

## TO KILL A ROACH

Colossians 3:5-9

14<sup>th</sup> in the series, “Roots”, on Colossians

### INTRODUCTION

How do you feel about cockroaches? Just the thought of them makes me shiver. They present a health risk, but even if they didn't they could just ugly you to death. The problem is they are some of the hardiest creatures on earth. They can be notoriously difficult to eradicate. December 18, 2003 the Associated Press reported an incident that occurred here in San Diego. Aurelia Oliveras was fed up with the bugs in her small home. She had been fighting a battle with them and losing, so it was time for “Arm-bug-geddon.” Aurelia decided to use bug bombs, aerosol fumigators, to rid her home of bugs. The bombs cover a 600 square foot space. Aurelia bought 19 of them and set them off in her home of less than 500 square feet. A pilot light from the water heater ignited the fumes resulting in an explosion that blew the back door off, knocked the south wall into a neighboring house, tore huge holes in the roof and flung Christmas decorations, glass shards and nails from the walls out like shrapnel. Fortunately no one was injured, but the damage was estimated at \$150,000. Amazingly, some cockroaches survived.

There are spiritual cockroaches. They are a spiritual health risk, and they can be even more difficult to eradicate than physical cockroaches. Unfortunately we all have a spiritual roach problem. We will learn about dealing with this in Colossians 3:5-9. As we look at this passage you may find yourself pondering a question that I hope we will answer at the end of this talk.

### PREMISE: WE ARE TO BECOME SNIPERS

Paul says there are some things we are to “put to death.” In other words, there are some things that we are to kill. The things Paul lists are very much alive in our society today. So imagine yourself as a sniper. You are given a target list. These are things we are to shoot on sight. They are part of the old life that died, the one we left behind in Christ because we longed for something better. These things are disease carriers, something you want no part of.

What we are shooting at is described in the NIV as “whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” The Greek text literally says “your members of the earth.” This is like Romans 6:13 where Paul wrote, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness.” Literally he said there “Do not offer your members to sin.” He pictures our “members,” our bodies, organs, eyes, ears, brains, mouth, arms, legs, and so on, being used to carry out sinful actions. Colossians 3:5 is similar. He's saying, “kill this use of your body parts for actions that are worldly, not governed by the “things above”

he mentioned in verses 1-2. He will proceed to give examples of the kinds of things he means. He lists 4 main ideas.

## PAUL IDENTIFIED FOUR TARGETS

### *Unrestrained Sexuality*

In verse 5 Paul rattled off a list of words that all have to do with sexuality. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust and evil desires. I do not believe the point was to define all these words and have each one target a specific behavior or attitude. Rather it was to point out that sexuality as they had practiced it prior to coming to Christ needed to be a high value target for the Christian snipers of that day. This is not a list of taboo behaviors and attitudes, rather a description of the whole approach to sexuality. It needed to change in their lives.

In that part of the world in the first century there was not one monolithic culture. The ancient Jews had a very different moral standard when it came to sexuality than most Gentile cultures. However, Colossae was a primarily Gentile church, and their culture had a lax sexual morality. Demosthenes, the ancient Greek orator and statesman, said, “We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for our day to day bodily needs, but we have wives to produce legitimate children.” In many of the cultures, part of their idol worship involved visiting temple prostitutes. This was not just accepted, it was *encouraged*. It was seen as good religious activity. The culture was not necessarily the wild, wild west of sexuality, but it wasn’t far from it.

Paul was saying that lax attitude had to go. Shoot it down as quickly as possible. The right view of sexuality was that it was to be confined to the marriage relationship. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” That’s pretty clear. Keep the marriage bed pure. In Ephesians 5:3 Paul wrote, “among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

Clearly this command is appropriate in our society today. What happens in Vegas doesn’t seem to stay there. It’s happening everywhere. Our culture is hyper sexualized. You cannot watch television or movies without being inundated with messages that you should be having lots of sex with lots of people, and if you’re not you’re a loser. You can’t even check out at the grocery store without being assailed by multiple magazines promoting sex.

Our daughter, Carissa, had a class on creative writing when she was working on a Master’s degree at SDSU. The prof assigned them to write a scene where two people

encounter each other in a room and have to resolve a conflict. Carissa wrote an intriguing little spy story involving a man and a woman having to escape from people trying to kill them. The prof admitted that the writing was excellent, but said it was an example of what not to do because it hinged on a good versus evil idea, which he claimed is outdated, and because the man and woman should have had sex.

### ***Insatiability***

Next on Paul's list of targets is greed. Paul rips off 4 terms relating to sexuality then suddenly seems to switch gears to talk about greed. Actually, I don't believe he switched gears. The Greek word translated greed was *pleonexia*. It sounds like some sort of disease. I wasn't feeling quite right but I never expected this! "My doctor diagnosed me with acute *pleonexia*! Is it terminal?" In one sense it is a deadly disease, but it is not a physical condition. The word meant the drive to have more. It means to be insatiable. To never be satisfied, to always think you need more. In his commentary on this book David Garland wrote that the word, "refers to the haughty and ruthless belief that everything, including other persons, exists for one's own amusement and purposes."

So this insatiable attitude comes into play both in regard to money and to sex. Never satisfied, always wanting more for self. And the heart of it, as Garland pointed out, is to think that all that exists is here to serve my desires and purposes. So I can use other people to meet my needs.

The idea that other people exist to meet my needs is what is driving much of the so-called sexual revolution. The flood of sexuality in our culture is driven by a mindset that is about gratifying self, even at the expense of other people.

### ***Fury***

The next issue Paul brings up is anger in its various forms: rage, malice, slander, filthy language, which most scholars believe refer to abusive speech. Paul brought up anger not because people in that day were especially prone to it but because it is consistent in all human experience. Anger is at the core of the problems of human relations. Why has there been such a long and consistent history of violence and war? It is because anger resides in the heart of humans.

We may not think we're particularly angry people. However, this is a common human trait. It is in there. Just poke us the right way and the anger comes out. Psychologist and author Raymond James Richmond says, "We grow up with anger right from the beginning of life." He's right. What happens when a baby doesn't get what he or she needs? Does the infant politely say to Mom, "Mommy dearest, I'm rather hungry. When you get a chance would it be terribly inconvenient for you to provide me with

sustenance?” No, typically they howl like a Banshee in a bad mood. They are angry and they’re going to let everyone within a 25 mile radius know about it.

Christmas Day, 2013, Laurie and I flew back east to visit Carissa and Michael. This was a unique flight because we had to take Lily Belle with us. Lily is their rabbit. That was an interesting experience, one I have no desire to repeat. There were some humorous moments. When we boarded our flight there was a very young boy who was already unhappy about being on an airplane. There it was. He didn’t want to be confined in a metal tube and he was angry about it. He was spewing that anger on the entire contingent of passengers. He was screaming as though someone was pulling his fingernails out with pliers. Thinking she might help as we were heading to our seats Laurie held up Lily Belle to the boy and said, “Look, see the bunny?” She hoped to calm him down. The kid didn’t even blink. He just kept wailing. I said, “Well, that didn’t make him happy.” A lady sitting a couple of rows back said, “It made *me* happy, ... I *love* the bunny.” My point here is that young child was angry because he was not getting his way. You see that everywhere you go. Who teaches kids that? No one. It is our natural instinct, one that has to be curbed by parenting.

David Buss is a professor at the University of Texas. He had his students do an assignment relating to anger. He asked them if they have ever thought seriously about killing anyone and tasked them to write an essay about that question. He was shocked to find that 91% of the men and 84% of the woman had thought seriously about it. Some described in their papers the elaborate plans they had made to carry out that desire.

Search Factory, a marketing consulting firm, did research on top Google searches. One disturbing discovery was that on average there are 1900 searches *every month* on “how to get away with murder.” There are 1000 searches every month on “how to hide a dead body.”

In every group of humans there is division, gossip, backbiting, criticism and conflict. It is there in your neighborhoods, your schools, your jobs, your teams, even your families. It even rears its head in churches. Behind all of that is anger, whether we admit it or not. James 1:20 says, “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” Most concerning of all is that Jesus said in Matthew 5:22, “anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment.”

### ***Dishonesty***

Paul next said, “Do not lie to each other.” Why did Paul pick on lying? The basis of relationship is trust. Dishonesty destroys trust. It causes us to pull back and protect ourselves from the untrustworthy person. It instantly tends to orient us away from loving and giving to that person to protecting ourselves from them.

Did you ever watch the television show *House*? The central character, Gregory House, was a brilliant doctor, who unfortunately was utterly selfish and incorrigible. But one thing he repeated over and over was a statement about human nature. “Everybody lies.” He insisted that it is characteristic of the human race to lie. That is a biblical assertion. In Romans 3:13 Paul described the human race by saying, “their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”

Researcher Dan Ariely did an extensive experiment on honesty. He gave subjects some math puzzles and told them they would be paid for all the ones they were able to correctly solve. He had them grade their own paper, report their results, then put their papers in a shredder. What they didn’t know was the shredder didn’t actually shred their papers. The researchers collected them to find out if the subjects accurately reported their results. They did this test all over the world. They tested 30,000 people. The average score reported was six problems solved, but the truth was the subjects actually only solved an average of four. In other words, the average was to lie.

## IMPLICATIONS

### WHAT DO THESE TARGETS HAVE IN COMMON?

The mention of “insatiability” gives us a clue. At the heart of it according to Garland was the idea that “everything exists for one’s own amusement and purposes.” In other words, we are looking to satisfy ourselves and our desires, to get what we think we want. At the heart of the insatiability problem is an obsession with self. The rampant sexuality thing is driven by the same idea. It is not about making the world a better place. It is not about bringing blessing to other people. It is about me getting pleasure, me getting what makes me feel good. It is about self.

When it comes to anger it is the same thing again. Listen again to Raymond Lloyd Richmond. He says, “All anger is, at its core, a dark and cruel wish for harm to come upon the person who hurt you.” My anger is always driven by taking care of me. If there’s no harm or affront to me, there won’t be much anger. Once again, the heart of the thing is self.

Finally there is lying. Is it not obvious that when we lie it is to take care of self? At the core of all of this is dedication to self. Paul says that is part of the old life, the one we’ve been freed from in Christ.

### WHY ARE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE SO HUNG UP ON SEX?

In 1894 a woman named Ruth Smythers, wife of Reverend L. D. Smythers, wrote a book for Christian young women who were about to get married. She called it

*Instruction And Advice For the Young Bride.* In it she said marriage is wonderful for young women but warned they must “pay the piper” by facing “the terrible experience of sex.” Her cardinal rule on sex was “give little, give seldom, and above all, give grudgingly.” She wrote, “A good wife should expect to have reduced sexual contacts to once a week by the end of the first year of marriage and to once a month by the end of the fifth year of marriage. By their tenth anniversary many wives have managed to complete their child bearing and have achieved the ultimate goal of terminating all sexual contacts with her husband.” Wow, I feel sorry for poor old Reverend L. D.!

An ancient rabbinic tradition said, “if a man wants to keep his mind on the law, he should not walk on a road behind a woman... whoever crosses a river behind a woman has no share in the life to come.” Wait, you’ll go to hell if you cross a river behind a woman? Did I hear that right?

Hold on. Back in Genesis 1:27 we find this: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” Male and female. What do suppose he expected to happen? Do you think he was shocked and outraged when he saw what Adam and Eve had gotten up to in the Garden of Eden? Did he say, “Well I didn’t know they were going to do *that*!”? No, in fact in the next verse he *commanded* them, “be fruitful and multiply.” When he said multiply he wasn’t talking about working on their math tables.

Consider Genesis 1:31. Throughout Genesis 1 after every act of creation it said, “And God saw that it was good.” But after creating man and woman, giving them sex, it says, “God saw all that he had made and it was *very* good.” God thinks sex is so good that he *orders* Christian married couples to have sex. 1 Corinthians 7:2-3 says, “Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.” The marital duty he is talking about is sex. Those verses *command* husbands and wives to meet each other’s sexual needs. In verse 5 he said, “Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time.” If a married couple is not having sex they are disobeying God! Apparently Ruth Smythers didn’t read this.

Well, okay, but why limit it to husbands and wives? Why do you make such a big deal about that? Our society tells us that religious moral strictures like this one limit our freedom, our enjoyment of life and make us feel unnecessarily guilty. Mary Calderone, who was a major architect of the approach to sex education that is found in most schools today, taught that it is essential to break children free from biblical views of morality because in her words, “religious laws or rules about sex were made on the basis of ignorance.”

Her ideas and the message of our culture have roots in the thinking of philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and Sigmund Freud that said sexual restraint injures our health. Margaret Sanger, who helped shape our culture's view of sex with her book, *The Pivot of Civilization*, claimed that unfettered sex was the only method by which a person could find "inner peace and security and beauty." She asserted that if the prohibitions of Christianity could be removed, most of the larger evils of society would disappear. How's that working out so far?

The acid test of a philosophy is how it works out in life. Does it deliver on its promises? Is rampant sexuality bringing inner peace, freedom and joy? Miriam Grossman is a psychiatrist at UCLA. She published a book titled *Unprotected* about the unfettered deluge of sex that characterizes universities today. She initially published it anonymously because she knew it would create a backlash. In it she details the devastating consequences of sexual promiscuity. She sees what she calls wreckage of lives on a regular basis and cries out to stop it. It is destroying people!

In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* Meghan Cox Gurdon wrote, "The sexual revolution did not make us whole by liberating our true... selves, but taught us to carve precious little bits off ourselves, wasting away our capacity for lasting marriage and deep sexual bonding." I could throw more quotes and statistics at you, but here's the bottom line. Our culture is buying a lie. It is destroying lives and families.

There are two powerful reasons why God limits sexuality. First, as followers of Jesus, we are called to do what he did. We are called to love. The true meaning of love is exemplified by the cross of Jesus. It is giving up self to serve others. Christians are called by God to always put the rights and needs of others first.

In his commentary on Ephesians, C. Leslie Mitton wrote that followers of Jesus are to take "responsibility for the true welfare of the other person involved in the relationship and for any child who may be born in consequence of it." To do anything else is not loving a person, it is using them for your own gratification. It destroys relationships! We are called to love people and if we use them for our own gratification we are not loving them. For any of you guys who might be using pornography this means you. You are not loving others.

Second, God limits sexuality because he loves us. He has given us a gift and he wants us to experience it to the fullest. Laurie and I bought a new car six months ago. That car came with a Bible. Well, not a literal Bible, but a book instructing us how to use the car. It is a thick book. In it are commands about what kind of fuel to use in the car, to change the oil, rotate the tires, what kind of tires to use, change the coolant, change the transmission oil and on and on. Frankly, that book is bad. It limits my freedom to do

whatever I want. It makes me feel guilty if I don't obey it. What if I don't want to put oil in the car? What if I don't feel like rotating the tires? You get the point. The book isn't ordering me to do things just to make my life difficult or limit my fun or my freedom. It is telling me how to get the most out of my car. God's instructions on sex are about how we can get the most out of it!

Here's the reality Hollywood doesn't tell you: The people who report the most frequent sex and the most satisfying sex are married. In 2010 the *Journal of Family Psychology* reported a study of 2035 married couples, and among questions asked was when they first had sex. Of those couples 336 reported they had saved having sex until they were married. Here's where it gets interesting. Those couples ranked significantly higher in the quality of sex, in their relational stability and in their overall relationship satisfaction than the others. In other words, doing things God's way provided them with more and better.

Isn't it curious that our world tells us that the sex drive is natural and is so strong it cannot and should not be resisted? To do so is to ruin our lives, rob us of peace and joy and fill us with unnecessary guilt. Yet we have an even stronger natural drive. It is the pathetic but powerful and constant need we all have for food. Does our world tell us that we must give that drive free rein, that we must obey its urges and eat whatever we want whenever we want? If it feels good, do it, right? What feels good? To me it is to obey my urges and to eat all the potato chips, doughnuts, ice cream, cookies, pizza, burgers and fries that I want whenever I want. Is our world saying we should most certainly do that because it is natural? Absolutely not. You hear a constant drone of preaching that you should never eat any of those things and that instead you ought to live on a steady diet of broccoli, kale and quinoa. We are told that if you give in to those urges to eat things that actually taste good you will become obese, get diabetes, and your body will have a race between a heart attack and cancer. Obedience to your natural urges will destroy your health. Does that not suggest that if we want to be healthy it will *require* discipline and the restraint of some of our natural urges?

Some religious people are indeed hung up on sex, and for all the wrong reasons. All I can say is may their tribe disappear. I am not among them. I am not hung up sex. I just want the most out of it and am not falling for the lies our world is trying to sell. The way to enjoy it the most is by obeying God's instruction.

#### HOW ARE THESE COMMANDS DIFFERENT FROM LAW?

If you have been with us in our study of Colossians you surely must be asking yourself the same question I asked when I looked at this passage. In 2:17-23 Paul had slammed the Law commands that said, "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." He pointed out in verse 23, "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-



imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” They don’t do any good in making people truly good and holy. But now Paul seems to turn around and say, “Don’t give in to unrestrained sexuality, don’t be greedy, don’t be angry and don’t lie.” How is this going to help? Isn’t he doing what he just said doesn’t work? Aren’t these commands going to be just as ineffective against sensual indulgence?

The Law with its "do not handle, do not taste, do no touch" rules is about the way we think you can keep people in line. If you want them to obey the rules you have to take a carrot and stick approach. Here's the reward if you're good, and here's the punishment if you're bad. It's the *Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town* method. You'd better watch out, you'd better not cry, you'd better not pout, I'm tellin' you why. Santa Claus is comin' to town. He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice, and hoo boy, you sure don't want to be naughty. In all the world that's how things work. If you want people to be good offer them the carrot and threaten them with the stick.

However, note the word “therefore” in verse 5. Paul is telling us to do these things on the basis of something that has already happened. Our life has been hidden with Christ. Christ is our life according to verse 4. We seek to obey these instructions not in order to get God to love and accept us. Paul has powerfully made the point in chapter 2 that God has already settled that issue in Christ. We obey these commands not so that God will love us but because he already does. We’ve already been given a new life. That is a crucial difference. God is not threatening to whack us over the head with the stick. We are naughty, but Jesus took the stick for us, so that's all done. We do not have to prove or earn anything! That totally changes the equation.

Note the statement in verse 6 “because of these the wrath of God is coming.” That sounds like a warning that God is going to someday rain down judgment on those who do all those things Paul is telling us to avoid. It sounds like God is coming to town, and he's mad. It sounds an awful lot like, "just wait till your father gets home, you're going to get it," doesn't it? However, the verb is a present tense and I think should be translated “because of these the wrath of God comes.” Okay, but that still sounds like, it's because of these things that God brings down the hammer. It could mean that, but it could also mean that it is happening right now. This is consistent with Romans 1:18, which says, “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people.” "Being revealed" is an interesting way of saying that. It's saying, "his wrath is there, right now and he's letting us see it." It is happening right now. People are experiencing the wrath of God because of these things.

You have to go on in Romans 1 to see what Paul meant. In verse 24 he said, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the

degrading of their bodies.” In verse 26 he wrote, “God gave them over to shameful lusts.” In verse 28 it says “God gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done.” God pours out his wrath on people by letting them pursue their desires to their hearts’ content, and letting them experience the results of their choices. Those choices do not produce life, they produce its opposite. They do not end in peace, joy, love, fulfillment, hope and blessing. They end in frustration, anxiety, war, anger, bitterness, hopelessness and separation from God. If we don’t put oil in our car, Honda isn’t going to send the car care police to slap cuffs on us and haul us off to jail. But we will get the consequence of our car breaking. If we disobey God he is going to let us do that and allow us to experience the consequences of our choices, and that is the loss of love, joy, peace and all of the rest of the life we long for.

Motivation is the key to whether we will have a change of heart that will enable us to kill the roaches. For years when he was younger, Laurie and I watched our son, Toby, fail to come close to fulfilling his academic potential. He got very good grades all the way through high school and college, but he did it while putting out almost no effort. At best he gave minimal effort. We would be dismayed to learn while he was away at college that he hadn’t even bothered to buy the books for some of the courses he took. He got A’s and B’s in some classes without even opening the book. It was obvious to both of us that he was way smarter than either of us, but he wasn’t trying very hard. He even admitted to us that for him, his college education wasn’t focused on the 3 R’s, but on the 3 F’s: football, fun and females. The result was his grades were always very good, but not nearly what he was capable of. We, being good parents, did all we could to force him to live by the law and do better, with the same effect the law always produces. Some outward obedience, but never totally buying in. It is a wonder, then, to look at him now. He is working relentlessly. He studies so hard it makes me weary just to think about it. He is working far harder than I ever worked, so hard I’m a little concerned that he won’t be able to keep going at this pace. What happened? There was one simple change. He found something that he wanted so badly that he is willing to work to the maximum to get it. He wants to be a doctor and he is pursuing that with great vigor. He is not working this hard to live by some law someone else is holding him to. This is coming from inside him, and the difference is a wonder to behold.

The choice before us is simple. Ignore God’s call to kill these targets, to do away with obsession with self, and what we get is the wrath of God in the form of the results of our choices. We get its total loss of real life. Or we can set our hearts and minds on things above, pursue God’s will with all our hearts, understanding that as we do so we will get what we desire most of all – glory to the God who loves us and experiencing a taste of life in his kingdom. We get the life we desire.