

For You May Be Sure Of This

Ephesians 5:1-7

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no 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. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them. (Ephesians 5:1-7 (ESV))

A common misconception that takes place within most of our minds as we observe all the many evidences of immorality and depravity taking place in our world today, especially the things we see filling our television programs and movies and news reports, is that we think that this exaggerated obsession with all the many forms of immoral and depraved behavior just has to be something that is new to our generation today, that it cannot have been this bad in earlier generations. But unfortunately, our memories confuse us. And though we might insist on arguing that yesterday surely was so much better than today, and the “old days” were truly “good old days”, sadly, they really were not.

Yes, immorality does seem to be running far more rampant today than it was before that “hard cultural turn” we took back in the 1960s. But the real difference seems not so much to be in the amount of immorality that is taking place, but rather in the open and perverse way it is now flaunted before the public eye, without embarrassment or shame.

And yes, in some ways flaunting one’s shame openly truly is worse than trying to hide it as was more common a hundred years ago. But the real reality is, sin, especially of this corrupt and vilest immoral kind has been with us almost since the beginning of time. We have only to read accounts given in the Old Testament about Sodom and Gomorrah and even about some of the respected leaders of those days, Abraham’s nephew Lot and his two daughters, and also Samson and Delilah, and David and Bathsheba, and on and on, we see the same immorality pouring forth in each of their behaviors.

So then, may I say it again, “sin”, in all its many forms, especially immorality and impurity of soul, is not at all new? It has been with us almost from the beginning, and it will surely remain until man takes his last breath.

And so, as we read these words in today's text about the immorality that is present within the hearts of men and women, we must not think ourselves unique. Sin is simply what it is, wrong in all of its contexts, and we as believers must be diligent to deal with it in the manner that God prescribes, else we will find ourselves caught up within its clutches and we will surely suffer all its consequences.

And it is from these scriptures before us today and others like them that we as believers are able to learn the true heart of God regarding such things and to know what to do about them. And we will note as we study these words that God is clear and plain so that you and I will have no misunderstandings about His condemnations of such behaviors.

Here, through this letter written by the Apostle Paul, God is giving some stern and emphatic guidance to the saints within the church at Ephesus. Listen again, beginning in verse 3 . . .

3 . . . sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no 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. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them. (Ephesians 5:3-7 (ESV))

These Ephesian believers were relatively new in their faith. They were, for the most part, gentile Christians who were coming out of a culture that had both condoned and promoted immorality and impurity as an ordinary occurrence of daily life. So, these kinds of behaviors and habits were not easy for them to break.

But here, in very emphatic words, God is saying that if a person truly desires to become a part of who He is, a believing Christians who will inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God, then they must, without exception, put away all of the ways of immorality and impurity of soul, that immorality of any and every kind has no place within the righteous Kingdom of God.

And we have only to read Paul's letter to the church in Corinth to find that the same obsessions with immoral and impure behavior were prevalent there also, and that God had the same answers for them. In chapters 5 and 6 of the Book of 1 Corinthians, we read where a prominent member of their church, perhaps one of their leaders, was engaged in an immoral relationship with the "wife of his father", hopefully not his own

mother but a second wife of his father, but all the same, seemingly not even bothering to hide their vile behavior.

And to add depravity upon depravity, the other members and leaders of that church were turning a “blind eye”, some even “winking” at this man’s corrupt behavior.

Again, as in His rebuke to the church members in Ephesus, the Lord was very emphatic, perhaps even more strongly so with these saints in Corinth. In God’s words to the Corinthians, He commanded them to address the matter immediately and strongly so that that man’s behavior might not become as “leaven” within the church and corrupt the whole congregation. And by dealing strongly and decisively with that man’s behavior, that man might eventually be able to be saved from his sin.

And the instructions there in I Corinthians 5 went on to say,

9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person." (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NKJV)

Here, it is apparent that some of the leaders of the Corinthian church had misunderstood an earlier instruction regarding keeping company with immoral people, thinking that they were supposed to keep their distance from the unbelievers of the world who were engaged in all those many forms of sin. But here, Paul was clarifying his earlier instruction, saying “no if you were to try to avoid those in the unbelieving world who were involved in immoral behavior, you would have to leave the world altogether. No, they, and we, need to remain engaged to some extent with all those in the unbelieving world so as to be a witness and a ministry to them.

Instead, the instruction that was given here was directed specifically towards those within the church, true believers in Christ, but who were caught up in immoral behavior. Here, we are being told to exercise discipline over the believing members of our churches in order that they might eventually be brought back to righteous behavior. And here at the same time, God was emphasizing to these Corinthian church leaders the “whole truth” about immorality, saying in chapter 6, verse 9 . . .

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
(1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV))

And he said to them,

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
(1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV))

Does this mean that a believer, if they get caught up in sexual immorality can lose their salvation and never be able to enter into the Kingdom of God? Not at all, but rather God is saying here that earnest men and women who have taken some small steps towards being saved might actually have never gone all the way and fully surrendered their hearts to Christ. And these rebukes can serve as a “testing of their faith” to open their eyes so that they can know for sure if they truly are saved. If a person’s response to these rebukes is to turn and repent of their sinful behaviors, meaning they are sorrowful before God for their sins and are willing to turn away from their sinful habits and behaviors, then their repentance will serve as an assurance to them of their salvation. But if a person does not repent and does not turn from their sinful ways, that equally serves as an indication that they probably were not truly saved from the beginning, and that they need to go back to Christ and fully surrender their hearts to Him.

And that is what you and I must do! We must examine not only our faith and our behavior, but also our attitudes toward such things as immorality, impurity and depravity. If we find that our spirit does agree with God’s Spirit, that as it is written here,
3 . . . sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

Then we can rest in the assurance that our hearts are right with God and that yes, we are assured of a place in the Kingdom of God. But if we have any question at all about any of these words, then we need to get ourselves back down on our knees, doing real business with Christ.

Here, God is saying that no form of sexually immorality and impurity and covetousness is allowed to remain within the heart, soul and behavior of a true believer. And may we

take a moment to clarify what God means by these words “immorality, impurity and covetousness”. They are behaviors that involve any sexual acts between a man and woman outside of the marriage bed. These words also specifically include homosexual behaviors. And even on beyond the acts themselves, these words include impure and lustful thought processes, especially to the extent of coveting sexual involvement with another person. And in today’s contexts, that would include pornography and other forms of visual, thought-provoking sexual activity.

Folks, these things are so very, very serious to our God. Listen to these words in 1 Corinthians 6, beginning in verse 13 . . .

13 “. . . The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
(1 Corinthians 6:13-20 (ESV))

Folks, God cannot be any more plain and clear about immorality and impurity and covetousness. They have no place in our relationship with Him.

So may I say to us plainly that, “From these words, we who truly have Christ as our Savior now really do know better? And we are without excuse, because every time we engage in an immoral behavior God’s Holy Spirit within us is faithful to quickly convict us and warn us away from those sins.”

And folks, God calls us to stand strong in our faith and in these instructions, because as God is saying here, we will surely encounter people who will try to argue a different gospel and say that these forms of sexual behavior are OK with God. But please know that they are liars and we must not listen to them or associate with them. Listen! Verse 6 of Ephesians 5 . . .

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them. (Ephesians 5:6-7 (ESV))

Again, let me say emphatically, this is a very serious matter to the Lord and it should also be serious with you and me. God is not “tolerant” as the world calls “tolerant”. He absolutely will not “tolerate” such sinfulness within the members of His church. Verse 5

. . .

5 For you may be sure of this, (Note those words carefully, God is being emphatic as He uses them) For you may be sure of this, (certain, absolute) that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
(Ephesians 5:5 (ESV))

Please grasp the seriousness of these words. You and I are God’s dearly beloved children. And it grieves His heart when His dearly beloved children get caught up in immorality, impurity and covetousness. But may I say again, if you and I are true believers, we do have a remedy for our behavior and that is repentance. (1 John 1:9) If we repent and turn from our sinful ways, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But the warning given here also still stands, that if we do not turn and repent of our sinful ways, and we start making excuses for our behavior, then that might mean that we have not truly gone to the fullest extent of surrendering our souls to Christ’s salvation. And that is when we must go back and begin all over again.

Folks, these are words of “truth” and they must be obeyed. God is merciful and full of grace, but He is also “Just” and He cannot allow sin to enter into His kingdom.

Listen again as I close with these words . . .

5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no 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.
(Ephesians 5:5-6)

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:-2)