

15. Walk in love and purity

January 13, 2013

During my elementary and junior high school period in Seoul, South Korea, it was not unusual to see open sewer systems on the side of the streets much like Nogales, Mexico now. The stench from the sewer was so strong that it used to tear my eyes and gag my throat. Not anymore though. Seoul became one of the busiest and most flourishing capital cities in the world.

Nowadays, as you all know that we are living in a moral and spiritual cesspool in America. But Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia are far worse than here. You cannot turn on TV without seeing half-naked women flaunting their bodies; and most of TV sitcoms' dialogs are below the waist. It is hard to find any TV program that is fit for a family to sit together and to watch unless you only watch Sesame Street or Disney Channel. Don't think that it is going to get better, rather it will get worse by day.

In this unspiritual and anti-Christian environment, it is extremely difficult to walk in purity that would bring honor to our Lord Jesus Christ. Unless we have a strong determination to go against the flow of this cesspool world and follow the Lord's way, we will be swept away by the filthy current of this world. As I've said it before, any dead fish can float down with the current, but it takes a live and determined fish to swim against it. That is what we are supposed to do, my brothers and sisters.

A. BE IMITATORS OF GOD

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Have you ever seen a child sitting in the front seat of a car, trying to drive like his dad? Or walking behind him around the house and mimicking everything his daddy does? Or, sad to say that, that might be including imitating his dad smoking a cigarette or taking a drink of alcohol? Children probably learn more by watching and imitating the adults around them than any other way.

If we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father. This admonition ties in with the last two verses of chapter 4 where apostle Paul has warned us against bitterness and anger. It is tragic when these attitudes show up in the family of God. As a pastor, I have witnessed malice and bitterness within the family of God. It is ugly, plain mean, and it doesn't glorify the Lord.

However, being imitators of God sounds like a daunting task if it weren't for Paul's next three words – "as dear children". It is more enjoyable to imitate someone whom we love.

Family resemblance is something we can be born with within the family. But imitation requires a lot of effort. Spiritually, it is the same. We need to study our heavenly Father's way and seek to obey His will through the Bible. As Paul put it, we who are God's cherished children need to follow in His steps – "walk in love" – because these are the steps His Son Jesus took.

Through His Crucifixion, Jesus paid the price for our sins, cleansed us from sin, and restored our relationship with God. His willingness to lay down His own life to save us pleased the Father like "a sweet-smelling aroma."

The world around us, however, opposes Christ's way of love at every turn and tries with all its might to lead us into its doomed pattern. That's why Paul issued such a strong summons to purity – an urgent warning against the world's self-serving ways – in the next five verses.

Speaking of the world opposing Christ's way of love, did you see what anti-Israel people did in Great Britain? One of the more popular and mainstream English Language Teaching textbooks that were published by the most famous publisher in England purposely eliminated Israel off the map. Instead they have "Occupied Palestine". Go figure.

B. IMMORALITY, SEXUAL IMPURITY, AND COVETOUSNESS

Ephesians 5:3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;

1) Immorality and sexual impurity

NKJV has the word 'fornication' in v3. The proper translation should be 'immorality' rather than 'fornication'.

The Greek word for 'fornication' – in this case 'immorality' – is "porneia" where we get our English word 'pornography.' It includes all kinds of sexual encounter outside of marriage – including fornication, adultery, and prostitution. 'Uncleanness' is "akatharsia" in Greek, speaks of moral uncleanness, and in the sexual sense, it includes homosexuality and any other sexual perversion. A better translation would be 'sexual impurity.'

In strict sense, 'fornication' is having sex before marriage. It doesn't matter whether you are a sixteen years old teenager or an over sixty years old senior citizen. If you are not married and have sex with someone, you are committing fornication no matter how you try to excuse yourself. God doesn't care if you are going to marry that person in 4 hours. Until you say, "I do," and sign on that marriage certificate, you are not married. People come up with just about any excuse to justify their carnal behaviors. But that won't fly with God.

Our carnal society actually encourages immorality and sexual impurity. They claim that so-called "free" sex is harmless and nobody gets hurt. Try to say that to a 15 years old teenage girl who just found out that she is pregnant; or to a young man who had one-night stand with a girl whose name he can barely remember, was told by his doctor that he now has a sexually transmitted disease that cannot be cured; or to a brand new infant who was born with AIDS because of his immoral parents; or to a broken home because a dad or mom committed adultery and broke the trust and peace of their family. The stories can go on and on.

Or you may think that immorality and sexual impurity are the things of the past that applied in the ancient days and they no longer apply to the 21st Century? Think again. Do you think that immorality and sexual impurity are only limited to unbelievers? Sad to say, these sins have invaded the homes of Christians and brought grief to local churches, too. Over 56% of Christian families go through divorces; pastors get involved with someone other than their spouses or get into sexual addiction through internet pornography.

Our defiled society puts sexual gratification over companionship and understanding individual. The result is that the shallow empty physical relationship leads to inner

loneliness and incompleteness. The desire to know and to be known cannot be fulfilled without knowing God and making Him known first. God has so much more to give us than what we chase after for ourselves.

2) Covetousness

Where immorality and sexual impurity are a lust for sex, covetousness is a "lust for more." This could include an insatiable appetite for sex, as in a sexual addiction. But it also indicates a hunger for more material possessions. In v5, the apostle directly connected immorality, sexual impurity, and covetousness to 'idolatry,' because these three behaviors make themselves gods in people's minds to rule over themselves and demand complete allegiance.

Listen, idolatry makes love for God and others impossible because a person who is into immorality, sexual impurity, and covetousness has elevated oneself and his or her perceived desires above all else. How can that person walk in Christ's self-sacrificial love and run after self-centered interests at the same time? How can that person be consecrated to God and dedicated to one's possessive carnal desires at the same time? How can that person give to others while grasping all he or she can for oneself at the same time? It is impossible. We must choose one or the other, as Jesus told us:

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

C. NO FILTHINESS, FOOLISH TALKING, COARSE JESTING

Ephesians 5:4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

From immoral actions Paul next turned to immoral words. "Filthiness" means what it sounds like – "shameful talk" – and is linked to the idea of being disgraceful. This would include obscenities, which degrade and abuse others.

The airwaves of the late night TV shows is filled with these kind of comments. It seems that the filthier, the dumber they talk, the more their audience likes it.

Filthy, foolish, and vulgar talk leads us into five danger zones:

- 1) It plays too close to the edge of what can degenerate into grossly inappropriate words and actions.**
- 2) It breaks down our resistance to things that hinder our intimacy with God.**
- 3) It promotes a warped and degrading view of sex and marriage, which God created to be beautiful.**
- 4) It promotes mental habits of sensuality and disrespect for others.**
- 5) It silences any opportunity to make Christ known.**

Sensual talk and gutter humor serve no beneficial purpose; even the laughter they provoke turns to bitter dust in our hearts. And worse, they mar the delight God has planned for intimacy with our mates.

D. RAMIFICATIONS OF SIN

Ephesians 5:5-6 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Some people would insist that sexual self-indulgence and materialistic self-centeredness are “no big deal.” But to our God, it is.

Remember what I said at the beginning of this study? Children learn more by watching and imitating the adults around them than any other way. And if we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father.

Our behavior shows whose children we are, to whom we belong. When we love Christ, we reflect that we’re members of His family. However, if we habitually choose a lifestyle that opposes God’s character and His will, if we blatantly, willfully, and continually give ourselves to evil so that it becomes our life’s pattern, then we need to examine if we really belong to Christ. Constant trafficking in sin is incompatible with the Christian faith.

Does this mean that if, through weakness, we can fall into immorality or covetousness, we’re not God’s children? Not at all. God knows that we’re dumb humans and that we are prone to sin. The key is whether we deliberately persist in a lifestyle that resists the Lord or whether the general tone of our lives reflects a Godward direction. Christ is to be our way of life, not sin.

E. WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT GOD WANTS YOU TO DO?

Ephesians 5:7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.

So don’t go to the places – physically and virtually – where you know that your carnal desires will be fanned. And don’t participate in the conversations that are below the waist. Don’t covet.

In place of filthy and immoral talk, apostle Paul wanted us to thank the Lord. He was actually recommending that we replace self-centered ideas with a God-centered frame of mind – that we do not abuse God’s gifts, such as sexual love and material blessings, but instead praise Him for their beauty and goodness in His design.

Through the apostle, the Holy Spirit warns us not to be a part of those who live in the darkness of sins. Why would we want to join those whose end is destruction? We have been made fellow heirs with Christ.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

If you struggle with some of the sins Paul mentioned, take heart. The Lord knows your grief and shame, and He’s reaching out His hand of forgiveness and help. Take His hand so that He may lead you away from harmful companions. But you need to take that first step toward Him. Ask Him to forgive you from your sins. He will. Then, you can talk to me or one of our elders. If you don’t want other people to see you or know, call us. Everything you say is confidential. Or visit FocusOnTheFamily.com. They have tons of materials that can help you break that addiction.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Don’t be a part of the group where you find yourself in the middle of filthy, foolish talking is going on. Walk away even if it costs you friendship with them. You have a true Friend, Jesus.

2) Be an imitator of God through His Word, the Bible everyday. If you don't fill your heart with the Word of God, satan will fill it with filth and his darkness.