

Flow of the Teaching

1. Setting the Stage (Colossians 2:20–23)

“Why do you submit to rules: ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’?”

Key Point:

Paul critiques *surface-level behavior management*.

Even harsh rules (“don’t do this!”) have “no value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

SCRIPTURE FLOW

Why Behavior Management Fails

Colossians 2:20–23

Rules alone (“don’t touch, don’t handle”) don’t change the heart.

They don’t address the *why* behind the behavior.

Discussion:

Opening Question

“When you think of addiction or repetitive sin patterns, do you think more about *willpower* or *wounds and meaning*? Why?”

- Why do we sometimes try to fix sin with rules or self-control alone?
- Why does that often fail?
- Why do you think behavior management (just “stop it” strategies) often fail to change addictive or sinful patterns?

Connection to addiction:

Trying to white-knuckle our way out of sin *without addressing the heart’s needs* will eventually break down.

2. The Root Problem: Old Patterns That “Feel Like Life” (Colossians 3:5–7)

“Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.”

Key Point:

Curiosity about our sin

Sinful behaviors—including addictions—are often attempts to:

- Manage pain
- Avoid fear
- Create control
- Feel chosen or safe

Even greed (*pleonexia*, a grasping desire for “more”) is called **idolatry**—a false refuge.

.Theological Parallel: Jesus and the Woman at the Well (John 4)

- Jesus does *not* excuse the woman’s sexual history.
- But He also doesn’t condemn—He offers *living water*.
- Her desire for love led to immoral choices, but Jesus addressed the *thirst*, not just the behavior.

Sin and Responsibility (Biblical Lens)

The behavior is still sin.

- Scripture repeatedly warns against drunkenness because it’s a *false refuge*.
- “Do not get drunk... but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

The core biblical issue isn’t just the Behavior itself, but that it becomes an **idol**:

- It promises peace God offers.
- It replaces the Spirit’s role of comfort and self-control.
- It prevents true healing by masking the deeper ache.

Those are valid needs seeking an unholy solution.

The gospel says:

“Your need for refuge and comfort is not sinful—but you’re seeking it in what cannot heal you.

Sin is often a solution the wounded part of us finds to sooth unbearable feelings BUT Soothing is not sanctification, soothing is not Salvation.

Discussion question:

- How can things like sex, alcohol, or even work become a way we try to soothe legitimate longings in illegitimate way

Moral Responsibility vs. Compassion for the Wounded

Here's the key tension:

- *Addiction language risks minimizing sin—“I can't help it.”*
- *Moralistic language risks minimizing pain—“You're just selfish and unholy.”*

The gospel holds both:

- *You are responsible for your sin.*
- *You are shaped by wounds beyond your choosing.*
- *You are invited into a story of redemption, not just behavior modification.*

Connection to trauma/addiction:

Paul isn't saying these behaviors are just “bad habits.” He's saying they are **false saviors**.

Naming the False Saviors

Colossians 3:5–7

Sinful patterns are **false saviors** trying to meet deep needs.

Old Self (False Refuge)	Legitimate Need	New Self (Christlike Refuge)
Pornography	Desire to feel chosen	Intimacy grounded in Christ & healthy relationships
Alcohol	Need for comfort/regulation	Holy Spirit's comfort & healthy emotional coping
Anger/control	Need for safety	Trust in God's sovereignty & patience
People-pleasing	Desire for belonging	Acceptance in God's family

Old Sinful Behavior	Legitimate (God-given) Need	New Self Christlike Characteristic
Sexual immorality	Desire for connection, intimacy, to feel chosen	Love, faithfulness, healthy intimacy Intimacy grounded in Christ & healthy relationships
Impurity	Longing for meaning, novelty, transcendence	Holiness, purpose, wonder in God
Lust	Desire to be desired, power, to feel alive	Self-control, being beloved in Christ
Evil desires	Desire for influence, significance, to matter	God-given calling, purpose, stewardship
Greed (idolatry)	Longing for security, safety, or abundance	Trust in God's provision, generosity
Anger	Desire for justice or to be heard, Need for safety	Patience, peace, righteous assertiveness, Trust in God's sovereignty & patience
Rage	Desire for control when powerless	Longsuffering, surrender to God's sovereignty

Malicious behavior	Desire to protect oneself or retaliate	Kindness, empathy, peacemaking
Slander	Desire to elevate oneself or deflect shame	Honesty, humility, speaking truth in love
Dirty language	Need to belong, connect through humor or defiance	Gracious speech, building others up
Lying	Fear of rejection, desire for acceptance and control of how others see us	Truthfulness, identity secure in Christ

Discussion:

- What “false refuges” have you turned to in hard moments?
- Can you name the legitimate need under the behavior?

3. Identity Shift: Remember Who You Are (Colossians 3:1–4, 10)

“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

“Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Key Point:

The solution to addiction/sin isn’t just suppression—it’s an **identity shift**.

Your old self (the one that tries to use substances, sex, or success to feel safe or valued) **died**.

“You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ.”

Our behavior changes when our **identity changes**.

Your new self:

- Is already chosen
- Already secure
- Already loved
- Being renewed day by day

Discussion question:

- How would believing “my life is hidden with Christ” change how you respond to temptations or triggers?
- What might change in how you handle temptation if you believed, *“My life is already secure in Christ”*?

4. Real Change: Put Off & Put On (Colossians 3:9–14)

“You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self.”

Paul uses **therapeutic language**:

- Put off destructive patterns (false coping mechanisms)
- Put on Christlike ways of relating: compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness

Key Point:

The old strategies (addiction, anger, control, lust) once helped you survive.

Now they must be replaced with *Spirit-empowered new patterns*.

Real transformation replaces old coping with new patterns empowered by the Spirit.

Discussion question:

- What is one old pattern God is calling you to put off?
- What new pattern or virtue might He be inviting you to practice instead?

5. The Role of Story (Optional Deeper Dive)

(If you want to connect to Stringer & Allender more explicitly)

Paul says the new self is “being renewed in knowledge.”

The Greek here (*epignosis*) suggests *deep, experiential understanding*, not just head knowledge.

Key Point:

Part of spiritual renewal involves:

- Learning your story (where did these patterns start?)
- Understanding your deep longings
- Surrendering those longings to Christ

Discussion question:

- Have you noticed certain situations or emotions that tend to trigger sinful or addictive patterns?
What might those triggers be revealing about your deeper needs?
- Have you noticed patterns or emotions that often trigger your struggles?
- What might those triggers reveal about deeper longings or wounds?

Closing Reflection or Prayer Prompt

“Lord, reveal the false saviors I turn to when I feel afraid, unseen, or unworthy. Teach me to put off these old ways and to put on the new self, rooted in my identity as Your beloved.”

DISCUSSION GUIDE — Colossians 3 & Addictions/Sin: Understanding the Deeper Story

Big Idea

Sinful behaviors—including addictions—are not random acts of rebellion but disordered attempts to meet legitimate, God-given needs.

The gospel doesn’t just call us to stop sinning—it calls us to uncover deeper longings, surrender them to Christ, and live from a new identity.

