

Morality

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[0 : 00] Well, this passage in Ephesians 5 that we're looking at now, 3 to 14, it's passages like this, I think, that often build the idea in people's minds that Christianity is all about keeping rules.

Because that's what it seems at first reading this passage. It's kind of a list of do's and don'ts. And people read this and think, well, that's obviously what being a Christian must be about. Like all the other religions, it's about a list of rules that you've got to keep to supposedly get into God's good books.

But if you've been coming to this church and sitting under the teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ for any length of time, you'll know that that's not what Christianity is about at all.

The message of the Bible, the whole Bible, its coherent single message, is not about what we do in order to get to God. It's actually the complete opposite.

It tells us what God has done to get to us. How he comes. How he reveals himself. How he comes into our situation as a person, Jesus Christ, and he calls us out of a dying world and changes us from the inside out to be the start of a new humanity that he is making for the world to come.

[1 : 21] That is what Christianity is about. That's the message of the Bible. And that's what we've been learning in Ephesians for the past few weeks. That's what the Apostle Paul, who God wrote to us through, has been teaching us.

Just about this new humanity that God is raising up in this current age to be the start of a new creation, which he's going to bring about in future.

And so that's the context of this passage. And that's how we've got to understand this passage. It's not about rules that we keep in order to earn a place in heaven. Rather, it's explaining the type of habits that characterize a person who already has a place in heaven through their relationship with Jesus.

That's how we've got to understand this passage. And the Apostle Paul, we saw last week, if you were here with us, he's already begun explaining these new habits that mark out the people of God in the passage we looked at last week.

And now he continues to do that, but he does it on a whole other level. Because now in this passage, he turns to a much more personal set of habits that he wants us to examine in our own lives, that we really need to think about.

[2 : 35] And that is our habits regarding sex. Now I say that word and suddenly everyone's listening. Because that's not an area of our life we often tend to talk about, do we?

Especially in church. I remember actually in marriage preparation class a while ago when Gene and I were going through marriage preparation class with our 70-something-year-old pastor.

I was dreading the session about sex. And it was awkward to sit there with my fiancé and this 70-year-old guy talking about sex in his office.

And yet it's important to talk about, and I'm glad he spoke to us about it because the Bible has a lot to say about sex. Now I've got to pause there and say if there are any children in the sermon who are listening and are old enough to follow the sermon, then you're old enough to hear about what I have to say.

But if you don't know what I'm talking about when I talk about sex, then you need to talk to your parents. And you need to get them to explain it to you. For now, I think it's enough to say that little baby Imogen you saw earlier, she wouldn't have been here without it.

[3 : 48] And neither would you. But parents, I want to say something to you as well. This is a vital topic to talk with your kids about. Earlier than you think you need to. And so if you're not teaching your children what the Bible says about sex, then the world is teaching them.

That's all they've got to go on, what the world says about it. And that is really messed up. And so parents, pluck up the courage to sit down with your children and talk about it.

Explain it to them. Let them hear it from you rather than from the Internet. Okay, and so Paul addresses it specifically in this passage. But why this topic? I mean, Paul, come on.

Why talk about sexuality? Of all the areas of life, why do you turn to this one now in Ephesians? Well, the reason is because in Ephesians so far, Paul has been talking about the new identity people have as followers of Christ.

The new identity they've been given in eternity. An eternal cosmic identity that we have. But I don't have to tell you that our sexuality is a central part of our identity, isn't it?

[4 : 51] It's a central part of who we are. And so if who you are is truly transformed by the gospel, all of you, if all of you is transformed by the gospel of Jesus as a Christian, then it's going to influence your sexuality too.

But then there's another reason that Paul talks about sex here. And that is because it turns out your view of sex says something about your view of God himself.

And to see why I want you to look closer at this passage, because that's exactly what I think Paul is saying here. So in your Bibles, I hope you have it in front of you. Some of the verses I'll put up on the screen behind me.

But it starts in verse 3 by saying this. Let's have a look. He says, But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Okay, let's pause there. So first we learn that sexual immorality really has no place amongst God's new humanity that he is making.

[6 : 05] And we've got to define our terms. By sexual immorality, the Bible means any sex outside of God's intended use for it. And God's intended use for it, according to the Bible, is in a marriage between a man and a woman.

Anything outside of that is sexual immorality, according to Scripture. And then Paul also mentions there two more things which are related to sexual immorality. And he always speaks about these three things in Ephesians as a unit.

Sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. Impurity is anything contrary to God's law, anything outside of God's design. And greed is basically wanting something you don't have.

The original word there is covetousness, breaking the tenth commandment. Wanting something you don't have. Because really that's what sexual immorality is, isn't it? It's impurity because it's living outside of God's design.

And it's wanting something that God has not given you in marriage. That's sexual immorality. And then he goes on to say that an immoral attitude to sex will come out in how we talk about it.

- [7 : 10] It's the very next thing he says. In obscenity, disrespect, inappropriate jokes about sex. You can tell a bad stand-up comedian, can't you, by how much he jokes about sex.
- I think he can because that's the easy way to get laughs. People love dirty jokes. The hard way, the hard humor is the clean humor. The easy humor is the dirty humor.
- Why do people like dirty jokes so much, though? Because it affirms the world's low view of sex. And so it gives people a permission to misuse it. That's why they laugh at it. Because it affirms what the world says about it.
- And it gives people a permission to misuse it. That's why you hear so much dirty jokes about sex. And so how we talk about sex at the office, around the braai, indicates how we think about it.
- And whether we share God's view of sex or whether we share the world's view of sex. And so that's the next thing Paul says. He doesn't only talk about sexual immorality, but he says how it'll actually come out in your life is through how you talk about it.
- [8 : 14] But then he says something very unexpected. At the end of verse 4. Have a look. He tells us what the opposite of sexual immorality and inappropriate joking and a low view of sex is.
- And that is Thanksgiving. Huh? How is Thanksgiving the opposite of sexual immorality? I thought, you know, abstinence was the opposite of sexual immorality.
- But Thanksgiving? Why does he use that as the cure, the antidote of sexual immorality? Well, think about it. We've already seen, right, the heart of sexual immorality is greed.
- Wanting something or someone that you don't have. But Thanksgiving, the habit of thanking God, recognizing what God has given you and thanking him for it, is the antidote for greed.
- And greed is at the heart of sexual immorality. Because, you see, Thanksgiving is a focus on what God has given you rather than what he hasn't. It's a focus on what he has blessed you with rather than what you don't have.
- [9 : 20] And Thanksgiving also is a recognition, very importantly, that everything you have, including your sexuality, comes from God. And so it should be used according to the purpose for which God gave it.
- That's what the discipline of Thanksgiving helps us to realize and recognize in our lives. So imagine for a second. Imagine I gave my son Alex a drill for a woodwork project that I had given him to do.
- And I instructed him. I took him aside. I took him to the workshop in our garage. And I cleared out the mess. Because as Gene knows, it's quite a mess in my workshop. But then I took him aside.
- And I told him how to use the drill. And I said, listen, before you use it, I want to show you how to use it safely. Because it's a powerful tool. And unless you use it properly, it's going to be dangerous.
- So I take him and I show him how to use it safely for his woodwork project. But then, imagine after a while, he forgets why I gave it to him. And he forgets what I told him about how to use it safely.
- [10 : 27] And instead of using it for the woodwork project, he reckons it would be quite fun to take to the playground at school. And he could have a lot of fun with this drill on the playground. And so he smuggles it in his bag.
- And at break time, he whips it out to the delight of all his friends. Now, what's going to happen? He might have a few minutes of fun. But it most likely is going to end up with him seriously hurting himself and others, right?

Well, in the same way, God has given us sex for a purpose. And it's a very powerful thing. And he has given it to us for a purpose in the world that he has made.

And the Bible tells us the purpose of sex is twofold. To strengthen the bond of marriage and to have children. And he's also told us how to use it safely within a committed, lifelong relationship.

But if we fail to recognize that, what God has told us about it, and we rather use it for any way we see fit to gratify ourselves, well, then it will lead to all kinds of harm for ourselves and for society, which we see, don't we, today, in messed up marriages and broken homes and absent fathers.

[11 : 37] And so that's why thanksgiving is such an important part of a Christian's life. And such an important antidote for sin. To make sure that in our prayers, we are making time not just to ask God for stuff.

But we're making time in our prayers to thank God. For who he is, what he's revealed, what he's done for us, what he's given us. For all kinds of things. Because if we make a habit of recognizing that everything we have comes from God, and everything we enjoy in this earth comes from God, and every type of pleasure we have comes from God, because he even gave us the capacity to have pleasure.

If we have that spirit and that attitude of thanksgiving, well, then we will also get into the habit of making sure that we're using those gifts his way and not ours. And so thanksgiving is a key ingredient to living a holy life.

But now I want to turn to the question, why actually is it so important to live a holy life? Come on. Because isn't it fun to sin? You know, why is it so important to pursue holiness as this passage is teaching us?

Well, that's what Paul goes on to explain here. Just why it's so important to pursue and to live a holy life in the strength and the ability that God gives us to do that. And we see two key reasons in this passage, which I just quickly want to touch upon.

[13 : 04] The first reason why it's so important is that your present pattern of life indicates your eternal direction. Now, I know that's quite a mouthful. But what I mean by that is simply how you're living and thinking and speaking now is a pretty good indicator of where you're headed in eternity.

And that's why the passage goes on to say this from verse 5. For of this you can be sure. And Paul's quite strong here. And he's strong for a reason.

He wants to hit this home. For this you can be sure. No immoral, impure, or greedy person, such a person as an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

But look at this passage for a second. Paul talks about no immoral, impure, or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Now, firstly, I've got to say that doesn't mean anybody who ever sins. Otherwise, we would all be excluded. And the Bible says, even when we do still sin, there is forgiveness in Jesus for all those who repent and trust in him.

[14 : 15] So what does it mean? What is Paul saying here? Well, for this whole letter, Ephesians, Paul has been comparing what he calls the walk of God's people versus the walk of the world. And a walk refers to an ongoing pattern of life, a trajectory, a direction.

And so what he's saying here is if your ongoing habits and patterns of life are contrary to God's laws, like, for example, in the area of sex, in how you think about it and how you speak about it and how you practice it, well, then he says you're actually, and he uses the strongest term that a Jewish man in the first century could use.

He says you're an idolater. Now, idolater is someone who worships idols, who worships created things rather than the creator. And so he's saying if you live in a pattern of life that disregards and is contrary to God's laws, you actually don't love God.

You love the world and created things more. If you love God, that will be seen in living a pattern of life that pleases him. And if you're not living a pattern of life that pleases God, well, then you're not actually part of his people and you never were.

No matter how many times you come to church on a Sunday, it's your holiness during the week which shows whether you are part of God's new humanity, not your membership in a church.

[15 : 32] I was at Dubai Airport once and we had a connecting flight. So I had to sit down, we had to sit down and wait. You know how, especially at Dubai Airport, it's hard to find a seat because there's all these people sleeping, waiting for connecting flights.

I couldn't sleep. So I just sat and watched all the different people. And it's amazing. If you like people watching, go to Dubai Airport because it's a hub. It's a transport hub of the whole world.

So I was sitting watching these people and I'd found that I could fairly accurately tell where they were headed by the clothes they were wearing. If they were wearing these big winter clothes, obviously they were headed somewhere cold.

But if they were wearing shorts and t-shirts and the kind of floral shirts, then I could pretty much tell they were going on some kind of tropical holiday. You could tell where they were going by what they looked like now.

Well, it's the same when it comes to our eternal destination. You can tell where somebody is headed by how they're living now. If they're destined for the new creation, then they'll already be starting to live in ways that reflect the nature of that new creation.

[16 : 48] And they'll stop living in ways that reflect the nature of the old creation, this broken world that we're in. But if they're still living in patterns of sin, in the ways of this world, disregarding God's good laws, well, then it shows that they are headed in the same direction as the world is.

And that is for one thing, and that is the wrath of God, where the rest of this world is going to face. What the rest of this world is going to face one day. The Bible says there is a day of judgment. And this world will fall under the just and perfect and holy and terrifying wrath of God for all its brokenness and sin.

And the only way to escape that is through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But whether you are following Him or not will be seen in how you are living now.

And so consider your own life. Ask yourself, what is your current pattern of living and thinking, especially with regard to something like sex? And what does that say about where you are headed in eternity?

Ask yourself. Because that's the first reason holiness is so important, because it indicates our destination. The second reason it's so important is because it's our job as Christians, as God's people on earth, it's our job to bring light into darkness.

[18 : 11] And we can't do that unless we are living holy lives. Which is what Paul goes on to say in verse 7 to 14. So have a look at that section in your Bibles, 7 to 14.

But I want to start by looking right at the end in verse 14. Paul quotes this. He says, Now I want to tell you something very interesting about this quote.

And I didn't plan this. With the baptism today, it was totally God's doing. I didn't plan this at all. But that quote is not from the Old Testament. Normally when Paul quotes something, you can find it in the Old Testament.

You can't find that quote exactly like it is in the Old Testament. Anyway, rather, he's quoting, most scholars agree, he's quoting the words of a first century hymn that Christians probably sang at a baptism.

To the person being baptized. They would sing these words, wake up sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. This was a hymn sung to a new convert.

[19 : 20] Now the words, of course, were inspired by texts from the Old Testament.

Just like, you know, when we sing praise songs, most of what we sing are words inspired by certain texts in the Bible. Well, this one was as well. It was drawn most likely from two Old Testament texts.

And I just want to quickly go into them so we understand what this hymn is saying. The first one, you don't have to turn there. But the first one is Isaiah 26 verse 19. And that was a prophecy about a group of people who were previously under the judgment of God.

Who have now been rescued from that judgment and given new life. It was a prophecy of something to come written 800 years before Jesus. And it says this. Let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy.

Your dew is like the dew of the morning. The earth will give birth to her dead. It's talking about a time where people will be raised from the graves. It's talking about a time where people will shout for joy.

[20 : 29] Because of salvation from the judgment they were previously under. Of course, we know, reading the rest of the Bible, that this prophecy was fulfilled. 800 years later. When Jesus came and died for sins.

And rose again. To open up new eternal life. For human beings like you and me. So that those who trust in him can also rise to new life. A perfect fulfillment of this prophecy that was written centuries before.

And then the hymn also draws from another prophecy in Isaiah. Chapter 60 verse 1 and 2. Which talks about this new life now being made available to people all around the world.

Not just the Jewish nation. Which is the nation that God first chose to speak through. But now he's opened up salvation to all the world. And that was prophesied in Isaiah.

The prophet. And he says this. Arise, shine, for your light has come. And the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth. And thick darkness is over the peoples.

[21 : 33] But the Lord rises upon you. And his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light. And kings to the brightness of your dawn. It's a beautiful prophecy about God bringing light to a dark and dying world.

And that prophecy is being fulfilled right now. In the gospel of Jesus being spread around the world. And the gospel of Jesus being proclaimed from pulpits like this one.

All around the world right now. And it's these very things that these prophecies talk about. That this hymn sings about. It's these very things that a baptism celebrates.

Like we saw with Imogen earlier. Her baptism celebrated. That she doesn't have to face God's judgment. Because of his promise to wash her clean of her sins. If she trusts in Jesus.

It celebrates the light of the gospel. That God has given to Imogen in a dark world. That he will teach her through her parents and through her church. To lead her to eternal life.

[22 : 34] And it's also a light. We're told in this passage. It's a light. Not just that she follows in her life. But it's a light that she gets to become.

In the lives of others. And that is true of all who believe the gospel. Because look again in your Bibles. At what Paul says in verse 8. Look at this.

He says. This is amazing. He says. For you were once darkness. But now you are light. In the Lord. He's talking to believers. But notice. He doesn't say like we would expect.

Now you have the light. Or now you know the light. Or now you see the light. No. What does he say? You are the light. Those who come into the light of Christ.

Become the light in this dark world. We get to be the ones who show people a way. To the new creation. And show people a way. Into relationship. With their creator.

[23 : 33] How? How do we do that? Well by living lives that demonstrate that new creation. To this broken one. Verse 9. For the fruits of this light consist in all goodness.

Righteousness. And truth. Because look what happens as we live these holy lives. Firstly. Verse 11. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness. But rather. Look what he says.

Expose them. That's the first thing the light does. When you shine a light on something in darkness. It exposes it. Doesn't it? Now that's not saying that we must go around pointing out people's sins.

And saying. Oh look at you. Look at you. Oh look what you're doing wrong. Rather. What it's saying is that. As we live holy lives. That demonstrate heaven on earth. People's sins.

And their brokenness. Will be obvious in contrast to that light. And they will realize it. And they will feel ashamed. They will feel that they don't want that. That they want what you've got.

[24 : 30] And then what will happen? Well we see in verse 13. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible. And everything that is illuminated becomes a light. So not only will our holiness expose darkness for what it is.

But it can also transform those in darkness into light. By attracting them to Jesus. Now.

Not in every case. Sometimes. The light will create aggression. Towards Christians. As it has done throughout history. And there are many martyrs who testify. To those. When the light came.

Who didn't want the light. They ran away from the light. They preferred to stay in darkness. And so they resist the light. They. They vehemently oppose the light.

It's amazing. The violence done towards Christians. Over the ages. When. Many of the times. They have done nothing to deserve it. Nothing to ask for it. They came in love.

[25 : 27] To share a gospel of love. And they got opposed. Violently. Because the darkness. Often hates the light. But. Not in every case.

That's not all that will happen. Well. Well sometimes the light will repel people. Who refuse to come into it. At other times. For those who do. Get exposed. And come into the light. And don't run away.

What will it do? It will transform them. This passage says. Because it will lead them. To find new life in Jesus. And it will cause them. To become part. Of the light themselves.

And that is why. It is so important. To live now. Like we will live in the world. To come. In holiness. A holy life. That Imogen's parents.

And her church. Will teach her. To live. As they call her. From darkness. Into light. And that's our job. That's your guys job.

[26 : 21] To call her from darkness. Into light. But it's our job. As a church. To call her from darkness. Into light. And I think it's appropriate. We do that right now. That we call her into the light.

By doing what the early church. Would have done. Early Christians. The first century Christians. By singing. A baptism. Hymn. For her. It just so happens. That I found. An old.

Dusty hymn. That I dusted off. That uses the very words. Paul quotes here in Ephesians. Wake up her sleeper. Rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you. And I d like us.

To sing this. Hymn. To Imogen. Now. So if you guys don't mind. Just come so we can see Imogen. And the kids are going to come. Join us as well. And the kids are going to come.