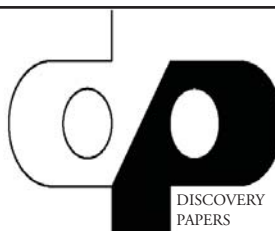


# REJECTING THE WORLD OF LIES

**SERIES: WALKING IN THE MYSTERY**



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Colossians 3:5-11  
4th Message  
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As you know, I usually like to get started by asking us to think about something in the culture that we live in to find out what kinds of questions people are asking. This morning I want us to consider a TV show called *Extreme Home Makeover*. If you're unfamiliar with this show, this is how it works. The show picks an extraordinary family with a great housing need. Often it's a family with multiple kids or disabled kids, or a family with some unique involvement in the community. They usually live in a home that is badly in need of repair and completely unsuitable for their family circumstances.

So *Extreme Home Makeover* comes in and in the course of a week, they provide them an entirely new home. They demolish their existing one and they build them a brand new home. They furnish it, decorate it, and prepare it for this family. It's actually a great service to these families, many of whom are obviously followers of Christ.

One of the reasons we like this show is that there's something about this process that gets us excited. Most of us have had the desire at some point to just start over. Demolish whatever it is that's frustrating us and build something entirely new. It might be our house, our job, or other stuff in our lives. But the promise of destroying what has proven inadequate and replacing it with something entirely new is really appealing to us.

That's exactly what we see Paul laying out for the Colossians over the next two weeks. We're in the middle of a series looking through the book of Colossians and trying to understand what it means to walk in the mystery of Christ. We've seen the cosmic majesty of who Christ is—now we're trying to understand what it means to live out lives in light of that. We've talked about walking in Christ, being filled in Christ, and last week escaping the world of shadows that is apart from Christ.

This week we'll be looking at Colossians 3:5-11. This passage really goes together with the passage we'll be studying next week. What Paul does in these two passages is basically what happens on *Extreme Home Makeover*. The show goes through four steps. First, they tour the old house to see what's wrong. Then they bring in bulldozers and demolish it to the ground. Third, they build up a brand new house. Finally, they welcome the family into their beautiful new home.

This week we're going to see Paul do those first two steps with the way we live in community. He's going to show us what things trip us up—how ugly things can sometimes get. And he's going to tell us to demolish the broken down old house. That's this week. Next week, he'll show us how to build a new house and start to live in it. For this week, he's going to show us how the old life, the broken down house, our tendency toward sin is based on lies. Today we're talking about **“Rejecting the World of Lies.”**

In our passage this week, we'll see two different lists of sins that Paul wants his readers to clean out of their lives. We'll see how sexuality plays a big role in this as well as other sins. Then we'll notice that Paul concludes it all with an instruction to stop lying to each other. We'll ask why he emphasizes lying. And finally, we'll see him describe the connectedness that results in a community after they've torn down their old lives.

So let's look at Colossians 3:5-11 and find out how we as a community can tear down the old habits that hurt us and prepare for a new life in its place.

## Tear it down

In the first section of this passage, Paul presents two different lists of things to be torn down. Commentators call them “vice lists.” There are two lists of five items.

Colossians 3:5-8:

**<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup>But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.**

Two lists of five items. First Paul says to “put to death” a bunch of bad things. Then he says to “rid yourself” of a bunch of more bad things. We'll notice next week that when Paul moves on to living the life of Christ, he will replace these five sins with five virtues that he considers

central to the life of faith. But for now, we want to think about these sins and what he is saying here.

He starts out with a list of sins that are essentially all sexual in nature. Then his second list describes more general relational sins. Both of these lists have to do with relating to each other. His encouragement to us is to put away these sins. Tear down that house. That's where we start today. **Tear it down.**

## Sexuality

Let's start with the first list. Let's start with sex.

We come from a tradition that has separated sexuality and spirituality. But historically this is unusual. For much of history, religion has incorporated sexuality into its practices. This was true for many of the religions surrounding ancient Israel. It was true for many of the religions surrounding the Colossians. It's even true for many of the religions surrounding us. Just last year, our India missions team ministered to an area dominated by temple prostitutes who performed sexual acts as part of Hindu worship practices.

Because Christians have rejected that, we've often gone to the other extreme and not known exactly how to understand our sexuality. Our problem is that we live in a church culture that has a hard time talking about sex in the midst of secular culture that has a hard time talking about anything else.

But if you read the Bible carefully, you'll realize that our sexuality is actually an integral part of our spirituality. And sexuality isn't just about having sex. It applies to all of us whether we are sexually active or not. Whether you are in high school, a single adult, married, divorced, or retired. For all of us, our sexuality is linked to our spirituality.

So Paul starts off telling the Colossians that their rejection of their old way of living has to start with their sexual decisions. For us that means that we need to consider our sexual decisions as well. We may not think about it, but our sexual decisions affect our community. This is one of the great lies of our culture: that what I do in my bedroom, as long as whoever else is there agrees to it, doesn't affect anyone else. Everything is "OK" as long as it doesn't hurt anyone. That's what our culture teaches us.

But Paul says differently. He says that walking in Christ means thinking about your sexuality in a different way. So this is something that we need to consider. What does it

mean for you to put to death sexual sins in your life? What sexual sins are you wrestling with? Are you addicted to pornography? Do secret fantasies rule your mind? Are you engaging in homosexual sin? Are you having sex outside of marriage? Are you sleeping around?

But sexual sin isn't just limited to having sex with the wrong person. Many of the sins that Paul lists have to do with your attitude, not just your behavior. If you're married, what is your attitude toward your spouse sexually? Are you being open? Respectful? Sensitive? Are you initiating without demanding? If you're single, what is your attitude toward members of the opposite sex? Respectful? Considerate?

This is the crazy truth that Paul starts with. What you do sexually affects us as a community. It sounds strange doesn't it. It sounds hard to believe. Even as I say it, the influence of our culture's attitudes toward sex are so strong, I find it hard to believe. Is this really true? Yes, it is. Almost every single one of Paul's letters includes some instructions related to how early Christians thought about sex. This is the tragedy of thinking ourselves as isolated individuals. We don't get this. Our individual sexual decisions affect us as a community.

## Relationships

So that's where we start. We start by demolishing the big sins in our lives. It starts with sexuality. Then after dealing with sexuality, Paul moves on to some more general sins. Anger. Rage. Slander. How I interact with people in general. How I talk to them. How I talk about them when they're not around. This is the heart of how a community functions.

If you're anything like me, you look at this list and it's pretty convicting. I can give you a concrete example within the past several days for virtually all of these items. I've expressed anger in a hurtful way toward my children. I've wanted other people to lose or fail or experience hurt—that's malice. I've said things about other people that discredit them—that's slander. I could go on.

So what about you? What stands out for you in this list? Remember we're talking about relationships here. It's not whether you are an angry or malicious person. It's about where you've expressed these things in relationship with someone else. How have you fallen into these particular patterns of living in the old world?

Then as soon as we experience conviction, we want to

get rid of it. We don't want to be this way. I don't want to yell at my kids. I don't want to think badly about others. So what do we do about it? How do we tear it down? Paul says to lay aside these things. But what does that mean? I think he's going to give the answer as we keep reading. But before we do, let's think about one more thing that Paul has mentioned: the wrath of God.

## Wrath

This is another concept that we don't really like to talk about. We love to highlight the love of God and rightfully so. God has revealed to us through his Word that he is essentially love. That is true. But if you really read the Bible, you have to face up to the reality of God's wrath as well. There's just too much throughout Scripture to avoid it. The Bible speaks of God as just, as punishing unrighteousness, and here Paul says that the wrath of God is coming.

It's an interesting thing to say because in the previous passage he talks about the new kingdom of Christ that is coming. So what is it? Redemption and Renewal? Or Wrath? Or maybe they have to go together?

We like to think that justice can be brought about without wrath. But that's not actually true. For justice to be served, punishment has to be delivered. It's easy to speak about justice without punishment on an abstract level, but if your child has been abused by someone or you have been wronged by someone or have witnessed gross injustice in other parts of the world, then you know that justice must involve punishment.

If we really think about it, we want a God who is capable of wrath. We want a God who is angry at someone who would sexually abuse a child. We want a God who gets upset when a wealthy landowner in India forces poor people to work in slavery through manipulation and deceit. We want a God who will punish the man who kidnaps a young woman in Thailand and forces her to work as a prostitute. Wrath must be a part of God's character if he is really defined by love.

The problem with talking about wrath is that if our God is capable of wrath, isn't he going to be angry at us? We know that these lists of sins we've just seen apply to us at least in part. We want God to punish others, but we don't want him to punish us. So we'd rather say that then have a God who is capable of wrath because he might turn it on us. But this is what the gospel does for us. We see a God who is capable of wrath, but find out that his wrath

has been poured out on Christ.

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "Wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead— Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

Then he says in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him."

So we have a God who brings wrath, but not for us. Wrath is coming, but Jesus saves us from it. That's the gospel. That's the freedom that we have. That's what allows us to hear what Paul says next.

## Embrace truth

After giving us two lists of five sins to reject as expressions of the old world we used to live in, Paul concludes with a final instruction that is a little bit surprising. It's kind of a summary of everything he has said in the previous section, but it may not be exactly the way we would expect him to sum things up.

Colossians 3:9-10:

**<sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**

After talking about sexual immorality, idolatry, rage, and malice he wraps things up by saying, "do not lie to each other." Now, most of us probably don't think of lying as the biggest problem in our church or even our culture. But what Paul is doing is telling us how to follow his instructions in the previous verses. How do we put to death all the sexual sins he mentioned? How do we lay aside all the relationship sins? We stop lying to each other. Remember that this is a letter addressed to the church. These instructions are for those who believe in Jesus Christ and for how they interact with each other.

What Paul is suggesting is that you demolish the old house when you tell the truth. Telling the truth to each other is what will change our lives. When we, as a community, are able to be open, honest, and vulnerable with each other, good stuff happens. We don't change our lives by trying harder or following some system for behavior modification. We tell the truth.

Jesus had something to say about the truth to the Jews who had believed him. He said in John 8:31-32, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus said that the truth will set us free. There is a freedom in not lying. There is a freedom in being able to tell the truth. Paul talked about the effect of truth in a community in the Book of Ephesians, a letter which shares a lot of the themes of Colossians. Here's Ephesians 4:15, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Speaking the truth in love allows us, as a community, to grow up into Christ. I've often heard this verse interpreted as a way of saying that we need to confront each other with the truth. If I see someone doing something that they shouldn't be doing, then I need to say it to them in love. But after studying it more and seeing similar themes in Paul's letters, I think he's talking about the truth of my own life. What Paul is saying is that as we are able to lovingly confess to what is true about me, we are freed up to grow into a community of Christ. We, as a community, are to embrace truth. How do we demolish the old broken down sins of our lives? **Embrace truth.**

This is one of the most amazing things about what it means to be a Christian. The community of Christ-followers should be the place, even uniquely the place, where truth can be freely spoken. We have been forgiven. We are being changed by the Holy Spirit. The truth sets us free, the truth allows us to see each other as we really are. We should be characterized by the truth.

Paul writes to the Colossians, "do not lie to each other." The verb is in the present tense, so this could be translated as "stop lying to each other." Are the Colossians lying to each other? What are they lying about? Then we have to ask the question of ourselves: are we lying to each other? What are we lying about? Is this a place where we can be honest about who we are and where we're at in life?

We, at PBC, have a deep desire, even a tradition of being a place where we can be truthful. That has always been one of our primary values. But there is also a tremendous pressure to feel like we are living up to the standards that we hold as a community. We put our nice clothes on for Sunday morning and we put our nice masks on. We hide behind what we want to be true of ourselves.

I'd love to be able to stand up here as a preacher and tell you that my motivations for being here are pure. I'd love to be an example to you of holiness and virtue. I wish I

could tell you that my love for you is sacrificial and honest. But those things aren't entirely true. I've long since come to the realization that nothing I do in this world will have pure motivations. I am simply incapable of doing things for entirely the right reasons. I am convinced that God has led me to become a pastor to people and to proclaim his Word. Partly I'm motivated by a desire to love you and serve you. But that's not the whole truth. Part of me craves attention. Part of me wants to be at the center of everything. Part of me uses my position and my role in people's lives for my own sake. Instead of loving you, I end up using you to feel better about myself.

The mystery of being in Christ is that this is a place where that truth can be revealed. I can confess to you that when I'm supposed to be loving you, part of my heart is really using you. This is a place where I don't have to lie anymore. I don't have to put on my nice mask here. Here, in the presence of Christ, truth sets us free.

Why is that? Because as Paul says in verses 9 and 10, the lies I live belong to something that he calls the old self. It is something that has been buried with Christ. I am being renewed in the image of Christ. I live in a new world where those things don't have power over me.

So the mystery of walking in Christ is that I can stand up here as a pastor with those things being true of me and know that that isn't the whole truth either. I am not simply up here to feed my ego. There is a new self within me that is loving, sacrificial, honest, and free. Being in Christ means acknowledging the truth of the old self while living in the truth of the new self.

I'm afraid to be truthful about my sin because I'm afraid that it is all that is true about me. I'm afraid that at my core, I am corrupt and selfish and depraved. And I was. But I'm not anymore. Christ has redeemed me. I have received a new self. I am growing into that image. All of this is true of me at the same time.

So what does it look like for us as a community to tell the truth? How do we stop lying to each other?

## **Take off the mask**

I want to suggest that there are three ways we might be lying to each other. Listen to these and see whether you fit any of these categories. Our call is to avoid these; to take off the mask. To embrace truth by owning what is true about us. **Take off the mask.**

Some of us are deceptive. We wear a disguise. We're actively trying to hide the truth. We are intentionally hiding something that we know is true of us and we are terrified to let others find out. This is deceptive lying. It's using a disguise. Maybe you're involved in sexual sin that no one knows about. Maybe you're really angry at home, but no one at church has any idea and you want to keep it that way. Maybe you are cheating your company or stealing or pretending to be someone you're not. Maybe you have an addiction to alcohol or painkillers or illegal drugs that you've been hiding. Whatever it is, you know about it, but you're working hard to make sure no one else does.

If that's true of you, then this passage is an invitation to you to step into freedom. Stop lying to us. Tell the truth. This is a place where the truth leads to forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, and healing. Come out of the dark, step into the light.

Not everyone here is using a disguise. Some of us just use a little makeup here and there. Now, I'm no expert on cosmetic products. In fact, I'm pretty confused by them. The other day, Rachel had something on her shopping list that had to do with eyelashes and straightening or shaping or coloring or something—I couldn't figure it out. And I stood looking at what I thought was the right area of the store for a long time trying to figure it out without any luck.

But what I do know is this. People use makeup to hide certain things and to highlight certain things. There are some things that are true that you want to conceal and other things that are true that you want to make more prominent. Some of us may use disguises, but I think a lot of us use makeup. It's not deceptive lying—I would call it misleading lying.

One summer in college I worked at a boat rental shop in San Diego. At times, I would teach private lessons. One time my manager came to me and asked me to teach a private kayaking lesson. I told him that would be difficult since I'd never been kayaking. He said not to worry about it, gave me a three minute crash course on kayaking and sent me out as an instructor with a man and his daughter on kayaks. This may come as a surprise to you, but I'm actually fairly decent at sounding like I know what I'm talking about when I don't. But don't worry; I don't use that power when I'm preaching. However, for this moment I was forced to use that power. About halfway through the lesson, the man said to me, "Paul, you seem to know a lot about kayaking—how long have you been doing it." I was a bit stuck at this point, but I came up with what I thought was a great answer. I replied, "Not too long—I

just picked it up this summer."

That's makeup. I'm not being completely deceptive, but I'm highlighting certain parts of the truth and concealing other parts of the truth. That's what a lot of us do. It's true that we care about people. It's true that we want to help and want to serve. So we highlight those parts of the truth and we downplay the deep insecurities we have or the anger toward our family or the bitterness of competition. We use makeup to mislead each other.

If that's true of you, then this passage is an invitation to you to be a part of this community as you are. You don't need to conceal around here. You can be honest. You don't need to exaggerate what's good about you or downplay what's not so good. You can bring it all here. We are all just like you and as we start to tell the truth to each other, it will free all of us up to continue that trend. We will become more and more a community of truth.

Some of us use disguises. Some of us use makeup. But there's one other way that we can tend to lie to each other. Sometimes we don't even know what is true of us and so it's impossible for us to tell the truth. If deceiving is a disguise and misleading is using makeup, then ignorant lying is like having broccoli stuck in your teeth. You don't even know it's there, so you walk around smiling at everyone, thinking that you're giving them this warm welcome. But the truth is that all they're seeing is the remains of your lunch, stuck between your teeth.

We are complicated people. We have lots of motivations at work and lots of things going on beneath the surface. I don't know what I don't know about myself, but I know that there's stuff I don't know. Did you follow that? But if I don't know what I don't know, then how can I tell the truth about it?

That's where we as a community can help each other. You know the relief you feel when someone tells you that you have broccoli between your teeth? You're embarrassed because of all the people that didn't tell you, but you're so thankful that finally someone did. This is part of the role that we play in each other's lives. We help each other know what is true.

So if this is true of you, if you feel like there is just a bunch of stuff that you don't even understand about your life, then plug yourself into a community. Join a women's small group, join a men's small group, find an older man or woman and ask them if you can spend some time with them, join a community group. Find some smaller community where others can help you see the truth. It's

pretty scary at first, but the truth that you discover can lead to great freedom.

So how do we demolish our old house? How do we put aside this old way of living that we're so used to? We tell each other the truth. We stop lying to each other, whether it's disguises, makeup, or broccoli that is going on. We tell the truth because this is a place where truth sets us free.

## Christ is All and in All

Paul summarizes this instruction by highlighting what happens when this characterizes a community. What is true of this group of people in Colossians? What can they experience as they come together in truth, centered on being "in Christ" together?

Colossians 3:11:

**<sup>11</sup>Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.**

This is one of a couple of grand statements in the New Testament describing the community of those who follow Christ as free from social distinctions and able to come together in oneness in Christ Jesus. This is what is true of us as a community. There is no social distinction among us. It doesn't matter your ethnic or cultural background. It doesn't matter how much money you make. It doesn't matter whether you think of yourself as religious or non-religious or whatever. In Christ we are one. **Christ is all and Christ is in all.**

That's the great mystery of what happens when people who believe in Jesus Christ come together. This is what we enjoy as a community and it's actually what our world is after. People want to live in a world where we can be different but come together as one. This is the goal of modern politics. It's why people consider tolerance to be the highest value in our culture. This is the heartbeat behind most modern social movements; a diverse community where people come together as one.

We agree with this goal, but we proclaim with the Bible that there is really only one way to get there. It's not going to happen by spreading democracy in the Middle East. It's not going to happen by relegating religious life to the privacy of people's homes. It's not going to happen by everyone realizing that we're all just the same. The only truly authentic way that diversity is united is around the person of Christ. Here there is not Greek or Jew. Here

Christ is all. Here Christ is in all.

What a grand conclusion to Paul's instructions about demolishing the old house. That old wreck has been knocked to the ground and now we have a vision of what might be built in its place. This is the type of community that we all long for. We long for a place where it doesn't matter your background or ethnicity or personality or job. We long for a place where you can come, be honest, and find connection together in Christ; a place where Christ is all and Christ is in all.

This is what we long for. This is why I'm a pastor—because I've caught a vision of this and it has changed my life. I have seen what Jesus has done for the world and how it can transform individuals and how it can transform a community. This is why people come to our recovery ministry and our men's groups and our high school group because they experience a taste of this reality. Next week we'll see more of how we get there. What kind of house we build on top of the wreckage of our old lives and how Christ enables us to do that.

## Conclusion

We've seen the first two parts of a classic *Extreme Home Makeover* episode. We've taken a tour of the old house and we've seen it torn down. Paul has shown us the kinds of sins that creep into our community and how destructive they can be. Sexual sins. Relational sins. We can't be the church with this stuff going on among us.

But Paul has shown us how to lay these things aside; how to put them off. It all begins with the truth. Confession. Honesty. Repentance. We need to embrace truth as a community. As we do, we find that it leads to great freedom.

May we be a community that refuses to lie to each other. May we stop hiding what we are terrified to reveal. May we stop misleading each other with versions of the truth. May we have the courage to find out what really is true of us in deep relationship. Then, may we experience together the oneness of a community, free from social distinction, and enjoy Christ's constant presence among us. Reject the world of lies. Embrace truth. That is walking in the mystery of Christ.

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## Interpretive Translation—Colossians 3:5-11

So stop doing all those things that only make sense in the earthly realm: sexual immorality, impurity, acting only with your interests in mind, wanting things that are bad for you, and wanting more of everything. All of these things amount to forgetting about God and worshipping something else. Don't forget that God's terrible anger will come to destroy all these things. Of course you did these things when you only knew about the earthly realm, but now your life is spiritual. So you have to let go of all those selfish attitudes: anger, hating people, wanting to hurt them, denying who God is, and talking in a way that tears down the beauty of the things God has created.

Because you know Christ, you can put these things behind you by telling the truth. You're able to do this because you've died to all those things. You don't live in that realm any more. Your new life in Christ defines you. That new identity is what is growing within you as you become more and more like Christ.

In this new realm, no one is defined by earthly categories. Your ethnicity doesn't define you: American, Asian, Indian, or Hispanic. Your religious affiliation doesn't define you: reformed, charismatic, emergent, Protestant, or Catholic. Your social class doesn't define you: engineer, teacher, doctor, blue-collar, or recovering addict. These labels don't make sense in the realm of Christ because Christ is all that matters and Christ lives within everyone.