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## Sermon

### ***Planks and Sawdust***

**Colossians 3:8-17<sup>i</sup>**

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My son wanted to have some fun at my expense. We were in Dubai where cars drive on the right-hand side of the road. There was no danger from traffic, so I drove the short distance to the local shop. As soon as I went to change gear there was a burst of laughter from my son. I had reached for the gear stick with my left hand and simply found the car door!

Being a member of the Kingdom of God, being a Christian is like that. There are all sorts of automatic actions that must be undone and replaced with a different way of life.

And it is different!

Many of our values get turned upside down. Love your enemies, cut your hand off, pluck your eye out are all things Jesus said. The list could be much longer.

St Paul gives us another list, Anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lying are all to be put aside as a way of life and replaced with a new way.

Now I want you to notice two things about those lists. First is the radical, even violent, way that Jesus tells us to deal with these things. He is not asking us to literally cut off our hands or pluck out our eyes, He is saying don't tolerate these things in your life. Do everything in your power to rid yourself of them. They are dangerous for you and harmful to others. It is like driving on the wrong side of the road. I may get away with it for a while, but it will eventually lead to disaster.

Paul's list points us in a different direction to the second thing I want you to note. All his statements are person to person. They are all about how we relate to each other especially the downtrodden in Society.

Anger and rage can hurt others. What is the difference? The Greek word translated anger is "the long-lasting slow burning anger which refuses to be satisfied." (Barclay) Rage is the quick explosion which dies down as quickly as it came. Both have been forbidden us.

Malice is all pervading evil.

Slander, filthy language and lying all have to do with speech. Turning them into positives gives us a good set of principles to follow.

Christian speech must be kind. Ask yourself, "Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"

Christian speech must be pure. No foul language

Christian speech must be true. Silence can be as false as misleading words. Our tone of voice or the way we look can shape the meaning of what we are saying.

Jesus and St Paul both knew what many in our day have forgotten; we are going to live forever. We are designed that way. Jesus knows that to be fit to live with Him we must be like Him.

WE WILL NOT LIKE BEING WITH HIM IF WE AREN'T.

Please note we are to deal ruthlessly with ourselves. We are NOT to deal ruthlessly with each other. You remember Jesus saying, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own."

This leads us to see why Paul ends this paragraph by talking about different groups that existed in his time. It always seems to me to not quite fit. How does he get from the way I live to a list of people? The answer? In the Kingdom of God all people come as equals. There are no first- and second-class citizens in the Kingdom. All are equal.

In Paul's day, Greeks were the aristocrats of the ancient world *and they knew it*. The Jew looked down on every other nation. They were only fit for the fires of hell. Barbarians were obviously ignorant. Their speech sounded like baa baa to the Greeks. The Scythian was seen as little more than a wild beast by Josephus an historian of the time. Slaves were simply chattels. Life and death were in the hands of the slave's Master.

Now all of these were to be treated as equals by everyone else in the new society that was set up by Jesus and his followers. It was a society where all people were treated with respect and honoured for who they are. Beings who bare the image of God.

Let's update this. What is your attitude to Issus, Bike gangs, beneficiaries, Gay people, drug addicts, your next-door neighbour, and the family member who is a right pain?

Now please be clear, we are not being asked to AGREE with any or all of these. The challenge from Our Lord and His servant Paul is how do we **see** them. How we **perceive** them? What is our inner attitude to them?

That is when we change from driving on the left to driving on the right. That is the sea change that we all must go through.

Listen to this text from Proverbs 6: 16. "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him... Do you know what the first one is? Haughty eyes, or as one translation puts it, a proud look.

One of my favourite preachers said this, "Look down your nose at one other human being and you have GOD for an enemy."

Billy Graham was visiting President Clinton after the Lewinski affair. A reporter challenged him; how can you visit a man like that?! Graham's answer was a classic. "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin, God's job to judge and my job to love."

This is easy to understand and excruciatingly hard to do!

How do we go about it?

First decide which side of the road you are going to drive on.

Second, accept that all people are welcome in the Kingdom and that means YOU. You are in the Kingdom because of what God has done for you in Jesus death and resurrection. Provided you keep driving on that side of the road and correct any tendency to stray back over to the other side you will be OK. That is why we have the General Confession at the beginning of our times of worship. That is why we have Communion every week. We need to be reminded. All of us need to be cleaned up regularly.

Much better that you do that each day. If you are familiar with the Lord's prayer, praying it at least daily is not a bad idea.

Thirdly be honest, gentle but persistent with yourself. Wives and Husband and children can be very helpful. Listen when they point out an attitude or action that needs attention and correct it as soon as possible.

Fourthly, seek help if necessary. Prayer is available at the end of each service. Counselling is available if needed from the parish staff.

Finally remember that the Holy Spirit is at work in you and will patiently transform you from within. Often you will not recognise that a change has taken place. Those close to you will let you know. Listen to the children. Watch their attitude to you.

God is at work in you to transform you into the likeness of His Son.

What side of the road are you walking on?

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