual immorality.’

There are other examples that we could pick out. If a Christian, how doing? Are we honouring God in our sexual lives? In case in any doubt what Paul talking about here, sexual immorality – ‘porneia’. The essential meaning of porneia is sexual activity (not desire) outside of marriage. Matt 15:19 Jesus says ‘Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.’ Here note that the source of moral life is the heart and this has to be changed. The source of immoral behaviour is the heart. Then he lists adultery and sexual immorality side by side. Adultery is a married person engaged in sexual activity so sexual immorality means more than this, porneia being the more general word covering any form of illicit sexual activity, that in the Bible is sex outside of marriage.

Of course Jesus says much more, if we look at a woman lustfully we have committed adultery. Not just the act but also the thought of the act that is part of Christian morality.

So, how are we doing? I don’t need to tell you how our culture is being dominated by sex. Our culture truly blind isn’t it? When radio debates on whether 10 and 11-year-old girls should be wearing provocative clothing.

Now I will be very honest with you and this is a huge struggle for me. I have found Internet pornography a problem. I know I am not alone, talking to someone the other day with the same issue, talked to a great many men. Late night TV has also been a problem for me. We had a cheap deal from cable – the free preview. Do you travel with your job? Has hotel TV been an issue for you? The pornography on the movie channels? A Christian youth leaders conference in the states had the highest take up of the adult channels of any conference that year. It doesn’t appear on the receipts. Mark in Japan – addiction for him. I can even get porn on my phone now.

I think of a friend who is a minister who has told his pastor that he keeps on DVD at home that he watches and this enables him to control his habit.

Now, I hope that short bit of personal detail doesn’t offend you too much. I think it is worth being honest about it because I meet so many men caught up in pornography

these days. Internet between 70% and 90% and for the most part it is not women looking at it.

Now the impact of pornography is very destructive:

- Pleasure – without complications, as a way of escape. Relationships difficult, this takes out the difficulty. Release without any responsibility. Fantasy is easier than reality. Gives power and control – self-centred.
- Powerful – it is a powerful channel for emotional tension caused by other things – so brings release. Alters our mood, relaxes, creates a powerful vulnerability to the work of Satan
- Progression: tolerance, addictive nature – people develop withdrawal symptoms, increasing time, the conscience becomes desensitised – used to be guilty but now very little, deception, plausibility to actual adultery, addiction
- Poison: seeing the world through porn tinted spectacles, rather than Gospel spectacles, devaluation of women, callousness and self-centeredness, lack of commitment, affect on sex life in marriage, fulfilling personal need
- Pain – secrecy, lying, split life, self-loathing, shame, money, marriage, career, relationship with God.

Now the central themes of an addiction are: escape from painful feelings, painful reality, the avoiding of uncomfortable emotions, and an illusion of control over the drug, search for pleasure/avoidance of pain – excitement or tension relieving.

This is what pornography is becoming for many – an addiction.

Slippery slope: experimentation, social occasional use, regular use, tolerance, and preoccupation. This leads to shame and guilt, to loss of control to life dominating, to problems with people, to lying, denial and deceit, life breakdown.

Now as I say this is not the only aspect of our moral behaviour, but it is a very important one for blokes.

And there is nothing wrong in sex – God created it good, nothing wrong with sex in marriage – 1 Tim 4 receive it with thanks giving. But any sex outside of marriage is not part of the moral life of a Christian whether gay or straight, sex with someone else or sex with yourself in the form of pornography and masturbation.

Application

I want to again emphasise that this is not the only issue in our moral life. Money is a key one also. But I want to pick out this issue of being men of morality in relation to sex. How are we doing this morning?

Lets have a bit of honesty shall we? What I have tried to do. This area has the potential to wreck utterly our relationship with the Lord, our family life, our confidence before God, our whole relationship with God.

Christian Morality – how do we get it?

So, how do we become truly Christianly moral. Not just external conformity, but an inner heart change. Our motivation and our love, an inner heart change. There is a lot to say on this. I am going to point on the following:

1. Believe the truth of justification so as to be severely honest with yourself
2. Understand what is going on in your heart – idolatry and epithemea
3. Rejoice in the Gospel as your true source of life
4. Kill off evil desires that give birth to immorality by taking practical steps
5. Ask others for help

1. Believe the truth of the Gospel so that you can be severely honest with yourself

I wish I had the whole day to talk about this subject! However, I have to be grateful for 40 minutes. In order to grow in our moral lives we have to be severely honest with ourselves and I would suggest others v16 tells us to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. Admonish is to warn.

Now we can only be severely honest if we believe in our justification before the throne of God only through the death of Christ. The fact that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ who died for us when we were sinners and enemies of God, means that we can look honestly at our immorality and know that it will not be lethal for us. We know that ultimately my acceptance before God; no matter how far I have slipped is through Christ alone.

Look at v 1-4, we have a Gospel summary there. Since then you have been raised with Christ. V3 for you died with Christ and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

What is he talking about? Doesn't seem to make sense does it. If it said you will die you will rise, make sense. This is in the past tense – you have died, you have been raised to the RH in Christ. This is what he means. He is talking about the outcome of being justified by Christ.

When believed the Gospel you died with Christ, that is God considers your sins as forgiven as if you had died on the cross to pay for them yourself – absolutely and utterly paid for in full. So you can go to him even with an addiction like pornography, you can face it, without fear that God is going to condemn you. Then to be raised –

Christ is raised, is seated at the RH of God and at the sight of the Son risen from the dead the heart of the father bursts with delight in the work of the son. To be raised with Christ means that you are seated at his right hand, he delights in you, he sits you next to him, he gives you intimacy through him, he even gives you authority with him, judgement given to the son and we will judge the angels.

Now, listen carefully. This does not mean we can sin and it makes no difference. First of all repentance is the hallmark of the believer – acknowledging sin and turning from it. We start the Christian life that way and we continue that way. Sin grieves the HS and it can disturb our confidence before God. If we continue in sin without any desire for true repentance then Scripture is clear that we do not possess the life of God within us. V6 is very clear – because of such things the wrath of God is coming. To continue to live an immoral life, without struggle or repentance is a sure sign that your confession of faith is false. Wrath awaits you.

But that said I want to emphasise the complete and finished work of Christ. Only when you realise that your confidence before God is not in your performance but in his performance that you can take a severe and honest look at how you are living in your moral life and can do something about it.

So if you are really struggling in this area – you can talk about it, admit it, not be defensive about it and acknowledge it as the first step to doing something about it. That is very important. There is no sin that that blood of Christ cannot cover past, present and future if turn to him in trust, except the sin of unbelief.

The Gospel gives you the emotional wealth and capital to face who you really are because it tells you that you are really loved. Been honest with your self, with God and faced up to what is going on in your moral life?

You need to have a very strong grasp on justification to do this.

2. Understand what is going on in your heart

This is where it gets more complicated. Look at v5 carefully. Tells us to kill off and there is a big long list. It is not the only list either. It is daunting. But the passage gives us the key to the origin of much of our immoral behaviour. The key is found in the two words – idolatry and evil desires. We need to look carefully at these words if we are going to make progress of any kind in the Christian life beyond what is possible by will power. That is not Christian change.

Every one has idols. Seems an old fashioned word doesn't it? Ex 20 'I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other Gods before me.' 2 Possibilities – worship the true God or some other finite thing. What is not envisaged is that we will have no god at all. This is impossible for the human heart, everyone lives for something, something that is the basis of their joy, their meaning, their security.

Greed called idolatry here. But in Eph 5:5 we read 'For this you can be sure – no immoral, impure, or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ.' In other words, there are people who look towards sexual immorality, impurity, lust, greed for their joy, their meaning, their hope, and their life. This is idolatry.

Now Christians can have idols of the heart. He is not talking about temples etc here. Talking about idols of the heart that we look to for life, security and worth. Because they give us life, joy, meaning, security they function as alternative saviours for us.

Now notice the word in v5 evil desires. English uses two words that translate one Greek word, epithemea. Epi – over, mega and themea desire. Now when you see evil desires what think? A normal desire for something evil. No, what NIV translates evil desires is actually over desire, not for something evil but something good This word epithemia is used by Paul, Peter, James, John, Jesus as the catch all for what is wrong with us. It is not that we desire evil things, but that we over desire good things which leads to immoral behaviour.

Now idolatry and over desires are linked. Look at the text – speaks of greed in relation to idolatry. You are greedy for something in the case here greedy for sex because there is something else you are worshipping. This idol throws out in to your life an over desire, in this case for sex.

Now the idol could be for sexual pleasure. In other words a person says I have to have sexual pleasure because it will give me life. There develops in your life an over desire for sex. Or it could another idol the loss of which causes sexual immorality. Let me illustrate this as an example. Suppose the thing you need to give your life and if it is threatened you worry terribly, or lost it devastates you or if it is blockedangers you massively is acceptance from other people. Now lets say you don't get that, you fail or what ever. Where go to get relief, comfort? Chocolate? Shopping? Sex?

You have an over desire for something but not caused by an idol but a by product of that idol failing. Or you may be incredibly successful and you are euphoric but the stress of having to put the work in to something so that you have been so impressive is so exhausting that it makes you vulnerable to finding relaxation not in good and godly things but in an over desire for something good which becomes evil – sex..

Now if you understand your idols and the over desires they throw out, you can understand your self and the temptations you face much more. I think it not only helps us understand why for example I find sexual immorality hard so that then I can understand what is going on in me – not just biological. It also helps me then to apply the Gospel to it. Why am I looking to pornography for my comfort and my life? When I know it is not. But further it helps to get to the root of it. There is a deeper sin. It is not just an over desire for sex, it is something else that I need to bring before the Lord and repent of. It is self-centeredness and a desire for personal glory, not Gods glory. E.g. pride and sexual immorality from CS Lewis.

Now let me illustrate this from my own life and what I have discovered in the past year or so. Look at this virtue list again. Anger and rage. I have been an angry person this year, let me explain. There was a sin under the sin – the desire to be thought well of.

Lets take lying – don't lie, I must not lie, I am a bad minister if I lie. But it is powerless, utterly powerless. Powerless because there was a sin under the sin – it was the desire to be thought well of. Now why do you lie? Do you lie or do you always tell the truth? I lie in order to make sure people see me in a good light. So that they will like and respect me.

Look at the issue of slander and gossip. Why do that? Isn't it to do with an idol – I need others to love me so I will put others down. I need others to think I am great.

What we are getting to is the sin under the sin, what is the idol that is causing sin. What am I looking for to give me life.

I cannot stress the importance of this more. The stop doing approach doesn't help. But when I can see why I might be angry, lie, tempted sexually then I can do something about it as we shall see.

So, how do you find your idols? if I lost it it would be so devastating life wouldn't be worth living. Or look at your extreme emotions. When a good thing is blocked or frustrated it is right to feel some anger. Jesus felt anger. When a good and important thing is threatened or lost it is not wrong to feel some anxiety or grief. Jesus was always weeping. But is when these emotions assume something beyond normality. We have over worry, over guilt, over anxiety so paralysed over grief so that we are utterly inconsolable – they point to something we have invested the power of life and death over us – an idol. You have done it. **Augustine, such emotions are the smoke rising from the fire of an imploding idol.**

As Christians we are sinners and we sin. What I am suggesting here is that we go deeper than that. Ask the question why do you sin in the way that you do. Not in a psychological sense but in a spiritual sense - what do we need to give us life that we have to have, what are our idols.

Summary

What I am saying here is that the Bible teaches that immoral behaviour is always related to our hearts, their over desire for good things and these over desires are due to the fact that we have set up something else in our lives that we look for to give us joy, hope, security, love meaning – idolatry. When we identify that we are much better able to be men of morality.

3. Rejoice in the Gospel as your source of life

Now notice again in v1-4 what Paul says. V 3 he tells us where our life now is - it is wrapped up with Christ in God. V4 Christ is our life again. And when he appears we will appear with him in glory, sharing his victory.

Where is our life – in idols? No, it is in Christ with whom we have died and risen to newness of life. If a Christian you know that our life is found in him. As I have already described, we have died with him, so God looks upon our sins as though we had died for them and they are completely forgiven, we now share the delight of God that he has for his Son.

Now look at v5 and the word **therefore** – because of this now put to death whatever belongs to your earthy nature. In other words on the basis of understanding what has happened to us by faith in Christ in v1-4 we are then able to kill off the actions and attitudes of our old nature.

But we have to understand it and grasp it. Look at what Paul says you are to do before you think about killing off the actions and attitudes of the old nature. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things any longer – understand what God has done for us in Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated. In other words, understand the Gospel think it out, and also experience it. Not just intellectual it involves our whole being – involves our hearts.

In other words the way to overcome immorality is to set your heart and mind on the Gospel, where Christ is seated. Think about that dwell on that, make that your focus. As you do, you will therefore be empowered to put to death what ever belongs to your earthly nature.

Now listen for example to what Paul says to the Thessalonians: ‘It is God’s will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, **not in passionate lists like the pagans who do not know God;**’

See that, people behave that way because they do not know God. So the more we know God, more set our hearts and minds on the Gospel which is our life, the more we will be free from immorality.

So, we are told that we are not just to teach and admonish one another we are to worship, praise and so on v16, singing with gratitude in our hearts to God. In other words get in to in to our hearts and minds through reading, teaching, fellowship, worship and so on until there is true gratitude in our hearts and we say if this Gospel is true how should I be. It has to affect our affections, we have to love it, moved by the Gospel, see the Gospel as something wonderful, something beautiful.

Now this is very practical because when tempted – you are not my life. Tempted to lie – speak to myself, get angry, look to pornography. You feel your over desires what do you do? First recognise that your heart is set in an earthly place. A good thing has become an ultimate thing. Then look at that and say to it ‘you are not my life’ and rejoice in him that he is the life, the true life that you have been looking at this thing to give you.

So vital that we are dazzled and delighted by the Gospel, I cannot stress it enough and it only comes when we set our minds in thinking, our hearts in worship. **William temple – your religion is what you think about in your solitude.** What is your religion? Do you daydream about being a hero for example? Do you dream about people seeing how cool, successful, rich, sexual you are? Replace that with a new affection – the Gospel.

As we do this, the power of idols in our lives is diminished. Look what Paul says in v15 ‘let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.’ Now we understand that – rich abundance and depth. Listen to Thomas Chalmers, an old puritan. He said this:

‘It is seldom that any of our bad habits or flaws disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning...or by the force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed may be dispossessed – and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind.

The boy ceases at length to be a slave of his appetite, but it is because a more mature taste has brought it to subordination. The youth ceases to idolise sensual pleasure, but it is because the idol of wealth has got the ascendancy. Even the love on money can cease to have mastery over the heart because it is drawn in to the whirl of ideology and politics and he is now lorded over by a love of power.

But there is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without object. Its desire for one particular object is conquered – but its desire to have some object is unconquerable. The only way to disposes the heart of an idol affection is by the expulsive power of a new one. It is only when admitted into the number of god’s children through faith in Jesus Christ, that the Spirit of adoption is poured on us – it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, and the only way that deliverance is possible.

Now that is very important. He is saying first that what cannot be destroyed can be dispossessed; an idol can lose its reigning in the mind. The way it does it is through the expulsive power of a new affection. That is the desire for sex may give way to money, which may give way to power. The heart is never left without affection. He says that it is only when we come to more and more fully understand the gospel and all we have, our adoption as sons that the heart is brought under the one great predominant affection – the Gospel that deliverance is possible.

So you have to think it out, pray it in delve deeper into the Gospel, worship, praise, understand it, meditate on it and so on and so on so that the beauty of the Gospel is the reigning affection of our lives.

I don't think there is any other way unless you shift the sin to something else

4. Kill off evil desires that give birth to immorality by taking practical steps

You will see I have started way back, but now I am going to get practical. Paul says kill them off in v5. Look at v9-10, this is what becoming a Christian is, what is he talking about? Our old self is our earthly nature. Paul elsewhere calls this the flesh, he says it is hostile to God, refuses to submit to God, it is hostile and insubordinate.

May express itself in two ways either in sinful actions and attitudes or in self righteousness, a refusal to agree with God that we are sinners. This is crucified with Christ, this died with Christ. Now we have new life, new creations, freed from slavery to our old selves and Paul says in v 10 that our new identity is being renewed in the image of the creator. Very exciting because Christ is the image of the invisible God and so he is saying the Christian is on a path of progress in the faith to Christ likeness and it is possible because the ultimate power of our nature is broken.

This means that we can therefore kill off; we are no longer bound to live this way any more. This is entirely practical. What meant for me. When I am tempted to misuse the Internet, I can say you are not my life. And I have a programme called Covenant eyes. Late night TV – told my wife and she makes sure I don't do this. Cable TV, we got rid of it, I told her. Travel with work I do my best not to stay in hotels. When I go I ask for the TV to be taken out of the room, the porn channels to be switched off or I remove the plug or hand in the remote. I have a friend who will call me when I should be there at any time of day or night for him.

This is the practical application of killing off. If money how going to ensure that you give enough? How going to ensure that you honour God with your income? If in moral life anger – what going to do about it practically? Find the source of what is creating the anger then say no longer my life. But practically – counselling you need?

5. Ask others for help

We have said it already, we are to confess our sins one to another according to James 5, we are to bear one another burdens according to Paul in Galatians 6, we are to help one another in the race that we have to run with endurance, in the fight of faith that cannot be avoided.

You see it here in v15-16. Teach, admonish, and worship together.

My accountability questions.

Conclusions

The Bible calls us to be men of morality, to be very different in our moral life, in our families, work, in church, in our sexual relationships, in the world and so on. A sign of true conversion is life change including moral life change.

But truly Christian morality is motivated by grace and expresses itself in love. It battles but identification of idols and honesty helps.