

THE SIN-KILLING QUALITY OF THANKSGIVING

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It's good to be back in the word with you. I really do enjoy these moments I get to spend with you guys. It is even more valuable to me because we are going through the book of Ephesians and Ephesians is written for us. It is written for Christians to celebrate the gospel together in that gloriously broken, but beautiful redeemed body which is the church.

I just want to pray with us right off the bat, and then we will get going into our text today: **pray**.

So for those of you who listened to the scripture which was just read for us, we just heard the syllabus for "Why I'm Not A Christian 101." Now for the sake of clarity, people are not Christians because the root of all sin is unbelief, but those in unbelief have their views shaped by their unbelief, and to someone who is an unbeliever, this passage seems to harden their hearts even more. This passage describes unbelievers, but unfortunately, Paul is writing this to the church because it can also define believers.

Did you hear what Paul was telling us to avoid in verses 3 and 4? Let me read these two verses to you again: **Eph 5:3-4**.

Now, to be a college pastor you must learn to be in-tune with the cultural rumblings of the day, and my cheat code to most of today's themes is UrbanDictionary. Where you the people get to offer definitions of words, and vote for which definition is best suited.

Keep what we just heard from Paul in the back of your mind and hear the top definition for college: "A magical place where it is rumored that learning takes place, although to those who enter it is often described differently afterward, as a beautiful land in which beer flows in amber currents next to a golden pasture, where virgins lie naked with gentle smiles upon their calm, inviting faces; but more precisely, a Shangri-La rite of passage into adulthood which involves rampant consumption of alcoholic beverages, flagrant and promiscuous sexual behavior, and a general and fundamental disregard for any form of responsibility by its habitants."

That definition hit just about everything Paul was warning us about. It is filled with sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, and crude language.

But the bigger question here is why? Why is Paul making this point? Wouldn't Christianity be a lot more attractive to people if we could narrow this list down? Is Paul just the fun-police? If Paul was on twitter would his twitter bio be: Paul, the apostle, taking the fun out of fundamental Christianity since A.D. 63?

So what I want to do in my remaining time with you is to look at three reasons as to why Paul is warning us against these things, and one concluding, counter cultural hope, which Paul will give us.

Reason #1: **Because Christ**

Why should we seek to avoid all these things: because Christ. Now for us in here, some of whom are Christians, some of us who may not be Christians, we need to back up out of the text to see this fully (we took two months off). But for the people in Ephesus who are reading this letter, they know full well what this means.

Because Paul opened this letter with the saving power of Christ. He says that before the foundations of the

world, God the saving and beautiful God, predestined that we would be sons and daughters who would be adopted into his family through Christ. This was not an afterthought, this was, as 1:11 tells us, the whole counsel of God's will. God is a saving God.

At the end of chapter 1, Paul tells us that God chose to save us through Christ, and this letter is written to show us the immeasurable greatness and the beautiful inheritance we have in Christ, who fills all in all.

Chapter 2 tells us that we were born dead in our trespasses, we were sons of disobedience, hostile to God. But God in his great mercy, while we were still dead in our sins, sent us Christ, and Christ died for our sins, in our place so that we may be made alive through him. And in him we live and move and have our being.

In him we live together as a bonded body of believers, growing, encouraging, preaching and worshipping each other into Christ. Chapter 4 says that we have a new life in Christ.

And the passage which sits right before the text we just looked at reads like this: **Eph 5:1-2**.

Why should we avoid sexual immorality, impurity, filthiness, coarse jokes, because we are Christ's and Christ's act differently. You see to the unbeliever in Ephesus these things are understandable, not accepted, not right, not justified, but understandable, but for the church to be engaged in this blows Paul's mind.

Look at **Eph 5:8**. It wasn't that you were momentarily in darkness, you were darkness, and Christ made you light. Why should we avoid these things, because for Christians, these things are antithetical to our new D.N.A. in Christ Jesus.

Reason #2: **Because Thanksgiving**

Look back at **Eph 5:3-4**. Isn't it interesting that in order to combat these things, Paul doesn't say "Avoid immorality, become morally committed to one person in marriage, avoid impurity and become pure, avoid covetousness, be content, avoid filthiness, become wholesome, avoid foolish talk, become sincere, avoid crude joking because you see the value of winsome speech."

Paul says avoid all of these things, and be thankful.

We looked at this before when we were in chapter 4. Paul is committed to showing the corporate danger of sin, and the corporate benefit of Christ. Sin kills community, Christ magnifies himself in it.

Each and every one of these sins hits at least a double. Each and every one of these sins is a sin against God almighty. There is no one innocent in this world. God is the only innocent being. He has done nothing to deserve sin, and yet each one of us have murdered him in our unbelief, and tainted him in our conscious sin. Each of these sins is a sin against others. Look down the list. Foolishness harms people, or at best wastes people's time. Crude joking is typically aimed at other people, and tends to objectify the opposite sex, the same is true with filthiness. Covetousness is rooted in what other people have, and what you don't. Impurity gets other people dirty and sexual immorality is directly related to another person whether that person is on a screen, or in your bed.

And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:18, that any sexual sin, hits the deep triple when it comes to who you are sinning against, you are sinning against God, you are sinning against other, and you are sinning against yourself. Your sins are never innocent.

But thanksgiving is rooted in gratitude. It's hard to sin against someone when you are grateful for them. It's hard

to rebel against God when you are smitten with joy for him. You see thankful people are never accused of not enjoying life. Thankful people are thankful. They are appreciative, and most importantly, they are content. They do not need to rob others of emotions, energy, possessions and intimacy to feel joy. But out of their thanksgiving stems a constant flow of corporate blessings.

I want to come back to this but I want to briefly touch on the final reason: **Because Wrath Eph 5:5-8**

Why is Paul so against these things, because he wants us to avoid God's wrath. Sinners stand under God's wrath. Why? Because sin is against God. It is just for a murderer to be tried as a murder, it is just for a robber to be judged as a robber, and it is just for a sinner to be judged as a sinner.

Now Romans 8:1 tells us that for the Christian, for the one who is Christ's there is no condemnation. We do not fear God's wrath in the same way a non-believer does, because Christ took our wrath on the cross. But for the Christian, we stand in danger of submitting to a yoke of slavery. We stand in danger of hindering our joy and our worship.

But I will offer this warning from **1 John 3:6**. Often times we may claim to be Christians, but the presence of continual, prevailing, intoxicating sin in our lives may be indicating that we should make that sure.

And for those who are not Christians, you are under the wrath of God because of your sin. Because of your sin, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Let no one deceive you with empty words. It is not every man for himself as long as he doesn't harm anyone else, it is not boys being boys, it is not young people being dumb, it is not the age of experimentation it is sin, and sin and all it clings to will be destroyed by a holy and pure God.

On one side is God's wrath, but on the other is inheritance. On the other side is complete acceptance. On the other side is Christ's atoning sacrifice. On the other side is what Paul calls the immeasurable riches of grace stored up in Christ. On the other side is joy forever more. On the other side is the saints clothed in light. So why is Paul making these warnings. It is not because Paul is against fun, against youth, against experience. Paul is warning us as Christians of falling prey to sin because Paul is for joy. Paul is for thanksgiving, Paul is for community, Paul is for life, because Paul is for glory, and glory is for those who were once darkness, but now have been made light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

This is what Paul says: **5:7-10**

This is where life gets hard for us. It's easy to say walk as children of light, it's harder to walk as children of light. Because so many times we are harbors of darkness. We hold sin in our hearts, hatred in in our hands, and shame in our minds.

Things we as Christians, and as non-believers should be ashamed of. So what is our hope? How can we who wrestle with darkness be brought into the light? No one wants their dirty laundry to be seen. Jesus himself said this in **John 3:20**.

Here is the dilemma for us. And it exists in Christians, where Christians think they should be sinless, so where they wrestle with sin they try to hide it from everyone thinking that if no one can see it, it isn't really there. And for non-Christians, even if they start thinking they need to clean up their lives, they don't go to churches because they think that churches are for those who are already clean, and so they try to purify themselves before they can come to God.

But look at what Paul says in **Eph 5:10-11**. The biggest sin I wrestle with as a Christian is lust. For some of you it may be the same, for some of you it may be different. I used to be severely enamored by pornography, and the lingering side effects of that is that my mind is prone to lust. I can't wait for the day when that tendency is removed by God's grace.

But I can tell you this, when I would be wrestling with lust, or if I had just looked at porn, I would look at this verse and you know what would jump out at me: Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

Shame. I only saw shame. I saw uselessness, I saw that I was trapped. I saw that I was dirty, and I saw that I was in darkness. And so I would spiral down into more and more sin, ashamed of who I had become. But I missed a key part here, look back at **Eph 5:10-11**.

Expose it. Why! How! No Way! How could I expose my most shameful tendencies? No one wants to see that, it is embarrassing, it is humiliating. Why?

Well this is our final hope for tonight: **God is dripping with grace.**

Look here:

Eph 5:10-11

What a beautiful hope. Where culture tells you to hide your true self, the gospel calls you to expose it. Why? Because when it is exposed it becomes visible, and when it is made visible, your deepest darkness is turned to light, how, because of the light of Christ.

Because of Christ's redemptive majesty we are freed from our sin. Because Christ took our darkness and bore it on his chest on the cross our sin has already been seen by God the father, our sin has been atoned for, our sin has been made clean, our hearts have been made pure and so now we walk as Children of the Light!

I saw this quote by Charles Spurgeon this week: "May I, therefore, urge upon any who have no good thing about them—who fear that they have not even a good feeling, or anything whatever that can recommend them to God—that they will firmly believe that our gracious God is able and willing to take them without anything to recommend them, and to forgive them spontaneously, not because they are good, but because He is good."

In Galatians, Paul warns us to avoid a list of similar things, and he says that you avoid walking by the flesh, when you walk by the spirit. It is a grace to walk by the spirit.

And look at what Paul says about grace: **2 Cor 4:15**

A focus on grace produces a life of thanksgiving. And a thankful life, is a sin expelling, Christ glorifying life.

Expose your sin to Christ. Expose your sin to your friend. Confess it to the cross and bear it no more. Boast in Christ by exposing yourself to his gracious care, remove God's wrath from your shoulders, and enter into the greatest inheritance, and the most joy filled life.

This is our hope. This is our battle. This is our gospel. Walk as children of light.