

Mentioning the Unmentionables: The Corrosive Threat to Our Families and Our Congregational Life Together

Part Two: The Solution According to Christ, the Scriptures, and God's Law

Putting to Death That Which Threatens Us: Colossians 2 & 3

We will return to the technology conversation in a moment, but I pause to share a Scriptural response...first to the problem of sin, and then, IN CHRIST, to our proper response to temptation and **PIL**.¹ Listen to the words of St. Paul, Colossians 2:6-15 (ESV):

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

This is the Gospel. Paul is writing to Christians, ones who have “received Christ Jesus the Lord”. They are to “walk in him”. But by way of reminder, Paul warns about being “taken captive” by the ways of the world and indeed the ways of the flesh. He reminds them of their baptismal identity, the “circumcision made without hands” and how in this, they had put off “the body of the flesh” and had been “buried with Christ”. From the tomb of Jesus, Paul says that they have been “raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God...” More than a one-time activity, **this is the new reality for those who are “are alive together with him”**.² To put an even finer point on it, Paul says that those who were DEAD in “the uncircumcision of your flesh”, God gave forgiveness of all trespasses, by “canceling the record of debt that stood against

¹ Remember, **PIL** is porneia, immorality, licentiousness. It is specific to the practice and viewing of sexual sin, but also refers to the broader issue of a rejection of what is good, true and beautiful. It also refers to the libertinism of “anything goes” as long as “I’m not hurting anybody”.

² Martin Luther’s teaching on baptism is worth noting and is drawn from passages such as this. “[Baptism] signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts. And it also shows that a new man should daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (The Small Catechism, Article IV, explanation to the Third Part.)

us...” The image is one of Christ taking our every sin, past, present and future, and nailing IT ALL to His cross. Now, how good is that?

But Paul doesn't stop there. After this reminder of who they are, and Whose they are... Paul says this just a few verses later (3:1-11):

***If then** you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. **Put to death** therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. **On account of these the wrath of God is coming.** In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. **But now you must put them all away:** anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have **put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self,** which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

This is absolutely astounding! **IF** you have been raised with Christ, **if** your every record of sin has been canceled, nailed to the cross, **if** you have been buried with Him, **if** you are raised with Him... **THEN.** IF-THEN. Paul switches from the passive voice (expressing the active agency of God in Christ to us and for us) to the active voice (demanding action from God's redeemed people). **SEEK. PUT OFF. PUT ON. PUT TO DEATH. Kill it dead.** What is first on the list? **P. Porneia.** What else? **Immorality. Licentiousness.**³ Paul says to “put off” the old and “put on” the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its creator. Paul does not equivocate, but speaks to **the active Christian life**, one of repentance and faith, bearing the Spirit's fruit. As we experience temptation and every manner of sin, **we are implored to kill it dead.**

Protecting Our Children and Families

Therefore, *if then* we are in Christ, we now turn to our practical, experiential response to our topic. I am presuming that those reading this are Christians, that some of you want to repent and amend your life, your habits, your minds...or that you want to do better as a parent or grandparent. That you want *to put to death* the temptation and sin we all deal with on daily basis, the **PIL**-saturated society we are swimming in. So, what do we do and where do we start?

We start with Jesus. Perhaps you need help and cannot stop indulging. Perhaps you crave forgiveness for past sins and behaviors that you've never confessed. Perhaps you've made a mess and you don't know where to turn. Come see your pastor. Confess yours sins in private and

³ Paul will regularly use lists of this type which encapsulate every aspect of PIL. See Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Ephesians 5:3-4.

receive absolution. Seek comfort in the forgiveness offered in the Divine Service. Seek professional help with a Christian counselor. And in confession and absolution, flowing from the grace God gives, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome our afflictions, our guilt and shame, and *we can get to work protecting our families.*

I speak now to both individuals and parents (whatever stage or season of life) and others in critical vocations that support families. First, we must purge the “old leaven” out of our midst. This demands an honest and thorough assessment of how much **PIL** we daily engage in. Where is it? Are there things we casually watch or listen to without thinking? Be aware. What kinds of things draw our heart away from Jesus? What is the technology situation of our households? Is there easy access to **PIL**? What about our children and grandchildren’s access? Be discerning. Making an honest assessment, we then make better choices. While this can come in many ways, I want to focus on the issue of the smart phone.

Folks, filters and secure web browsers are fine...but they are half measures at best. They can be easily gotten around by any third grader. We need to do better than automatically handing over technology to people who ARE NOT ABLE (through lack of maturity and formation) to handle it.⁴ I use an analogy. Let’s say you are a master woodworker. To practice your craft, you use many different types of tools and saws. Some are for specific cuts, some are held by hand, others, like a miter saw, *are very powerful but also very sharp.* It takes time and practice to learn to use these tools. It takes someone watching over you and you watching them. It takes careful cuts and precise measurements. It takes maturity and an ever-watchful eye.⁵ Because even a master woodworker can make a mistake or the wrong cut...even worse, receive an injury.

Would any woodworker worth his salt, who wanted to train their child to follow in their craft, ever hand over a miter saw to a novice (such as child!) and say, “Have at it”? Of course not. But that’s exactly what we’ve done by giving smart phones to children. We might think they need them, or we might feel like we need a break from our children(!), but we are handing over something very dangerous to people who have no business using them until thorough training. This leads to all kinds of problems, up to and including unfettered access to **PIL**. That is just one example of how we are doing it wrong.

We protect our families in many other ways as well. We first model the behavior we want. For they’ll do what we do. We center our lives (including our home life!) around Jesus. We practice forgiveness. Let them see it! We also stay informed of the threats and challenges (the entire purpose of this article) and plan strategic responses. We protect our children by having *age-appropriate* conversations at *every stage of life.* We respect their innocence by not flaunting the world at them. We recognize that little eyes and little ears aren’t ready for everything all at once. Some things should be “unmentionable”! But the flip side is, if we aren’t the first ones to instruct

⁴ This includes many adults I know!

⁵ This is not rocket science and we all know how to do this. YOU WATCH, I DO; YOU DO, I DO; YOU DO, I WATCH.

and guide, *then we may as well be last*.⁶ So, we monitor EVERYTHING and act accordingly. We train, and pray, and study, and worship, and talk, and repeat. This is the way we protect our children, our families, ourselves. We start with Jesus and end with Jesus. Christ is all, and in all. And we use what He has given us—sanctified wisdom—to do what we are supposed to do.

Fighting Back and Reclaiming What Is Good

We also fight back. I have been talking about households and family decisions. But congregations also need to take action. The first step is awareness, which (again) this article is addressing. We need to know *the gravity of the problem and how corrosive it truly is*. We also need better discernment going forward. This means being students of the Word and students of God's good creational order and design.

We have been assaulted over the last several decades by views antithetical to God's natural law. God's Law is available to all people; it is written on the heart of every man. God's Law, simply put, is His will for His creation. We need to embrace what God teaches us in nature, in science, in biology.⁷ We need to study and know how the world is **supposed** to work. This is also corroborated and articulated in Scripture. Man and woman functioning according to God's good plan has a tremendous effect to counteract all of the wicked ideas out there...ideas we have been lapping up through the entertainment industry for decades. Part of fighting back is to be grounded in the truth. To acknowledge there is truth and that God is the arbiter and purveyor it. This means studying, and reading and seeking outside help to put it all together. There are tremendous resources available. The Church needs to make them available and encourage their usage.

The Church has to do a better job of catechizing our children, teens, parents and everyone in between. We need to preach regularly against **PIL**,⁸ and conduct robust bible classes and workshops.⁹ Christian publishing houses must do better at making resources available on a wide variety of people in a variety of situations and topics relating to **PIL**. Let's instead use technology for good, truth and beauty. It is a tool, and can be an effective weapon in the fight against **PIL**. There are many other ways the Church can fight too. Singles should be encouraged to marry, and *taught* to be chaste while waiting. Perhaps the local congregation can be an appropriate place for men and women to meet and socialize.¹⁰ Married couples should be encouraged to start families. Fathers and mothers need to be prayed for, mentored, and also held accountable. Recognize their job is not easy! We should celebrate them, but also come alongside and give them help. *It is a scary time to raise children*. The Church should be right there, in Word and Sacrament ministry, in the Divine Service, but also providing some of the real human

⁶ This has been proven—your child will see the person they hear from first on a topic as the expert of that topic.

⁷ Science is not opposed to God but the study of God's creation.

⁸ The three-year lectionary provides ample opportunity to do this.

⁹ One of the things sorely missing is the Church modeling to parents best practices for conversations and technology limitation in the home.

¹⁰ Maybe the Walther League wasn't such a bad idea!

needs people might need. Churches can support women who are single parents through gifts and assistance. Congregations can host men's bible studies to mentor younger men in faithful masculinity. The Church can be a place of reconciliation and healing for those broken by addiction and compulsive viewing of **P**. All of this is part of how we can fight against Satan and his designs. Being the Church in every way, in every place, for every person.¹¹

Lastly, the issue of sex/human sexuality needs to be reclaimed by the Church. The claim often made against so-called conservative Christians by so-called progressives—*you all are a bunch of repressed prudes*. “You hate sex!” Not true. God is the author of creation and of all life. Sex, rightly ordered between a married man and woman **is a good gift of God**. It is the very physical and intimate way God binds together husband and wife. So, the problem is not sex. *The problem is perversion*. It is the twisting of what is good into something evil. But the perversion does not *destroy* the good. There is a long-standing theological maxim in the Church: *abusus non tollit, sed confirmat substantiam*.¹² That is, “Misuse does not destroy the substance, but confirms its existence”. To quote Luther, “Gold remains no less gold if a harlot wears it in sin and shame.” Let us stop letting the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh run roughshod over what God has given and ordained. And let us turn to Christ for mercy, and to our Creator for order, and for the Spirit for regeneration and formation. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You say the “amen”.

¹¹ This truly is the vision of Paul in Colossians. The vertical reality of God's people receiving His grace and mercy only in Jesus Christ alone, and the horizontal reality of how we love our neighbor through active service.

¹² Latin always sounds cooler.