

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 17

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: “Avoiding Evil”

Ephesians 5:3-7 ~ July 3, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help believers understand how to live a pure, thankful life.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Prayer gathering – 6 p.m.
- Members & Friends e-mail list
- Missions Month – Dale Beyer

Opening Prayer

What sins do you struggle with the most?

As you live each day, what are the biggest moral challenges you encounter?

I submit that sexual sins and sins related to our speech and materialism would rank the highest for many. The unfortunate truth is that many believers live a compromised life in these areas of sin. The Church is rarely a shining light of moral clarity in these areas. Too often, we read of prominent church leaders whose sexual sins become front page news. In the workplace, many who claim the name of Christ recount their weekend exploits in the same terms as non-believers.

In the first two verses of chapter 5, Paul has commanded us to imitate God. There is no higher calling for us as Christians than the command to imitate God. God has told us to “Be holy, as I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). Last week we saw that the way to obey the command to imitate God is by loving each other as God has loved us in Christ. When we love God and love others, then our lives will indeed

reflect the holiness of God because, as Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” John 14:15

Turn to Ephesians 5:3-7

Now, in vs. 3-7, Paul gives us a strong caution and warning not to let our love degrade into the sinful forms of love the world embraces so easily.

Read 5:3-7

Paul gives us a great caution – a specific caution to:

Avoid evil practices

The first way he tells us to avoid these things is:

Don't pollute sex vs. 3-5

-no sexual immorality

Porneia is the Greek word translated “sexual immorality”. We get our English word *pornography* from this term. This refers to sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship.

-no kind of impurity

This is from the Greek word *akatharsia* – which is a broad term meaning anything that is unclean and filthy – in a religious or moral sense. Jesus used this word when He spoke about decaying bodies in a grave (Matt. 23:27) “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.”

Both of these terms taken together, in this context, refers to sexual activity outside of marriage, and

sexual practices that are perverted such as homosexuality, pedophilia, prostitution, etc. Paul tells us that we shouldn't even have a "hint" of these things in our life. The Greek text says we shouldn't even mention these things because they are "improper for God's holy people" (Gr. = saints).

Don't worship wealth vs. 3, 5

-no hint of...greed

In a nutshell, we can say that greed is the desire to have more. It reveals a lack of contentment – dissatisfaction with your life and what God has provided for you. (Of course this can apply to our sexuality, and when used in this context, it would be the starting point for someone to participate in sexual immorality or impurity.) To be specific, it's dissatisfaction with the material things we have. But, as believers, we should be content.

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." Philippians 4:11-12

Our contentment in Christ – no matter what our circumstances are – is a great and undeniable testimony to the reality of Christ in our life. Greed for the things we don't have reveals a heart that is no different than the heart of the unbeliever. This doesn't deny the emotions and the feelings we have when we are in difficult or painful circumstances, but it shows, when we are greedy, that our greatest

interest in life is not Christ, but the things of this world. Jesus warned us that:

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Matthew 6:24

This is why in vs. 5, Paul calls the greedy person an “idolater” – because they have made money or things the object of their worship and passion – instead of Christ.

Don't discredit the truth vs. 4, 6

We have a tremendous blessing and privilege of sharing the Gospel with our oikos. What an amazing job God has chosen to involve us in! The Holy, Righteous, Perfect God has given you and me the task of being His ambassadors – His representatives in this world. He has commissioned us to tell others about the reality of sin, and God's love as displayed through Christ and His sacrifice for our sins. It is through our words and actions that this message is communicated – and in a sense, validated! But if we aren't careful with how we speak, we will discredit the message of the Gospel before the words ever leave our mouth!

One of the great things about your oikos – the 8-15 people in your life that God has supernaturally and strategically placed in your life – is that your oikos knows you and is more likely to listen to what you have to say. You have more credibility with the 8-15 people in your

life than someone from outside that circle...unless you are obscene, foolish, or coarse with your words.

-no obscenity vs. 4

James Montgomery Boice refers to this as the “*bridge word*” in the list – meaning that it can refer both to actions – and to words. (Ephesians, An Expository

Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 181)

This describes the person who has no standards of morality or public decency. The Greek term has the idea of filthiness and shameful behavior or speech. It’s related to a Greek term used in Col. 3:8 “But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and *filthy language* from your lips.”

-no foolish talk vs. 4

Greek = *mōrologia*. *Mōro* is the root word we get our English word for ‘moron’ from. *Logia* (*logos*) means to speak / words – so together, the term means foolish words / foolish talk. Biblically, a fool is not usually someone who lacks intelligence. It’s usually someone who ignores God – or doesn’t believe in God.

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile...”

Psalm 14:1

This person lacks morals – and they may say things that degrade and impugn those who practice high moral standards.

-no coarse joking vs. 4

This doesn't mean you can't joke around with people. After all (I love this line by James Montgomery Boice), "*A buoyant spirit or bright humor is not bad. The God who made monkeys is not humorless.*"

(Ephesians, An Expositional Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 182)

"no coarse joking" refers to the person who is obscene – and probably a fool – but they are very witty and they tend to use their wittiness to turn everything around into an innuendo – and they use humor to turn everything into a gutter-level conversation.

Warning!!! vs. 5

This is a difficult passage to understand what Paul is saying when he says that this kind of person has no "...inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

He even prefaces that statement with "For of this you can be sure..."

Let's go over a very important truth that can help us understand what Paul is and isn't saying here.

If you are a believer in Christ, you can't lose your salvation. You can't lose it because you didn't 'earn' it in the first place...you weren't chosen by God (Eph. 1:4) unto salvation due to righteous living on your part – it was by His grace which means, by definition, you don't deserve to be saved / forgiven. It is by "grace you have been saved, through faith...not by works" (2:8-9).

When you are a Christian and you sin, you don't lose your salvation. As we read in chapter one – if you are a believer in

Christ, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit as a down-payment on your eternal home in Heaven.

So – Paul is not talking about a Christian who loses their salvation because they have fallen into one of these sins. He is describing someone who thinks that by their own self-inflated virtue they are good enough to be a child of God, or someone who may profess belief in Christ, but their life is no different for it. They are a habitual sinner in these things – their life is characterized by immorality, impurity, and greed. Their speech is crude and obscene.

In vs. 6, Paul warns his readers not to be deceived by “empty words”.

“The Message” has a good paraphrase of this verse:

“6 Don't let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with him.” (*The Message*)

These “empty words” or “religious smooth talk” is the kind of preaching that denies God’s judgment, and tells people that *“God is a God of love, and He won’t judge anyone for their sin”*. In fact, these preachers or purveyors of this heretical teaching usually deny the reality of sin and judgment. But Paul says there is no uncertainty of these things...that the person who lives life in this way has no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Now, I want all of you to know that I preach this sermon with humility, because of my own difficulty in some of these areas. As I prepared and studied this week, I was convicted throughout the process. These commands are a great challenge

for us, as Jesus' prayer in John 17:14-19, that we would be protected from the "evil one". The solution for us – the way for us to avoid evil is not through isolation – such as the Amish community or the early monastic communities. We are not called to isolate ourselves from the culture and put up barriers between us and them. We are commanded to be salt and light – to "go, make disciples of all nations". This is not easily done, because when you live in our culture, you will be exposed to sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking. Our application today is the remedies that Paul gives us to avoid these sins.

Application

Be *thankful* for: vs. 4b

Be thankful for what? Well, in one sense, we are to give God thanks for all things in our life. But according to James Montgomery Boice, Paul is telling us instead of perverting the wonderful things God has given us, if we give thanks to Him for them, we will use them in God-honoring ways and guard them from corruption.

The gift of *sex*

Too often, the church can come across as "anti-sex" or in a way that steals the joy and pleasure out of the intimacy that God meant to bless a marriage. Instead of perverting sex through immorality or impurity, thank God for your spouse and enjoy each other as God has intended. Sex is not something

man created – God created it and blessed it. It was God who, through the pen of Solomon told us to: “...rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.”

Proverbs 5:18-19

This is God’s wonderful gift to a husband and wife, but because of our sinfulness, we have perverted it and polluted it. Instead, give thanks to God for this wonderful gift – and enjoy this gift in the safe boundary of marriage.

The blessings of wealth

Instead of being greedy for more, be content with what God has given you. Indeed, greed is pervasive in all economic levels...poor people are greedy...middle class knows greed...but the wealthy probably struggle with greed more than the others! Ironic isn’t it that those who have the most, want even more! I believe this is because of our sinful nature – and when we are dissatisfied with God, and we are greedy for material things, we think – we’ve bought into the lie that if we get these material things we will be satisfied. But the opposite is true...we get more, and we are still dissatisfied! In fact, our dissatisfaction seems even greater, because we had expectations that are never realized – and that causes us to want even more.

Instead, give thanks to God for what He has given you.

Francis Chan, in his book “Crazy Love” gives us some comparison to help us see how financially blessed we are in our nation compared to the rest of the world. “If one hundred people represented the world’s population, fifty-three of those would live on less than \$2 a day. Do you realize if you make \$4,000 per month, you automatically make *one hundred times more* than the average person on this planet? Simply by purchasing this book, you spent what a majority of people in the world will make in a week’s time.” (Crazy Love, by Francis

Chan, p. 89)

Use the material blessings in your life to give generously to the Kingdom. Use your blessings to share God’s love and truth with a world that is desperately searching for lasting, significant and safe love – along with undeniable, life-changing truth.

The opportunity to *speak truth*

Give thanks to God that He wants to use you to reach your oikos. He has commissioned you to reach those in your life with the Gospel. Use your mouth in ways that glorify God, not in ways that discredit your testimony.

Don’t *participate* vs. 7

I like how “The Message” paraphrases vs. 7:

7 Don't even hang around people like that. (The Message)

Paul mentioned in vs. 3 that we shouldn't do these things because they are "...improper for God's holy people". But here in vs. 7, he gives us the very simple way to make sure we don't get drawn into or tempted to practice these things...he tells us not to "...participate in the things these people do."

In 2 Cor. 6:18 "Flee from sexual immorality."

Why can't I stay and fight...why can't I stay and be strong...resist in the face of temptation? Why does God tell me to "flee" or not to "participate"?

Because the sexual arena is such a strong behavior and attraction for us – and the reality is that we aren't strong enough to stand in the midst of these things and resist them. An alcoholic who thinks they can go hang out in a bar and stay sober has already failed. They have failed to realize the power of their addiction – and even though you might not be addicted to the behaviors Paul is talking about in this passage, we need to realize our weakness to resist these temptations.