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The Truth About Our Life in Christ

A Study in the Book of Ephesians

Pure Light

Ephesians 5:3-14

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Friday night I asked my daughter Ashley if she was nervous about going to Mexicali on the missions trip, and she answered by saying, “Well, yeah, kind of.” Well, that’s a legitimate answer to that question. You can be “kind of” nervous. But there are other questions that really shouldn’t get a “kind of” or “sort of” answer. One time I asked a couple if they were married, and they said, “Well, kind of.” I remember one time I asked a young lady if she was pregnant, and she said, “Well, sort of.” It seems to me that these questions should be in an either “yes” or “no” category.

That is really what Paul has been talking about in Ephesians 4 and 5—that there are those who are spiritually dead and those who are spiritually alive. We really are one or the other, and there shouldn’t be a lot of activity down the middle there. The problem is that, all too often, we are too much like Wesley in “The Princess Bride.” Wesley’s the hero in that story. At one point his friends find him and they think he is dead, only to learn that he is just “mostly dead.” And then he’s not functioning too well later that day, and he basically asks his friends to give him a break because he’s been “mostly dead” all day.

I think there are too many of us, as Christians, who live like we’re “mostly dead” or “kind of dead” or “sort of alive”—somewhere in that middle ground. Paul is saying that really shouldn’t be. The subject that he talks about related to this discussion is the topic of sexual purity. Those who are spiritually dead behave a certain way in the area of their sexuality. But those who have been made spiritually alive ought to be radically different from that.

I think we would all agree that it is troubling as we continue to see statistics that indicate there isn’t a lot of difference in behavior between those in the church and those outside of the church. Paul would say that certainly shouldn’t be the case. But I’m really not interested in statistics this morning. You can believe what you want about those. What I’m interested in is your heart and my heart, because ultimately we’re not a statistic—we are each a person who is going to stand before God and give an account. Each of us needs to examine our own heart—are we pure before God in this very important area?

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 5, and let us see what Paul has to say about an area of our life that is very personal, very private, and very important. Chapter 5, verses 1-2 talk about Christ’s love that caused Him to sacrifice Himself for the sins of others. Verses 3 and 4 are a complete contrast to that. You have the love of Christ that sacrifices, and you have lust, which leads to self-indulgence—just the opposite—and that is really what he is talking about. He says, “But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you as is proper among saints.” The word *immorality* is the Greek word from which we get our word pornography—it’s the word *pornea*. It really encompasses any type of sexual behavior that is displeasing to God. Impurity is similar to that. If you put the two together, you really just cover any type of thoughts or behavior that is offensive to God in this whole arena of sexuality. The word *greed* is not talking about greed as in money or materialism, but greed as in sexual greed. It is the same way Paul used this term in chapter 4, verse 19, when he

described those who are spiritually dead as being driven by greed. It is an insatiable appetite that is never satisfied—they are just driven for more.

Certainly we would say that does aptly describe our culture. There are people who are driven in the sexual arena to try to experience some sort of satisfaction, but it never happens. They are just driven for more and more and more. The reason it doesn't satisfy isn't really discussed in this chapter, but most of you are aware of the fact that I have written a book on this subject called, *All It's Meant To Be*. The book was an attempt to talk about this whole topic of sexuality from God's point of view, to help us understand why sex never will satisfy. Even in a marriage, it doesn't fully satisfy. It was never meant to. The book was written to help us understand why God created us as sexual beings and how that relates to our relationship with Him. It's a book for singles; it's a book for marrieds; it's a book for 15-year-olds; it's a book for 50-year-olds. I realize it may seem kind of self-promoting to mention my own book, but the motivation in writing the book was that, if people can learn what God has to say about the subject, it will help them. And my motive for bringing it to your attention is the same. I think understanding God's perspective will help us to live lives of purity. I know sometimes it is kind of embarrassing to buy a book that talks about sex. But I think in a sexually-saturated culture, every single Christian needs to understand what God says about this in order to walk in purity. So if this is a resource that helps, I'm just reminding you of that.

Paul is talking about sexual sin. The New International Version translates the last part of verse 3: "Let there be no hint among you of immorality or impurity." That's a very good translation of what Paul is saying. Let there be no hint of immorality or impurity—we ought to be squeaky clean in this area of our lives. Have you ever noticed that in various places in the New Testament the writers have lists of sins of the flesh—they just list them out. You can find this in Romans 1. You can also find it in 1 Corinthians 6, in Colossians 3, and in Galatians 5. In every single one of those lists, sexual sin is at the top of the list, because God understands this is an area of great significance that we do have to deal with. It's an area where we often can be led astray.

It isn't just our behavior, though. It is also reflected in what comes out of our mouth. Verse 4: "And there must be no *filthiness*." That's a word which means vulgar talk. It is what we might think of as locker room talk—of taking something that God values and making it dirty. That is what he is talking about. The second term there, *silly talk*, doesn't mean that we shouldn't have small talk, or a sense of humor, or have some fun. It is talking about silly talk in the context of sexuality. Literally, the Greek word is the word from which we get our English word "moron." So if you want to get right to the point, it is the talk of a moron—that's the literal translation. It really means taking what God considers to be of great value and completely devaluing it—making it seem silly or making it seem of no value. People talk about sexuality that way all the time.

The third phrase in verse 4 is *coarse jesting*. It is talking about someone who is witty, clever, humorous. Most of our comedians would fall into this category. But what they are doing, with their witty sense of humor, is devaluing what God considers to be of great value. They are promoting something that is offensive to God.

All those together are just talking about taking something that is extremely precious to God—that was given as a precious gift—and, basically, talking dirty about it, talking silly about it, dragging it through the mud, and making it seem like it is of no value. The opposite of that is to give thanks. That's what he says in verse 4—rather, we should be people who give

thanks. We understand this is a precious gift from God, and we appreciate and we value it. We're thankful for the gift, rather than dragging it through the mud with vulgar, silly talk.

I realize that many of you, every week, are out in the marketplace, or you're in the schools, and you have to listen to this kind of talk. You can't really escape it. It is there, and a high percentage of people in our culture talk this way about this subject. The risk, in that, is it begins to have an effect on us, and slowly we begin to buy into that same value system.

Listen to this poem by Alexander Pope, as he issues a warning we need to take very seriously:

Vice is a monster of such
frightful mien
That to be hated needs
but to be seen.
But seen too often
familiar with his face
We first endure, then pity,
then embrace.

- by Alexander Pope from *The Complete Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*, Henry Boynton, ed.

That is the slide that has to be avoided. We first endure, then we pity, then we embrace. In others words, we've bought in to this value system that is so offensive to God. Paul is saying it shouldn't be that way with us. Verse 5: "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man {*those three things we have already talked about—immoral, impure; the covetous is the greedy person*} who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Paul makes his case in Romans 1 that when we worship the creature rather than the creator, sex becomes our God, and we become idolaters. Whenever we commit sexual immorality before God we have become an idolater. We have said that sex is our god—that sex is more important to us than God. So God has been dethroned, and sex is put on the throne—that is the sin of idolatry. That is what Paul is saying in verse 5: "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

So what is Paul saying there? Is he saying that someone who commits sexual immorality cannot go to Heaven? The answer is, "No, that is not what he is saying." Remember back in chapter 1, we were told that the moment we trust Jesus Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit comes within us. The Holy Spirit is a down payment, a pledge, a guarantee of our salvation. He will guarantee us our redemption in the end, so our salvation is secure because of the Spirit's role in our life. But what he is talking about in verse 5 is the identity of those who are not in Christ—they are identified as immoral, impure, idolaters, covetous. That is who they are, and that is what identifies them. Therefore, that is their behavior; that is how they live their lives. And he is contrasting those people with those who are heirs of the kingdom. He is saying, "You know, those people aren't heirs of the kingdom, so that is why they live that way." But in the process of saying that, he is saying they live that way because they aren't heirs of the kingdom. Therefore, there ought to be a dramatic difference in the life of those who are. They live that way because they are spiritually dead. They live that way because they are in spiritual darkness. Why wouldn't they live that way? But the children of the King ought to be different from that.

It appears there were false teachers in Ephesus who were teaching these believers that

this whole concept of sexual sin was no big deal to God. They were promoting the idea that it really doesn't matter how you live your life—that God isn't all that concerned about sexual behavior, and so don't really worry about it. You remember, this was the city of Ephesus where they had the great temple to the goddess Diana, who was the goddess of fertility. So sexual immorality was rampant in that culture, and obviously it had leaked its way into the church.

In Acts 20, when Paul left Ephesus, the last thing he told the elders was to beware, because there would come false teachers up from among them. He said there would be wolves that would seek out people in the congregation to devour. It appears the wolves had arrived and they were teaching that this was really no big deal—that this behavior doesn't matter to God. So Paul is going to remind the believers that this sin is *very* offensive to God.

Verse 6: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things {*meaning this sin*} the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” In other words, Paul is saying those who commit those sins, who are identified by this type of behavior, will eventually suffer the wrath of God for that sin. So that tells us how offensive that sin is before God—it is deserving of His wrath. He is saying therefore, because that sin is so offensive to God, we, as His children, should not be partakers in it. That's verse 7, where he says exactly that: “Therefore, do not be partakers with them.” Paul is saying there are people who are in darkness, and they are identified by their behavior. They're immoral and impure. They're idolaters, and God is going to judge that sin. But those people aren't part of the Kingdom, and that's why they live that way. There ought to be a dramatic difference between them and those of us who are heirs to the Kingdom. We should not be partaking in that behavior.

In verse 8 he reminds us how radically different we are: “For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” There's a real contrast between darkness and light. Now, he doesn't say, “you were *in* darkness,” and he doesn't say, “you are *in* the light.” He says, “you *were* darkness...”—that was your identity, your nature, who you were. “You *were* darkness, but now you *are* light in the Lord.” He says, “Therefore, walk as children of light.” In other words, live the radical difference that Jesus makes.

Verse 9: “For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” Now, there's a mixed metaphor here, because you typically don't think of light producing fruit. But I think it is the image of the sunlight shining on the fruit trees and producing fruit. So the trees that are in the light produce fruit, and the fruit is goodness and righteousness and truth. That is evidence of the light—that we are light. And he says that is behavior that is pleasing to the Lord (verse 10). That's a contrast to chapter 4, verse 30, where it tells about behavior that grieves the Holy Spirit of God. It is important to understand, in this area of sexual behavior, that the goal is not to see how close we can get to the line without going over it. The goal is to see how pleasing we can be to the Lord in this area of our lives. So he says that is really what drives us—not operating down here “in-between,” “kind of,” “mostly dead,” or “partly alive”—but being driven to live a life that is pleasing to God.

The contrast of that is not bad fruit; the contrast is no fruit at all. That is what he says in verse 11. “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness.” In other words, a tree that is in the dark produces no fruit. So you have fruit, and you have no fruit. The contrast is between behavior that is characterized by goodness and righteousness and truth; and a behavior that is characterized by nothing of value at all—there is no fruit to it at all.

(v11): Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

Paul says that our responsibility is not to participate; our responsibility is to expose. When we, as the light, shine in the darkness, we expose the immorality around us. Now, to do that, you don't have to preach a sermon. You don't have to give somebody a lecture. You just have to be pure light. We live in such a sexually-contaminated culture that, when people choose to be sexually pure, they stand out as a beacon in the night. Jesus talked about this in John 3. He declared Himself to be the light of the world. He said that when He steps into the darkness, the light exposes the behavior in the darkness, and people don't like that. They prefer the darkness because their deeds are evil. As a matter of fact, they went to such an extent that they nailed Him to a cross to extinguish the light.

When you are in school, in your neighborhood, or out in the marketplace, understand that when you choose to be characterized as pure light, you will expose deeds in the darkness that Paul says we don't even want to talk about. But the pure light does expose them, and many people won't like that, and they won't appreciate that.

But there will be those, when the light shines into the darkness, whose deeds will become visible. In others words, they will see their sin for what it is. They will call out for a savior, and they will become light. That is what he says in verse 13: "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light; for everything that becomes visible is light." Verse 14: "For this reason it says, "AWAKE, SLEEPER AND RISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST WILL SHINE ON YOU." He is saying that we shouldn't be "mostly dead." We shouldn't be sleeping somewhere in the middle. You have been made alive. Rise! Live that life, and let the light of Christ shine in you, so that some of those in the darkness will see their deeds for what they are, call out for a savior, and experience salvation in Christ.

There is a reason why you weren't taken directly to Heaven the moment you trusted Jesus as Savior. That is because He has a job for you, and your job is to be pure light in the midst of darkness, that others might know His saving power. Put it all together and it is a pretty simple message. Paul is saying you are no longer spiritually dead. And because you are no longer spiritually dead, there ought to be a radical difference in your behavior in this sexual arena, and in your talk in this sexual arena, than those who are spiritually dead. You ought to be characterized by pure light. You ought to walk pleasing to God.

This would be a good time to examine your own heart. What is it that is in your heart with respect to this very important topic? Are you pure in your mind, in your mouth, in your behavior? Are you really living as if you are spiritually alive, or are there characteristics of someone who is mostly dead?

I don't know what you did a year ago, or last week, or last night. But God knows. God offers forgiveness and grace to those who come to Him and confess their sin. You can't undo that, but you can receive forgiveness and be made pure. What you *can* do, from this moment on, is make a commitment to be pure light for Christ—in your talk, in your mind, and in your behavior. I trust that we will choose to be pure light for Him.