

Killing Sin

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Date: 19 January 2025

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] Hamish, one of our elders, is going to come read for us as we read from the New Testament, from the book of Colossians, Paul's letter, chapter 3, verses 5 to 11. 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 the word of the Lord. Amen.

We started a new series last week called Practicing the Christian Life, and so the hope is to do this every January for about a month, and that's to look at one of Paul's lists. So Paul has these lists all throughout his letters more than six times, where they're focused entirely on how to change, and so he gives you ethics, he gives you commands, he gives you all sorts of thoughts about what it means to change, to become more like Jesus. And so I hope to do one of these every January. And so this month we're doing Colossians 3, which is one of the foundational lists of how to change. And so there's a Christian word for this, a Bible word for this, and that's the word sanctification, which means to become more and more like God. And so the idea here is that the best change, the change that we really need, that every human really needs, is to become more like God.

[2 : 0 5] So integrity, the character of God. And so when Christmas came, when the incarnation came, we see that what it really looks like to look like God is found in looking like Jesus, that he shows you the character, the integrity, the fruit of the Spirit lived out in the Gospels.

And so that's the change that we all need. It's the most important kind of change. It's to say that the spiritual matters more than anything else. So you can get a gym membership this year and change physically, and that's good. You can learn a language and change intellectually, and that's a great thing. I wish I knew more than one.

But the change, the most important change we actually need, every human is made to be conformed, to become like Jesus. And so that's the focus of these lists, and so that's what we're looking at.

So this week, verses 5 to 11, we looked at verses 1 to 4 last week. We're going to see here the depth of the change that's needed first.

First, there's a depth to the change we need, and then the reason, the intellectual reason, perhaps, of that change, and then how we can do it. So another way that we can seek it today.

[3 : 1 3] So let's think about it. First, the depth of the change that we need. How deep, another way to say it is, how deep does this problem go in us that we need change from?

So Paul says here in verse 5, put to death. Now, this is a clear command, put to death, but I think the translation is a little soft because it's good, it's true, it's right, but it's the word, the Greek word uses the prefix *necro*. So in medical terminology, you doctors, you nurses, you know this *necrology*, the study of dead tissue. It's corpse language.

So verse 5 says, kill, kill. So the King James Version, the old version of the English Bible says, mortify, make dead, make it a corpse. That's the word that he uses here. He's saying something extreme.

He's saying, I want to be able to metaphorically walk and step over the dead bodies of my vices. I want them to be a corpse. I want to step over the dead bodies of my gossipy words and my judgmentalism and my rage and my impatience and my lust and my money hunger. I want to be

able to step over those dead bodies. And then he says, put to death, make like a corpse these things in you. Put to death, the word he uses is the earthly. Now, is he saying that the things you need to put to death are the physical life, the things of the physical life? And that's not at all what he means. He's not saying here, he's going to list the very first one is sexual immorality, but he's not saying sex is evil. He's not saying don't participate in society or don't watch movies or something like that. Like that's the earthly. No, not at all. The earthly here for Paul, when you read across Paul, you realize that what he means by the word earthly is over desire or just the generic word lust for things in this world more than God. So the earthliness in us, the earthliness in us is when we want things in this world on earth, the horizontal, more than we want the vertical, more than we want God.

That's earthly. That's what he means by it here. It's a deep, look, it's a, here's an example. It's a deep longing for a boyfriend or a girlfriend far more than you want God. It's a deep longing for the fulfillment of sexual lust far more than you want God. It's a deep longing for success and money hunger and financial security far above your want of God. That's, that's what he means by earthly here.

[5 : 57] And so that means that he is talking about the depth of this problem, the depth, the deeps of this problem. And you can see that by looking at the list he gives you in verse five. So kill, make dead, make corpses out of loving things in this physical earthly life more than you love God. And look at this list. The first one is sexual immorality. And then it's impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Now there is only one action you can perform in all of this list, and that's sexual immorality. That's a, that's an outward action. It's pornea, this, this word that we get, the, the modern word. And the rest of these are not actions. You know, he's talking here about something deep. And he's saying that you can commit sexual immorality as a reference to any act of sex outside of the covenant, covenant bonds of marriage. But after that, he says, he gives you a list of what's going on deeper, like impurity. And he's telling you why that happens. He's giving you one example, sins of the hand, sins of the eyes, sins, sins of physicality. But he's saying, but the rest, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry. He's saying, look, the issue doesn't begin there with sexual immorality. It's way deeper than that. So why? Well, it's because of impurity.

Impurity is not an action. Impurity is a condition. It's a disease. He's saying sexual immorality sometimes happens because, because we have impure desire. We want things in this life more than we want God. And then he goes on from there and he says, uh, passion. That's a word for broken desires.

And then the very next word is evil desire. These are synonyms, evil desire. The old King James uses the word here for inordinate. He's translated inordinate desire, a disorder desire. You're wanting things, you're wanting good things, but you're wanting them way too much more than you want God himself. And so he talks, he uses the last two covetousness and idolatry. They're just synonyms.

Idolatry is the catch all word for this deep problem of misplaced desire. What is idolatry? What is covetousness? It's wanting things in this life far, far more than you want God, than you love God, than you have affection for God. He's saying that we have a desire issue that sexual immorality or greed or whatever gossipy words that they're, they don't start there. James, Jesus's brother wrote his book, the book of James and made this so clear. They don't, they don't ever start there. They start in the depths of the soul, these desires, and then they're given birth in the hands and the eyes and the actions in this world. And so he's saying that we've got a deep, deep problem that we've got to deal, deal with. You can, here's an example. You can, um, you can be envious of someone and you can look at their life and you can say, boy, I really, you don't, you would never say this out loud. You probably don't even say it to yourself, but deep down there's a desire where you think that is the life I wish I had. And in it, you may never act on it. You may never say a bad word about them, but there's a sinful desire. There's a broken desire deep down at the bottom of your soul that is creating total discontentment. And it's called covetousness. It's wanting what other people have that you don't have, that God has not given you right now. And Paul's saying that is what's earthly. Desire, disorder, desire, misplaced and broken desires is what's earthly. Now let me apply this. It's, it's, we've been applying it. It's a command. So it starts as application. That's the beautiful thing about this passage. It's application from the get go, kill the, kill what's earthly in you.

[9 : 47] But let me apply it a little more. First, first of all, do you see what this passage is saying? Um, last week we looked at verse one to four and verse one to four said, talk, talking to Christians

said, if you're a believer today, if you follow Jesus Christ and you look to him for forgiveness, you, you in the first century died on the cross with him. As he died, your sins, your guilt, your disordered desires, dead, paid for that day. If you're a Christian, you were raised with Christ.

That's already happened. That's all past tense. And so Paul is, you put verses one to four and verse five to 11 together. And Paul is saying that if you're a Christian, um, you're an emerald in God's sight. You're a diamond already in the eyes of the father. You're forgiven. You're cleansed. Your sins are no more, you know, it's, it's not that you were forgiven back then. It's that Jesus Christ continues to be your intercessor and mediator, that you have a holistic savior, a savior that never stops mediating. And that means the sins that you commit today, this morning, the selfish desire that you're already struggling with today. Jesus Christ right now is saying the debt is paid. And verse five to 11, and Paul says, and you, me, you're cleansed, you're forgiven, and you're full of evil desires at the same time. Boy, let me say that that is the source of mental health in this life. To be able to say, I'm safe, I'm cleansed, I'm forgiven, and nothing will ever change that before God. And I'm a mess, full of selfish desire, full of evil desire, incapable of terrible things. At the very same time, that is the source of mental health as we talk about mental health in the modern world. Look, it's, you're, you're 100% justified and forgiven, and you are a big sinner, total mess at the very same time. And that is contra everything that the contemporary culture wants to say about the source of finding happiness in this life. What we're taught in the contemporary world, I love to listen to a podcast called Modern Wisdom, and there's a lot of good wisdom in it about how to sleep better, and how to be more productive, and how to get your life back on track. And I learn a ton from it, and I'm always helped by it. But it's almost inevitable that every time at the end of the podcast, the expert says, you know what, the real issue is, you've got to say to yourself, you're a good person. You've got to say it. You've got to say over and over again to yourself, you're a good person until you believe it. And Paul comes and says, boy, the modern says, say to yourself, I'm a good person. But every person in the pre-modern world, every person even a couple generations ago knew that that was not true, that that's not true, that that's not the real source of health. Look, you don't even have to go to the Christians to know this. Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the greatest philosophers of world history and atheist, this is what he said. He said, most people act decent and respectable on the outside only because they're afraid of punishment.

[12 : 56] And Carl Jung, he said, the best of us know that there is a shadow, an ugly part to ourselves, and we try to banish it down to the unconscious realm to forget about it. And even Freud, what did Freud say? Freud said, there is a battle between conflicting personalities in our depths. We have almost, and that is why the deep part of us, we have almost zero control over our emotions.

Look, Christianity offers you liberation, and the liberation is to be able to say, I'm 100% forgiven and cleansed and loved by God the Father, and I have a lot of evil desire in my life. A big mess. Now, that means that the problem is so deep in us that some of us have to come today and realize that maybe we are hiding from the depths of who we really are. What did Luther say? He said, we're justified yet sinner. Those two things have to go together in this life. Justified yet sinner. But we can hide from that reality by our goodness. We can hide. We can seek self-salvation and pretend that that is not the case. Here's how it works. We can say to ourselves, you know, I don't commit adultery. I don't steal. I'm a respectable, decent person who even listens to hymns on Spotify sometimes throughout the week, right? And that, that line is incredibly earthly.

It's incredibly earthly because you're saying, you're saying, I think I live, I'm saved because I'm a good person. I, you know, I, I, I'm justified and I'm, I don't really have evil desire. I don't really struggle in the bottom of myself with who, with, with utter selfishness. There's a wonderful short story. Wonderful. That's relative. It's hard to read actually by Flannery O'Connor. It's called Revelation. And in it, she writes a story of this woman named Mrs. Turpin. And Mrs. Turpin, it says in the story that she thinks she's one of the good ones. Flannery uses words like she, she's got her act together. And on the outside, Mrs. Turpin says, you know, I'm even, I'm even wrinkle free physically on, on the outside and on the inside, I've got my act together.

She, she loves the fact that she's got a good relationship with her husband. She keeps her farm in pristine order. She sings gospel songs while she works. And then in the story, one day, Mrs. Turpin is accosted by a stranger in a waiting room. And the stranger comes up to her and says, quote, and only Flannery O'Connor could, could say it like this, quote, you are a warthog from hell. That is what

the stranger says to Mrs. Turpin. And Mrs. Turpin in disbelief says that a good, in disbelief, a good Christian woman such as herself could, could never be associated with anyone from the likes of hell. And she says this, I break my back to the bone every day working.

I do good for the church. I break my back every day working hard and I do good for the church. And one literary reviewer writes this, Ms. Turpin has the appearance of goodness.

[16:20] But as you read the story, the reader knows she is full of the pride of superiority. She thinks she is better than every single person she meets. She's seeking self-salvation. She measures herself against others. She thinks her salvation is found in her superiority. She's created her own system of merit. She has credited others with moral value points. And here's how she measures.

Her moral value system is based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education, and visibly good behavior. And so, of course, in her own system, she ranks well. But in God's system, where she has exalted herself as a judge, she is empty. She has evil desire, earthly desire, because she believes in her own superiority. Her superiority, her goodness, is her salvation. She's incredibly earthly, right?

Now, self-salvation is evil desire. It's when God is not your functional Lord. Your decency is your functional Lord. Your respectability is your functional Lord. Your theological knowledge is your functional Lord. Your quiet time in the morning is your functional Lord.

Your exalted position over the political group that you could never be a part of, the bad guys, that is your functional Lord. And Paul comes to here and says, you've not yet applied the gospel, the reality to who you really are, justified yet center at the very same time. And so, let me move on by saying this. To be able to say, I'm clean, I'm forgiven, God loves me no matter what, and I'm a terrible mess on the inside. Boy, that is liberation. And it's liberation that works like this. You are free in that to never look out at anybody in this world and say, those are the bad guys.

We're the good guys in here. Those are the bad guys out there in the city. And at the end of this passage in verse 11, Paul says, there is no Jew, no Greek. There's no distinction here. Scythian, slave, free person. He says, before the gospel, everybody's equal, lacking, and even in Christ, equally corrupt, equally struggling. You can never say the good guys are in here. The bad guys are out there. The other freedom it gives you is this. In Psalm 32, David says, when I pretended like I was a good person, my bones wasted away. When I pretended that I didn't struggle with sin all the time, it was like my bones were rotting from the inside out.

[18:54] But then he says, but when I confess my sins and I knew God had forgiven me, my shoulders were able to drop. You know, freedom came into my life. The ability to say, I'm a sinner. The ability, the freedom to say, I am a terrible mess and I'm capable of terrible things, even as a Christian, that is liberation. It's liberation. Why? Because the ability to confess before God and before others is what keeps you, is what keeps you growing. One of the greatest dangers we can face, one of the greatest dangers we can face is to be unwilling to confess our sins. If we hide, they grow. They grow and they grow. Secondly, briefly, sidestep, the reason for change.

Why should we care about this? Why should we care about this? Paul implicitly talks here about the reason for change. And Paul's speaking here to Christians, but if you're not a Christian today, especially would love for you to think about this with me for a moment. There's a presupposition in this passage. And the presupposition is that there is such a thing as evil. There is such a thing as greediness. There is such a thing as lust. There is such a thing as sexual immorality. So this is a list of sins. And Paul is assuming something. He's presupposing something, and that's that there is such a thing as objective moral norms in this world. That there is morality that stands bigger than our emotions. That stands bigger than just the way society feels about right and wrong. That there really is such a thing as right and wrong. And I just want to ask you, I just want to say to you that that reality is a major, major reason why you should believe in God and why you should be willing to come and ask forgiveness to God. Because there really is such a thing as absolute norms or morality that stands bigger than you, bigger than all of us. Sometimes people visit here to St. Columbus and they're invited, or maybe you've come in today off the Royal Mile because of our location. You're not a

Christian. You're exploring Christianity. You're thinking about it. And we love that. That's so good. I may it never stop. But sometimes I'm able to get to meet with somebody that's wrestling with stuff we talk about here. And sometimes people say, I can see why my friend invited me. I can see why people like this, but it's just not my thing. And sometimes I'd like to say to them, I'd like to say to you

maybe if that's what you're thinking today. I understand that, the subjective peace that you're looking for. You know, what you're saying is you've come and you've looked for an emotional peace in your life. And I get that. And you've not yet found it in this space for whatever reason.

Sometimes the Christians don't find it in this space for whatever reason, right? But what I want to ask is about not just the subjective, but what about the objective? Does God exist? Is there such a thing as moral normativity? And what is your standing before him?

So are you able and willing today to get up out of your feelings for a moment and ask, is there such a thing as moral norms by which these lists are written? Is there such a thing as sexual sin? Is there such a thing as greed? Do you believe in that? And if you do, if you do, if you're willing to say, I do think actually there's something wrong that no matter what society we're in, what culture we're in, what time period we're in, every single one of us can look at it every single time and say, that should not happen, that is wrong, that is evil, that is unjust, then you're presupposing, here's the reason, the intellectual part, you're presupposing belief in God. You're presupposing that God exists because there can be no absolute moral norms by which you think you should change unless there is an absolute person giving absolute moral norms. Otherwise, all normativity is subjective.

[22 : 57] It's nothing but our emotions and our feelings and our society collectively agreeing on it. And if that's the case, you can never look at another culture and say what they do is wrong because they've all agreed on it. But if you think there is a justice that's bigger, if you think that there is a reason for having an international court that judges all nations in some way, how could it be unless there is a justice, a moral normativity that stands bigger than my feelings? And if you believe that, and I bet you do, if you believe that, then you're presupposing belief in God. You can't believe in that. Do you have the courage to say that? There's a theologian in the States, famous story, where he was riding on the train from New York to Philadelphia. And on the train ride, he saw a little girl sitting on her mom's lap. And at one point, as little kids do, she got very upset and she reached up and she slapped her mom in the face. And the theologian wrote a book around that event. And he said, that is the condition of humanity. You see, if you say verse six, boy, we don't like verse six, verse six says, on account of these sins, the wrath of God is coming. But look, if you say, I don't think it's fair, I don't think it's just that God could come and judge me based on my lustful thoughts. It's just what harm am I doing to anybody? It's just my lustful thoughts.

It does no harm to anyone. It's not fair. It's not just that God would be my judge. Then what have you done? You've sat on God's knee. You've assumed there is such a thing as justice, a normativity that stands bigger than you.

In order to then slap God in the face with it. There can be no objective justice unless there's an objective justice giver, one who is absolute, that gives absolute justice to the world, right? You presuppose that which you reject. Would you consider that today? And understand that if you believe in any sort of moral normativity bigger than society, you are presupposing God's existence. And you are realizing you need to change. You need help. You need something outside of yourself. I think the truth, I think, is that we all know. We all look at our conscience. We all feel the weight of guilt. We all know that we are not the people we were made to be. We all know that. So finally, thirdly, not only the reason for change, but here also, how can you do it? The way to change.

So Paul says here, kill these things in your life. Sexual immorality and impurity and passion and lying and greed. He says, rid yourself of these things here in this passage. And he's talking here about this old word, the King James. I'll bring it up again. The King James uses the word to mortify, mortification. Kill these sins in your life. He's talking to Christians, to be sure, but he's talking to everybody too. And the way he's talking to everybody today is that in verse 10, it says, you've already put off the old self and you've put on the new clothing. It's a clothing metaphor. And if you read that language in the light of all of Paul, what you realize is what he's saying is it has already happened. If you're a Christian, it can happen for you. If you're not a Christian, that God can come and take the dirty clothes off your back of your guilt. Take the misdeeds dark, the evil desires, the covetousness, the idolatry off you, the filth off you, the dirty rags of clothing that you wear and will put on you new clothing. And the reason that that's possible is because in the middle of human history, Jesus Christ came, the son of God became a human, and he put your dirty, he, he, look, here's how it works. God, the son came and took your dirty clothes off you and he didn't throw them in the rubbish bin. He put them on. That's how the gospel works. Jesus Christ put your filth on. He wore it like clothing, your evil desires, the ones that you're still struggling with today. He wore it and he died for it. He died in it, not guilty of it, innocent, but yet wearing it for you so that today he can

put on fresh clothes for you. He can robe you in beauty and white. He can say you're an emerald, you're a diamond. In the eyes of God the Father, you're cleansed, you're forgiven forever. That will never change. And this is what makes Christianity so unique.

[27 : 35] That is the basis for mortification. That's the reason for change. It's not so that you can get new clothing. It's because God gives it to you in the gospel. He gives you the forgiveness that you can never earn. And so, lastly, as we close, verse 10, the language here is passive. He says, if you've taken off, if Jesus has taken off of you the dirt and put onto you his clothing, his beauty, then you are, you need to be, you are being renewed day by day. So, listen to that language with me for just a minute or two. It's passive language. You are being renewed day by day. This is Holy Spirit talk. This is how Paul talks about the Holy Spirit. And here's the tricky bit. What he's saying is, when you come to Jesus, you don't just get to change at a whim. This is why it's so hard.

The Holy Spirit has to do this. The Holy Spirit has to mortify your sins. And you cannot control the Holy Spirit. And you need the Holy Spirit to come into your life and to keep changing you and renewing you. You are being renewed. It's the work of the Spirit. And it goes at different speeds and different paces for different people. But then he says, and kill these things, and rid yourself of these things, and you should be walking over the dead bodies of your sins. You see that? He's saying it's passive, but it's active. It's the work of the Spirit, but you've got to do it. You've got to seek it. You've got to chase it. You've got to long for it. And next week, come back next week, because next week, as we combine this passage with verses 12 to 14, the positive side, I'll give you John Owens. I'm going to whittle them down. Don't worry. But John Owens' nine ways to do this. But there won't be nine, but it will be underneath the three. Okay. John Owens' nine ways to do this. That's the very practical. But look, I just want to give you the one, as we close, the one, the key to Christian change, the key that makes Christianity different than everything else on offer in the world.

Gospel change, what is it? It's that you're already forgiven. You're already cleansed. And so to seek this, to get rid of these things, what has to happen? You've got to be smitten.

You've got to be enthralled. You've got to be driven. You've got to experience the beauty over and over and over again of the love of Jesus Christ for you in the gospel.

That's the key to Christian change. You never graduate from the gospel. Instead, the key to Christian change, to mortification, to killing these sins in your life, these passions, lust, greed, whatever it may be, the key is to be over and over and over again smitten, to fall in love with Jesus Christ constantly. That's the key. You've already got the forgiveness.

[30 : 39] You've already got it. But what you've got to do to change, remember what's the depth? The depth is evil desire. It's something down in the bottom of the soul. The only way to beat it is to get better desires. Thomas Chalmers, you need an expulsive power in your life of new affection, greater affection.

You need to be smitten, struck by the beauty and love of God for you in your life. And so that just let me get 100% practical here. Sometimes you've got to sit around or as you're working, as you're washing dishes, whatever you're doing in your life, and you've got to think and ponder and meditate on the love of God for you at the cross until you believe it. And sometimes you won't start out believing it. Do you ever struggle reading the scriptures? Do you ever struggle in your quiet time?

Do you ever struggle in prayer to feel anything? Well, what it's saying is you've got to seek that renewal by saying it and saying it and saying it and focusing on the love of Christ for you and seeing the depth of your problem and looking at the cross through the eyes of faith until you're struck, until you're smitten, until you're afflicted, until you believe it. That's the depth of change, a greater affection, a better desire than the desires of your sin. And so I'll give you this experience in two people. And this is the last word. Blaise Pascal, we quoted him a month ago, but it's perfect to say again. Blaise Pascal was already a Christian, but the night of fire, this happened to him.

Mortification, how does it come? He talked about the, he experienced the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit as he meditated on the cross. And this is what he wrote down. We found this sewed into Blaise Pascal's pockets and his jacket that he wore every day after his death. He's the great 18th century philosopher, mathematician, invented the calculator. The year of grace, 1654, Monday the 23rd of November, half past 10 until midnight, fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not the God of the philosophers. Pascal was a philosopher, one of the greats, but not the God of the philosophers, not the God of the learned. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ, my God and your God, joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. I departed from him. I left him. I fled from him. I renounced him. I crucified him.

Let me never be separated from him. He is only kept securely by the way taught in the gospel. Renunciation, total and sweet, complete submission to Jesus Christ. May I never forget this.

[33 : 19] John Donne. John Donne, one of the master poets of the English tradition, early 1600s, he lived a crazy life, crazy life he lived. He had sins of youth, as they say. And John Donne became a Christian and he wrote poetry about God. And he writes about, he writes this, he writes about a world of failed lovers, sexual pleasure, my wit, my hope, my success, my plan for fame, my money. And he prayed this, oh God, seal, seal this bill, stamp this bill of my divorce to all these faint loves from my youth. Batter my heart, three-person God for you. Knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend me, that I may rise and stand. Overthrow me and bend your power to break me, burn me, and make me new.

Divorce me from these enemies. Untie or break that knot again and again. Take me to you. Imprison me, for I, except you enthrall me, never will be free. You got to say, Jesus, every day, lest you enthrall me. If you do not imprison me, enthrall me with your love, I will not be free. Let us pray. Father, enthrall us with the love of Christ as the basis of change. Mortify, kill the sins we struggle with. We want to step over the bodies, the corpses of our gossip and our lust and our addictions and our impatience and our rage problem and our money hunger and our greed and our love for our success far more than love for you and our boredom with the Bible, our boredom with you. We want to step over these things as if they're dead and we know today, Lord. Lord, that's not us apart from being enthralled by Jesus' love for us. Give it to us afresh, Lord, we pray. As we sing right now, as we sing right now, give this to us afresh that we would love, we would be so taken by your love for us. Greater affections we desire, and we pray this in Jesus' name.

[35 : 34] Amen.