6-9-19

Ephesians 5:3-5

In the last part of chapter 4, we were given a list of things that we, as Christians, should avoid. We were also given the proper action instead of what we were to avoid. Additionally, we were then given the reason to act in a certain way. In the midst of these, we were admonished to not grieve the Holy Spirit. In all this we see that the Bible is not simply a book of morality or moral teachings. It is a book that reveals God through Jesus Christ. This revelation of God is what brings about the desire for our moral behavior; We desire to please God.

Last week we talked about the first two verses of chapter 5. Paul tells us to imitate God; and the reason is that we are His beloved children, if we have accepted His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour. In just a few words, Paul gives the picture of the vast love God and Christ have for us and what a horrible event they endured to bring about our salvation. As human-beings, we owe God everything anyhow; as Christians, we owe God everything, including our eternal salvation. There is no justification for not giving Him our lives.

In our reading today, Paul goes into some very deep issues of sin and begins to tell of the consequences. Notice that they focus on the two areas of sexual immorality and greed. All sin will separate us from God and interfere with our fellowship; but some sins carry greater consequences and we can kind of think of them as “worse sins”.

1 John 5:16-17

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death.

These are designations made to help us think about sin; it is not as if we can get by with more “little sins”, I don’t want to give that impression. All sin damages our fellowship with God and we cannot please Him or carry out the work He has for us if we are living in sin. Yes, we all fail; that is why we are called to repent of our sins constantly; we need to have our feet washed.

We need to keep in mind that Paul is writing about sexual immorality and greed to a group of Christians; to the church in Ephesus; to us. We might wonder why he would write about such things to a group who should know better. There are several reasons; not the least of which is that even though we are Christians, we are still prone to sin and need constant reminding to avoid it.

Consider where they lived. Ephesus had a giant temple to the goddess Dianna or Artemis. That temple is considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemis was a fertility goddess. Everything associated with her was highly sexualized. People came from far away to participate in worship in her temple. They also brought money with them. In Acts 19, we read of Paul’s encounter with Demetrius who was a silversmith. He started a riot in Ephesus against Paul because he made money selling silver figures of Artemis. Not only do we see sexual immorality in Ephesus, we see greed. This was the city in which the Ephesian Christians lived; truly a cesspool of immorality.

Now consider where we live; in the United States; in the world. Isn’t sex worshiped here, strictly for carnal pleasure; for one’s own pleasure, regardless of the person being used to achieve it? And isn’t that type of selfishness really greed? I’m not sure Ephesus had anything on us as far as being a cesspool of immorality. At least they could get away from it in their homes; we have television and the internet that bombards us with this stuff constantly. There are always campaigns that tell us to be good, kind, to care about others, to do the right thing. Notice that these well-meaning teachings accomplish nothing. We are going downhill fast. The reason is that we try to have this morality stand by itself; divorced from God. Which brings us back to the Bible not being a book of morality, but a revelation of God. The morality will take place when it is attached to fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

When we, as the Ephesians were, are surrounded by these worldly influences, we face several dangers. One of the biggest dangers is that we see all these people around us having all kinds of fun and they’re getting by with it. Not only getting by with it, but encouraged by society to engage in this behavior. This feeling is nothing new; I encourage you to read Psalm 73. In this Psalm, Asaph begins to feel sorry for himself because of all the wicked having a great life. But he is reminded that God has set them in slippery places and they are doomed to destruction in the end. In our reading today in verse 5, Paul reminds us that the wicked will not enter the Kingdom of God.

Another danger is that having lived this kind of life prior to conversion to Christ, we may be tempted to go back to it; especially since it pervades the culture we live in. This is where we need to be careful with what we think about. It is easy to recall something we used to do that was sin; but if we allow ourselves, we begin to reminisce. In Matthew 5, Jesus teaches that dwelling on something in our minds is as good as doing it. So, if we think on evil, we have sinned, and we have opened ourselves up to increasing sin, such as actually engaging in the evil we once did. Paul is bringing these things up to help protect us from relapse.

Living among this constant evil, we are in danger of becoming deadened to it. We lose the sense of the ugliness of sin and its consequences. If it doesn’t bother us to see it, we are more likely to engage in it. Even our conversation can show the effect the world has on us. Keep careful watch on your words. It can be helpful to stop and think, “Would Jesus say that?” Remember, we are to imitate Him in all things; actions, thoughts, and words.

This is not just an individual reminder; this is corporate; this is for the church. What we have here is basically a call to be holy. Remember that the church is the bride of Christ and Jesus is purifying His bride so that she is presentable to Him. If we allow the ways of the world to infiltrate the church, we are working against Christ. As we look around the world at the church in general, we see more and more of the world in the church; the church acting more like the world in order to appease the world. This is not surprising.

2 Thessalonians 2:3a

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first.

That is the final Day of the Lord will not come until there is a significant falling away from the faith; the faith in Jesus Christ. Also,

1 Timothy 4:1

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Any teaching that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible is a doctrine of demons. We see that today, where many are putting aside the true teaching of the Bible and inserting teachings that fit what the world wants to hear. We, as a church of Jesus Christ, must, by the strength and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, stand against any of these teachings; against allowing apostacy in this congregation. Our desire is to stand before Jesus, as individuals and as a church body, pure and undefiled by the world.

For these reasons, Paul reminds the Ephesians and us to put to death any of these sins in our own body and to keep them out of the church.

In verse 3, Paul speaks of immorality and impurity. In the Greek, these two words cover every form of sexual intercourse that takes place, other than between a man and a woman who are married to each other. In this context of marriage, sex is a beautiful and bonding gift from God; it pictures or shadows a unity that was meant to exist between God and His people. Any other engagement in intercourse is an abomination against God’s gift and against God Himself. As Jesus taught in Matthew 5, even thinking about it in a lustful manner carries the same sinful weight as performing the action.

Along with these two Paul mentions greed or covetousness. In this context, greed can certainly be applied to immorality. In Deuteronomy 5:21, we read the well-known “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife”. Desiring another person simply for gratification is greed or covetousness. But greed goes much further in its overwhelming desire for anything. With the idea of greed, we often think of money or power, and this is often the case. But we can be greedy for anything. If our desire for anything pushes out all else, especially God, it is greed. It is good for us to occasionally stop and prayerfully consider what we spend most of our time thinking about. If it is something material or contrary to the Bible, we must seriously consider that we might be dealing with greed.

Let’s consider why these two sins are so serious. First, sexual sin.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Recall that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Because we are sealed with Him, because our body has become a temple of the Holy Spirit, what we do with our body matters. To engage in sexual immorality defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit. To become followers of Christ means that we have given ourselves to Him; we belong to Him; and we must always remember the incredible price that Jesus paid for us on the cross.

Next, in verse 5 of our reading, Paul tells us that greed or covetousness is idolatry. If we are greedy for anything, it has pushed God to second place and that is not a place God accepts. Just look back into the Old Testament to see how God feels about idolatry. It led to the destruction of the territories of Israel and Judah. It is only due to the faithfulness of God to His promises that the people weren’t destroyed also.

Paul tells us these things ought not even be names among Christians. This must be taken in context. Obviously, these things are mentioned in Scripture; but only in explanation; in guidance to holiness. Notice that Paul does not engage in lurid detail; he speaks in generalities and categories; both in this letter and in his other writings. What we can take from this is that we speak of these things as necessary for instruction without details. We must be careful in Christian discussion that we don’t get bogged down in talking about these sins; too much talk may actually lead to temptation and our focus must remain on Jesus.

Paul speaks more about this in verse 4 where he is speaking about any kind of vulgar speech. Sexual inuendo or jokes about sex have no place in Christian conversation. They are not only degrading to men and women; they speak against the good design of God. Remember that our object is holiness; to do and say what is pleasing to the One who created us.

Interestingly, Paul offers thanksgiving as the antidote for impure speech. This makes sense when we think about how selfish these kinds of speech are and how selfless it is to thank another. We need to always thank God. Everything that is good, comes from Him.

James 1:17

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

We must even thank God when things don’t go well.

James 1:2-3

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Thanksgiving doesn’t come easy for us; it is against our human nature. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can be thankful to God as we should be.

Verse 5 is very important for all of us. Those who engage in these things will not enter the Kingdom of God and Christ. The only thing left for them is eternal darkness and separation from God in hell. This is the destination of those who reject Jesus. This is encouragement for us when we see them prospering; their end is not what we want. But, perhaps more importantly, this is a warning to those of us who claim membership in Christ’s church; that is, in His Kingdom. If we are truly saved, nothing will keep us from the Kingdom. But we must look at our lives to make sure we don’t engage in immorality or greed. If we live like this, it is evidence that we have not accepted Jesus Christ. Our good works, and our obedience to the commands of Christ, are the evidence of our salvation.

What do we do, if we look at our lives and see that we are living in sin; which makes our salvation suspect?

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Remember that confessing sin involves repentance. Repentance is not just being sorry for the sin; it means turning from it; a radical change in lifestyle. Jesus is faithful; He will not turn you away; and He will provide the strength to amend your life.

Prayer

In this life full of temptation; without You, we don’t stand a chance. Our strength to resist evil comes from You. We recognize and admit this; we confess our own weakness and so, we cling to You. You are our rock and fortress; You are ever present in time of trouble and temptation.

If sin is residing in our hearts, we ask You now, Lord, to show it to us; and then provide us with strength and courage to resist the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Write Your law on our hearts that we may live it to Your glory.

Thank You for the price You paid on our behalf. Thank You for sealing us with the Holy Spirit. Give us that assurance of Your salvation in the lives we lead.

We pray these things in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Amen