

**Ephesians—God’s New Community**  
**A New Purity**  
**Ephesians chapter 5:3-17**  
**16th January 2022**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

On Sunday mornings this term we're making our way through the second half of Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus. The first three chapters of this letter are doctrine—Paul has explained what God has done for his people through Jesus Christ, “Blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (1:3) and in the last three chapters Paul describes how we should live in response to God's amazing grace to us.

Now, all the teaching of chapters 4-6 run against the grain of Western culture today, but no teaching is more counter-cultural than today's: God wants absolute sexual purity from his people.

Let's prepare for what Paul says:

On the one hand we need to be sensitive because the teaching of these verses may prove difficult for some of the Lord's people. It may bring back memories to one brother or sister of historic infidelity, which caused damage to you or your family; It may remind another saint of an ongoing battle with sexual temptation. There are a series of good Christian books with the titles like this, “Every Man's battle”, “Every young man's battle.” “Every young woman's battle” which show that sexual temptation is common among God's people; this sermon may remind someone of their desire, indeed –need, of a life-partner.

May God's Word bring healing to his people, knowing that in Jesus Christ there is not only forgiveness but by the power of his Spirit, there is help and healing too.

Secondly, and on the other hand, our society and wider culture is soaked in sexual impurity of one kind or another—just like the world of the Ephesians. And so we need to be clear as to what the Lord requires of his people. This is not a subject on which we can afford to fudge or compromise or “obfuscate”! And if I can speak a word to parents- you need to be clear to your children about these matters. If you don't they will form an opinion, taken from social media to fill the vacuum you leave. And one day they will are likely to say to you, “I don't want to go to a Bible-believing church any longer because of their views on sex.”

But not if, by God's grace, you teach them diligently, tactfully and faithfully, God's Word.

My last introductory point is this: there are a couple of basic truths about sex which every Christian ought to clearly understand. First, that God created the wonderful gift of sex to bind one man and one woman together in marriage. That is clear from Genesis 1 and 2. Second, since the fall of mankind, since the disobedience of Adam and Eve, recorded in Genesis 3, Eros has become defiled: *“They (Adam and Eve) realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”* (Gen. 3:7). Before they disobeyed God they were unashamed of their nakedness, but the moment they fell, something strange happened and Eros became defiled.

Sex between one man and one woman in marriage is still a precious gift, but in addition to that pure experience, the mighty river burst its banks and has polluted vast plains of human experience with a thousand perversions. Before the fall, only one pure sexual experience existed — that between one married man and woman, Adam and Eve; after the fall a thousand perversions in thought, speech and deed arose; from fornication to adultery, from lust to homosexual practice.

We can break Paul's teaching into two parts: God wants his people to be sexually pure; God gives us many good reasons for this command. Then we'll think about our response.

## #1 God wants absolute sexual purity from his people

### **No impure thoughts**

See the words "greed" in verses 3 and 5, could be translated "covetousness" Paul hasn't changed the subject. Paul is talking about greed for sex, or lust. Remember that the tenth commandment against covetousness includes, "You shall not covet your neighbour's wife..." (Exodus 20).

Christians are not to entertain impure thoughts or desires. We can't stop the birds from flying around the tree—we can't stop sexual temptation, but we can and must stop the birds nesting in the branches—we can avoid taking those evil thoughts further.

### **No impure words**

Read 4. Christians are to have nothing to do with dirty jokes or smutty comedy. But be known instead for people who use their lips to praise God, verse 4:

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.*

*Isaac Watts*

"That colleague doesn't join in with our dirty jokes, but instead they're always joyful and thankful." What a witness!

No dirty talk—in fact says Paul, not even a hint of sexual impurity, verse 3, verse 11-12.

### **No impure behaviour**

The words Paul uses cover every sort of sexual deviation, "Sexual immorality" (verse 3), "Any kind of impurity" (v.3) "Debauchery" verse 18. Can we see how radically and beautifully counter-cultural God's people are called to be?

Last June a College of Cambridge University was leading a Christian radio broadcast. One of the Bible readings for the day was this, "*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy nor drunkards nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were (wonderful words...) But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.*" (2 Corinthians 6). But out of the nine offences in that list, they missed out two 'male prostitutes' and 'homosexual offenders.' Because they didn't want to offend modern listeners. The Christian newspaper *Evangelicals Now* contacted the college chaplain for an explanation and got back the reply, 'It was probably not the best idea.' (EN August 2021)

True Story, I quote. "*Martha was amazed when a lesbian friend she had been praying for announced that she had become a Christian. For some months Martha did not ask about her friend's lifestyle, afraid of how the conversation might go. Finally, she mustered the courage and asked. "Oh that" her friend replied. "I figured out that Jesus didn't like it, so I quit."*

Paul goes one step further.

### ***No impure partnerships***

There were some people in Ephesus who engaged in sexual impurity and called themselves Christians. It is likely that they were influenced by Greek philosophy, which taught that the mind or soul was everything, the body is nothing, so it doesn't matter what you do with your body (verses 5-7). Don't hang out with people who call themselves Christians but justify and persist in sexual sin.

This is a radical call to sexual purity isn't it, brother and sisters? *"Among you there must not be even a hint of immorality."* (3) *"It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.."* (12)

Paul knows its radical so he gives us five good reasons:

## **#2 God gives us many good reasons for this command—not children**

### ***1. Sexual immorality is just improper for God's holy people! Verse 3***

You are God's holy people, holy means set apart, separate from the world, it's just improper to be connected to immorality in any fashion. It's like trying to mix oil with water. You're holy—sexual immorality is unholy!

### ***2. Unrepentant sexual immorality leads to hell, verses 5-6***

Paul is not talking about a Christian who is struggling, or a Christian who out of weakness falls and then repents of their sin, he's talking about people who call themselves Christians but are unrepentant hardened fornicators, impenitent serial adulterers. Why should we turn away from sexual sin? Because people who do not repent of it are on the broad road that leads to eternal destruction.

Why did God send ***fire and brimstone*** on Sodom and Gomorrah? Because of their wickedness, including sexual sin.

### ***3. Sexual immorality produces no good fruit, verse 11***

In the third place, run from sexual impurity because it is fruitless. Sexual purity is fruitful—it binds husband and wife together and can even bring forth new life. But sexual impurity brings forth nothing but guilt and condemnation and destruction and death and divorce.

### ***4. Sexual immorality is darkness, but you are light! Verse 8a***

Reason 4, sexual immorality is darkness but you are now light.

### ***5. Sexual purity is a witness, verses 11-16***

And finally, the light of sexual purity is a witness to a dark world, I think that's what Paul is saying. The light of your purity will expose the darkness of sexual impurity around you and that could provide you with an opportunity to witness to those around you and an opportunity for them to repent.

On frosty Friday Yvonne and I were taking a walk and we noticed lots and lots of spider webs on trees, bushes, fence railings. I just had to take a photo for this morning's sermon. Had a great army of spiders gone to work that morning to spin these beautiful webs? Not at all, they'd been there since last autumn, it's just we had not seen them. The cold frost of that morning had made them visible.

Sexual immorality is everywhere in our culture, from adverts to TV programmes, to films, to social media. It is just an assumed and accepted and invisible part of daily life. By our lives and speech, we're called to be light which makes the invisible visible. We are called to be light which exposes the darkness of sexual immorality—and by the grace of God leads the world to repentance and the light of the Gospel.

### #3 How should we respond?

How should we respond to God's Word? How does the Lord want us to respond? What is the Spirit of the Lord saying to you? You work it out, but for sure, he is saying two words to all of us, Run and Repent:

#### **(1) Run from temptation**

"Flee the evil desires of youth" (2 Timothy 2:22). When Yvonne and I have a date night, an evening to ourselves, we'll sometimes try and find a film we can watch together—not always easy—because the stuff she likes and I like are so different—anyway—so we find something on Netflix with a PG rating, but I cannot tell you how many times we've turned a film off 5 or 10 minutes into the start because of sexual themes or innuendo or dirty talk. We're called to run away from that stuff.

Perhaps we should take a leaf from a former generation. It was common in the 40s and 50s and 60s for Christians to have nothing to do with cinema (my dad used to call it the Devil's House!), nothing to do with theatre, nothing to do with pubs or dances. Why? To avoid temptation. I hope we don't laugh at such guidelines, because the pendulum has gone the other way and we hear of Christians openly talking about *Love Island*, *Game of Thrones* and other series which contain sexual impurity.

How can we remain pure if we fill our minds with impurity? If you wonder if something you are watching is good and wholesome, verse 10, ask the Lord about it. He will tell you.

#### **(2) Repent of all sexual sin**

Repentance in Greek is made up of two words, meta—change and noia—mind. So repentance is changing your mind about something. You came here this morning thinking one thing, you've heard God's word and it has changed. And then repentance in the Bible also means turning around, doing a U-turn. God wants his people to turn from sin and turn to righteousness, every day of our lives.

### Conclusion

Have you ever wondered why God has placed such a great hedge around the pure marriage relationship between one man and one woman? I mean, in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul has built a 5-meter thick wall around the castle of pure sex, surrounded it by a moat, and followed it by barbed wire and tanks! Why does God think that the pure relationship between one man and one woman is so important to guard? Because the Bible not only opens with a marriage it also closes with a marriage, the marriage between Jesus Christ and his blood-bought people, the Church.

And little marriage, the marriage between a man and a woman is designed to be an earthly picture of that precious, pure, faithful, eternal loving relationship between Jesus and his people. That's why the Lord guards marriage.

May the Lord help his people to shine as stars in a warped and crooked generation, for his glory and our good, by the power of his Holy Spirit.

## Possible Home Group Questions

*It may be worth reading through the passage and just summarising the main points of the sermon*

### Questions about approaching this whole subject

(1) Do we feel uneasy about talking about these issues in a home group? If so, why? Is there a right decorum for Christians to possess? Where are the limits of home group discussion?

*(We must be careful because of (i) hurt to some, (ii) temptation to others, (iii) general unease for others and because the Bible does not go into explicit detail – even the Song of Songs is cryptic and poetic in its descriptions. If the purpose of speech is to edify, we must be careful that we do that and not stumble anyone.)*

(2) Should Christians be open about any sexual battles they are facing in a home group?

*(Surely not, because we might stumble someone and because of potential gossip, this is a discussion with a small group of people).*

### Questions about the Bible's view of sexuality

(3) Describe the world's view of sex and where that view is promoted?

(4) Try to summarise what the Bible teaches about permissible and immoral sex – carefully and tactfully.

*(Pure Sex is that which takes place in the marriage between one man and one woman, immoral sex is everything else.)*

### Questions about temptation and cure

(5) How can we avoid sexual temptation? (Run!) Be very very practical.

(6) What is the main reason God puts such a protective hedge around marriage?

*(Because it is meant to be a reflection of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his people, that beautiful, faithful eternal relationship: God is protecting his great universal plan and purpose, to gather a people to 'marry' his Son.)*