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Ephesians 5:1-20

We Need Grace:
Immorality. Darkness. Thanksgiving.

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My **sister-in-law** recently **poked fun at me** by posting this **meme** on my Facebook page. It pictures a rather stiff looking **aristocrat** at a **sporting event** clapping and saying, “I say, what a rather robust group of fellows. Which color are we rooting for?” She knows I don’t really do **sports**. I don’t watch **football** or **basketball** or **baseball** or **golf** except for when I’m with friends or family. But I still want to try and start today’s sermon with a **sports analogy**.

The **chapters 1-3** of Ephesians are like an **inspirational pep-talk**. The **coach** is telling his players why he chose them, what he sees in them, how fantastic they are, and that they’re going to do great. It’s an **encouragement**. It feels **good**. It’s **motivational**. But in **chapters 4-6** of Ephesians **it’s getting real at halftime**. The team is down by **21 points** and the **offense** has to move the ball. The **coach** doesn’t pull any punches. They have to **play differently** or they’re going to lose (obviously, I’m talking about **golf**).

Coach Paul is telling the believers at **Ephesus** in Ephesians 5 how they must live. First came the **motivation**, now comes the **action**. As we read and study the second half of Ephesians 5 it can be a bit **discouraging** and **frustrating**. I don’t like him telling me how **how it is** or **how to live**. I don’t like to hear “**Don’t** do that” or “**do** this now” but it was good for the **their church** and it’s good for our church. So **what** play does Paul call believers to run?

We must abstain from immorality. (Eph 5:1-7, 18a)

For those of you who were here last week this theme is really a continuation of the **contrast** between the **old self** and the **new self**. Just like last week, Paul **roots** this **change** in following **Christ Jesus** himself.

1 Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children **2** and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (NIV®)

If I were to continue with a **sports analogy**, many sports have a **team captain**. For example, in **soccer** you have a team captain who is responsible for **rallying** the team **on the field**. It’s **not a perfect analogy** but I think we sometimes think of God as the **owner of the team**. He’s way up in the **private boxes** watching the game. But **in reality**, through Christ Jesus God has **stepped down onto the field** and has played the game with us. Now we can follow his lead and example. Although our team captain has **stepped off the field**, he will return at the end of the game. Until then, we follow his example. **Loving** and **living** like him.

So as we follow Christ, what are we supposed to **do**? Paul first outlines what we’re not supposed to do, the things we are supposed to **avoid**. Paul says we must abstain from immorality. **What types of immorality?**

Sexual (v3a, 5)

The first type of immorality is probably the one we think of first anyways, sexual immorality.

3a But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity,

“Sexual immorality” is the Greek word “porneia,” which is where “we get words like pornography.”¹ What does pornea **mean**? *It means any and all sexual activity outside of committed lifetime marriage between one man and one woman.* At the end of chapter 5 Paul gives us a picture of **marriage** should look like by **citing Genesis 2:24**, which tells us God’s plan for marriage is rooted in the **creation account**.²

Ephesians 5:31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (NIV®)

So Paul is prohibiting people from engaging in all types of sexual activity outside of God’s **Genesis design**. This includes things like **premarital sex**, **fooling around** with your boyfriend or girlfriend, **adultery**, **divorce and remarriage without following the Biblical guidelines**, looking at **pornography**, **filling your eyes with lustful images or movie clips**, and when **two men or two women** engage in a **sexual relationship**.

But when Paul says “But among you there must not be even a **hint** of sexual immorality” does he mean that if you’ve ever **committed** one of these sins you **can’t come** to our **church**? I’ve been **wrestling** with what Paul is saying this week. On Thursday nights we are **watching videos** and **discussing** how Christians can offer both **grace** and **truth** to LGBTQ people. The Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender, the **organization** that created our **curriculum**, published a **Pastoral Paper** giving Guidance for Churches on Membership, Baptism, Communion, Leadership, and Service for Gay and Lesbian People.

The paper argues this is one of the reasons **modern church membership** is **helpful**. Modern church membership with its **By-Laws** and membership **practices** looks much different than **New Testament** membership, but it helps us **navigate** today’s **difficult** and often **tricky** environment. Membership provides us with a way to **set expectations**. We have **one set of expectations** for those who say “I’m a **member of the family**. I’m willing to **submit** to my family’s **leadership** and be **held accountable** to my brothers and sisters in Christ.” We have a different set of expectations for those who just **attend** our church. If you’re not a member of the family, you’re a **guest**. The paper says:

In a family, guests are not outsiders to be kept at bay but friends to be welcomed with hospitality. At our church, we invite guests to join the church family, but if they’re not ready we’re stoked to welcome them into the “living room,” give them the “best seats” in the house, and lavish the best we have in our “cupboards” to care for them and make them feel at home.

But there are expectations in a family: This is how we do life together. People joke about parents saying, “As long as you live under my roof...” but there is a reality that family needs a cohesive vision of life together. Family membership clarifies what we believe God the Father’s vision is for us as his children, adopted into his home “under the roof” of his authority, through the presence of Jesus in the power of his Spirit. (pg. 7-8)

I think this balance between **welcoming LGBTQ** people into our church as guests but holding off on membership until there is **repentance** and **faith** in Christ Jesus is a way to **honor Paul’s teaching** and also honor the **way of Jesus**, who ate and drank with people caught in sin (Luke 7:34). So what’s the first type of immorality we must abstain from? Sexual immorality. And the second?

Greed (v3b, 5)

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

It's really important to see that Paul equates sexual immorality and greed as **equally sinful**. **Broadly** speaking the church in **America** has clearly called out the **evils** of **sexual sin**, but we haven't as clearly called out the evils of **greed**. I think it's because our **culture** by and large **approves of** greed. There is a **good side** to **capitalism**. The opportunity for **financial independence**. But there's also a **dark side** to capitalism—the **insatiable** need to **consume**. **Consumerism** is greed. This Christmas if you go to the **mall** I hope you will **avert** your eyes when you walk past **widow displays** that uses **sexuality** to sell their **products**. But I hope you'll apply that **same level of effort** to avoiding consumerism, which may mean **cutting** your trip to the mall **short** or **not going at all**. The mall is just one place we are **tempted by greed**. What about all the **online deals** or the **sales after Christmas** or just buying into the message, "I'll be **happy** if I can just have that thing or... if my **Christmas bonus** is this large or... you fill in the blank."

Spoken (v4, 6-7)

4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

If we **shouldn't participate** in sexual immorality, we **shouldn't joke** about it. A clear marker between a Christian and a non-Christian should be what comes out of our **mouths**. Our **words reflect** what is in our **hearts**, and if Christ has **changed** our hearts, then a sign of that is **uplifting and good words**. As believers, we must avoid spoken immorality. And finally?

Drunken (18a)

We must avoid drunken immorality. I'm jumping ahead to verse 18.

18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,

Debauchery means **indulging** in **pleasures** like extra-marital sex, drugs, and alcohol. **Drunkenness** lowers our **filters** and **self-control** so that we say and do things we wouldn't normally do if we were **sober**. Drunkenness gives control to our **flesh**, but as Christians we're called to give control to the **Holy Spirit**. *So we must abstain from immorality that is sexual, greedy, spoken, or drunken.*

We must abstain from immorality and expose our darkness to Christ's light. (Eph 5:8-14, 18b)

We talked about this last week. It's not only that we must turn away from sin, **repentance** includes turning to something. It's not "**What** should we turn to?" but "**Who** should we turn to?" Christ Jesus.

We have a new identity in Christ. (v8-10, 18b)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

If we know Christ, we were once in darkness but are no more. **Before** Christ Jesus we were **stumbling around** in a **dark room**. We couldn't see. We were **blind**. Now it's like the **curtains** have been opened wide and the **light floods in**. So we should no longer live like we are in a dark room. Don't try to put the **blackout curtains up**. We may **accidentally trip** over something we left on the floor, some **old sin pattern**, but the more our eyes become **accustomed** to the light the less we will **want** to live in the darkness anymore.

It also says “you are light in the Lord.” **You are light.** That’s a statement about **our very nature.** In Christ, you are **no longer a sinner but a saint.** Yes you sin but the **identity of sinner** no longer applies to you (Mark 2:17; Rom 5:8; John 9:31).³ You no longer fit in that category. Just because you **plumb** on occasion does not make you a **plumber.** You are light. There’s something about us at our **base-level** that has changed.

We have lots of different ways we can **identity** ourselves. I’m a pastor, a **husband**, an **engineer**, a **teacher**, a **mom**, a **dad**, a **brother**, a **sister.** These aren’t bad ways to **think about** ourselves. But our **core way to identify ourselves** should be in relation to God. We are his **children** of God. We are **saints.** We are **light** just like our **older brother Jesus.**

John 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (NIV®)

This **speaks** of Jesus. Our light doesn’t **emanate** from ourselves. It comes from a **relationship** with him.

Shine Christ on your darkness. (v11-14)

We want to admit our sin but not just so we can **air our dirty laundry** but so that Jesus can fill the space the darkness left behind. This is why **when we expose each other’s sin we don’t just point out the bad** but also **apply Jesus** and offer **forgiveness** and **grace.**

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [...]

13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

14 This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Expose means “**to lay bare.**” Have you ever been in a **black room** and touch something but you’re not quite sure what it is? There are **things in our heart** that we **can’t quite tell what they are.** Is it **lust** or **beauty?** Is it **greed** or a **responsible** use of my money? Is it **sin** or **not?** Bring those things into the light. **Tell** a brother or sister in Christ. **Expose it** to the light, and let the light do its work. Let Christ work on it through them.

The most **beautiful** part of our passage is verse 14 when Paul quotes an **early church hymn** that sang of the **resurrection.** When we bring our sins into the light we are actually **re-enacting** the resurrection. The resurrection is the promise that one day you and I will come out of the **darkness of death** into the **light of eternal life** with Christ Jesus forever and ever. So when we bring our sins out of the darkness and into the light it’s like we are experiencing a “**mini-resurrection.**” And **you feel it** in your **spirit** too. The **guilt** and **burden washes away** and you feel **renewed** and **hopeful** once more. That’s a **dim reflection** of what the resurrection will be like. *Shine Christ in your darkness.*

We must abstain from immorality, expose our darkness to Christ’s light, and give thanks to God. (Eph 4:15-20)

19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We go to things like **sexual immorality** and **consumerism** because as **humans** we experience **emptiness**. This is because of **humankind's broken relationship** with God. But those things **won't satisfy**. **Only God** can satisfy our **hearts**, and so Paul calls us to **gather** in a **fellowship** and together **worship** and praise God. It's attributed to the Greek philosopher Pythagoras as once saying, "Music is the language of the heart, the only language that enters the soul without having to pass through the filter of the brain first."⁴ We **sing songs of thanksgiving** as a way to resist temptation, shine Christ's light on our sin, and cultivate a grateful heart. *We must abstain from immorality, expose our darkness to Christ's light, and give thanks to God.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

¹ Coekin, Richard. *Ephesians For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading* (God's Word For You) (Kindle Locations 2108-2109). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

² Zondervan., *Ephesians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament series Book 10) (Kindle Locations 8703-8704). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

³ See also Psalm 51:10-13; Luke 6:33, 15:1-2.

⁴ Reider, Maxim. *The Language of the Heart: Ernest Hoetzl conducts the Tel Aviv Soloists*. The Jerusalem Post. Published February 11, 2016. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Culture/The-language-of-the-heart-444608> Accessed 12/6/18.