

Walking in Love, not Lust

Ephesians 5:1-7

The way that God designed our five senses so that they adjust to minimize harsh stimuli is amazing! Your eyes adjust to bright sunlight so that it doesn't seem so bright or to a dark room so that it isn't so dark. Your ears filter out certain noises so that you don't even think about them.

Your sense of smell and taste work the same way. Not many people like the taste of coffee at first. It's too bitter. But after you develop a taste for it, the bitter tastes good. And, your sense of touch develops calluses so that what at first felt rough no longer bothers you.

Our spiritual senses also work like our physical senses, but with a crucial difference. While it is to our advantage in most cases to adjust to harsh physical stimuli, it is to our disadvantage spiritually. When we first hear of some terrible sin, we shrink back in horror and disgust. But if we are exposed to this sin repeatedly, so that it becomes commonplace, we tend to accept it or at least shrug it off.

I fear that the American church is in grave danger of embracing the sexual immorality that has engulfed our nation. The more we are exposed to it, the more we become desensitized to it. I don't have to quote statistics of the widespread use of pornography and other immoral things. All of us who are tuned in to today's media and culture know that we are increasingly swimming in a cesspool of moral filth. So Paul's commands in our text become even more urgent today, that as God's saints, we eliminate sexual impurity from our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Ephesians 5 contrasts walking in love with walking in lust. Listen to it again:

- 1 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.**
- 3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;**
- 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.**
- 5 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.**
- 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.**

Last time we looked at verses 1-2 and we saw three positive principles about walking in love.

I. Walking in Love (vv.1-2).

- A. We Walk in Love by **Imitating God**.
- B. We Walk in Love by **Loving** as Jesus Did.

C. We Walk in Love by Giving of Ourselves.

Verse 3 begins with “**But**,” drawing a contrast with the command to walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. He wants to make it clear that the love to which Christ calls us stands in stark contrast with the lust of the pagan world.

So that we all are perfectly clear, let me point out that being a moral person will not get you into heaven. Of course, none of us has been perfectly moral, because Jesus raised the standard of morality even to mental purity when He said that if we even look on a woman to lust, we have committed adultery with her in our hearts (Matt. 5:27-28). But even if you can claim always to have been faithful to your spouse or to be chaste as a single person, it will not qualify you for heaven. As we saw already in Eph. 2:8-9, “**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast.**” So the task for the church is not to crusade to make our lost world more moral, but rather to get lost people saved. God’s transforming our hearts is the basis for pleasing Him by a holy life.

Today we see four negative principles of walking in lust.

II. Walking in Lust (vv.3-7).

Satan is in the business of counterfeits, reproductions and fakes. His counterfeit of love is lust. People want true love, but often settle for lust. Only Jesus gives true love. Even many believers choose the fake over the genuine. That is why Paul must address this problem in the church. We are all susceptible to all kinds of sin. But as we have been saying, if we know Jesus, if we are children of God, it should make a difference in our lives. Let’s examine 4 ways we can avoid walking in lust.

A. We Avoid Walking in Lust by Putting Off Sexual Immorality (v.3a).

Paul says that “**fornication and all uncleanness... let it not even be named among you as is fitting for saints.**” I like the way the *NIV* translates it, “**Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity.**”

The people of Ephesus came to Christ in a city that celebrated illicit sexual activity. The metropolis was home to the temple of Artemis. The priestesses of the temple were prostitutes and the worship was sex. The Ephesians as a whole accepted and even exalted all manner of sexual perversion. It’s not that different from our culture is it?

In our culture at large, 47 percent now approve of homosexuality, although that breaks down into 83 percent of liberals versus 23 percent of conservatives. Among liberals, 89 percent approve of sex between an unmarried man and woman; 33 percent of conservatives agree. Having a baby out of wedlock is acceptable to 83 percent of liberals and 33 percent of conservatives (The Washington Times [6/5/2007], p. A6).

But God’s standards for moral purity are not up for popular vote! He designed the sexual relationship for a man and a woman in a lifelong

committed marriage. When practiced within these boundaries, it is a good gift from God, not something dirty. He gave us His commandments for our good. When we violate His standards, it results in short term pleasure (that's why we're tempted to do it), but long term pain and problems. Keeping God's commandments is often difficult in the short term, but deeply fulfilling in the long term.

"Fornication" comes from *pornea*, which refers to all sexual sins. **"Uncleanness"** refers more generally to anything that is unclean or filthy.

Think of the Christians who have fallen in the area of sexual sin. How many ruined marriages and broken homes stem from this? How many pastors and leaders have given the church a black eye because they walked in lust?

Sexual lust is both unwilling and unable to see the consequences of sin. Lust gets, love gives. Lust wants satisfaction, love gives commitment. Lust is selfish, love is selfless. Lust is not concerned about others, love is not concerned about self. 1 Cor.13:5 says love **"does not seek its own."**

Kent Hughes tells the story of a mother who baked a batch of cookies. She said no one was to eat the cookies until after dinner. Soon she heard the lid of the cookie jar move, she jumped up and caught her son with his hand in the cookie jar. She called out to her little boy, **"What are you doing?"** He said, **"Resisting temptation."** Hughes continues, **"There are open cookie jars all around us. The ubiquitous cookie jar of our culture is the television, dwelling in the heart of nearly every home in America. Turn it off and the goodies are present in an open magazine or a billboard. There are living cookie jars everywhere, inviting passersby to taste their wares. It would be so easy... but when these wares are removed from the jar, their sweetness soon turns to rot, and the decay is shared by the hand that plucked them resulting in gangrene of the soul"** (p.155-156).

B. We Avoid Walking in Lust by Putting Off **Greed** (v.3b).

Note the word **"covetousness"** in v.3. It also should not be **"named among you."** It seems sort of out of place here in this discussion of sexual lust. Yet it can be taken within the context of illicit sexuality. It can rightly be interpreted to mean to covet or have greed for someone else's body.

The greedy person has something in common with the person involved in sexual immorality... he does not control his appetites. The only difference is that one is the lust of the flesh and the other is the lust of the eyes.

Instead of always being greedy for more and more stuff, we must remember what Paul said in 4:28. We should then work not to get more stuff but that we may **"have something to give him who has need."** What a concept!

Both greediness and sexual immorality **"is not even to be named among you** [not even a hint of it] **as is not fitting for saints."** He obviously does not mean that they should not be discussed, because he is discussing them here. The Bible also contains stories of sexual immorality, as well as a vivid fictional depiction of it (Proverbs 7). Rather, he means that these sins should be unknown among Christians. Folks, we can't guard everyone's heart, but we can guard our own hearts. Let such sin never even be **"named"** here in our church, our homes, our marriages, our youth, etc...

C. We Avoid Walking in Lust by Putting Off **Filthy Talk** (v.4a).

In v.4, note three specific terms: **"filthiness," "foolish talking"** and **"coarse jesting."** These things are **"not fitting"** among the people of God.

"Filthiness" refers to obscenities, dirty language, and vulgarities. When a person becomes a believer, one of the hardest things to change is the bad habit of dirty language. Yet it can and **must** be changed.

"Foolish talking" is from *morologia* (*Moros* – "moron," *Lego* – "talk"). Pro.15:2 says, **"The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness."**

There is nothing wrong with good, clean humor. Pro.17:22 says, **"A merry heart does good, like medicine."** *American Health* magazine says a good laugh is like "inner jogging." We can have good humor that is appropriate. But much that passes for humor today is just plain vulgar and dirty.

"Coarse jesting" refers to a joking manner that is determined to be **"coarse"** or rough. It carries the idea of taking any subject and making it obscene or suggestive. This is common in so much of our media today.

Most of us have never committed adultery, but probably none of us are innocent of enjoying watching it on the screen. While we may not tell dirty jokes or use foul language, we often vindicate it by our choices of entertainment.

I can say without any legalistic bent that it is wrong, no, it is sinful for believers to indulge vicariously in the sexual immorality of others or to be entertained by sexual innuendoes passed off as humor.

Let me give you four reasons why we should avoid **"coarse jesting"** and other forms of filthy language:

a. When we use filthy humor, the conversation always gets worse.

I've often been with a group of men when someone tells an off color story. Soon someone else will say, **"If you think that's bad, wait till you here this..."** Sometimes this goes on among Christian men and I have sat and laughed. Guys, it shouldn't be that way...ever!

b. When we use filthy language, we reveal our inner thoughts.

Jesus said in Mark 7:21, "**For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications...**" What we say reveals what we are thinking. If someone is quick to speak of sexual immorality, sexual immorality is on his mind.

d. Third, we harm our spiritual credibility.

How can we witness? How can we lead other believers spiritually?

e. Fourth, God is listening to us.

We "**grieve the Holy Spirit of God.**" Jesus said in Mt.12:36, "**For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment.**"

Rather than using foul language and telling dirty jokes, our speech should "**rather be the giving of thanks.**"

You would think that Paul would say that we are to replace sexual impurity with purity. That is true, of course, and he will state that (5:9-11). But here, he says that the alternative to sexual immorality and greed is to give thanks. Why does he say that? What does thankfulness have to do with moral purity? A lot! If you read Paul's account of the degradation of the human race in Romans 1:18-32, at the root of it was (1:21), "**they did not honor Him as God or give thanks.**"

To be thankful, you must be in submission to God's Lordship over every detail of your life. If you're grumbling or complaining, you're really saying that you know what's best for you better than God does. If you're grumbling about being single or about being married to the "wrong" person, you are not just complaining about your circumstances, but really about God's goodness and wisdom in these aspects of your life. The same goes for discontent in the financial area.

A man sat down to supper with his family and prayed thanking God for the food. Then during the meal he complained about the bread, the coffee and the cheese. His young daughter questioned him, "**Dad, do you think God heard the prayer we said today?**" He answered confidently, "**Of course.**" Then she asked, "**And do you think God heard what you said about the coffee, the cheese, and the bread?**" He answered, "**Why, yes, I believe so.**" She said, "**Then which do you think God believed, Dad?**"

D. We Avoid Walking in Lust by Putting Off **Deception** (vv.5-7).

V.6 says, "**Let no one deceive you.**" People are being deceived today.

We are not to let anyone "**deceive**" us with "**empty words.**" What kind of empty words do you hear? "*Everyone does it.*" "*Times have changed.*" "*No one cares what we do in private.*" "*No one will get hurt.*" "*It's just between you and me.*" "*You deserve a little satisfaction.*" "*Who's going to know?*"

What is the real truth? People who practice such things have no place in heaven.

V.5 says "**for this you know**" or at least we *should* "**know.**" The statement that follows seems rather harsh. It says that "**no fornicator** [person given to sexual sin], **unclean person** [person given to filthiness], **nor covetous man** [person given to greediness] **who is an idolater has ANY part in the kingdom of Christ and God.**"

It's plain. If you are habitually caught up in any of these sins, you are L-O-S-T!!!

People who walk in lust apart from Jesus often think they have plenty of time. They want to first have a little fun, indulge themselves, live a little. Look again at v.6, "**Let no one deceive you... because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**"

V.7 says the person without eternal life is "**an idolater.**" Instead of worshipping God, He worships his own self-centered, self-gratifying, lusts.

Does this mean that a believer who falls into sin can lose his salvation? No. True believers will never persist in such sins. We may slip from time to time. We might even stumble and fall headlong into sin. However, by God's grace we won't stay there.

Believers, we are not to be "**partakers with them.**"

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul tells us plainly, "**Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.**"

Is there hope for those who are stuck in this kind of sin? YES! Look at the next verse, 1 Cor.6:11 says, "**And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**"

Praise God! There is hope for every sinner at the cross! Don't let your moral senses be dulled, so that you go along with our cul-tural drift into increasing immorality and greed. Let your senses be trained by God's Word that shows us His paths of righteousness, which are for our eternal joy and good. Trust in Christ and repent of your sin and He will wash you from all your sins.

CONCLUSION: Remember we are to "**be imitators of God.**" Jesus was never obsessed with lust. He never uttered an obscenity. He never spoke foolishly. He never used coarse jokes or off-color humor. He never laughed at what ought not to be laughed at. Jesus never dealt in lust; rather, He always walked in love. In fact, He loved us so much; He gave Himself for us. Now He asks us to walk in that same love today.