

Sermon Builder

Original Language Study

³ But all fornication and immorality or covetousness must not be named among you, as is fitting among saints, ⁴ also baseness and foolish talk or coarse joking, which are not proper, but greater thankfulness. ⁵ For this you have been knowing, that all who are fornicators or impure or greedy, which is idolatry, are not having an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words; for because of these come the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.

Compare Translations

v3, some oddities in NIV and HCSB. ESV: *must not even be named*; NIV: *must not be even a hint*; HCSB: *should not even be heard of*

v4, oddity in the KJV. ESV: *which are out of place*; KJV: *which are not convenient*.

v6, NIV and HCSB do damage; ESV: *the sons of disobedience*; NIV: *those who are disobedient*; HCSB: *on the disobedient*. Paul is not saying this wrath comes on everyone who is ever disobedient but on *the sons of disobedience*, those whose lives are so characterized by sin that they are of their Father, the devil.

Notes on the Passage in Context

Paul has previously listed some actions Christians are to avoid (4:14, 17-19, 22, 25-31) but this is the first time to see something more clearly resembling a vice list. Up to now the message has been largely positive: this is what you are in Christ. The end of 4 showed the first shift to the negative: what you must not be. 5:3-5 contains the only real vice list in Ephesians, though there are more things to avoid listed on in 5:6-21, particularly 6, 8, 11-12, 15, 17, 18.

The movement comes through Ephesians as 1-3 focused on our theological position with Christ and chapter 4 shifted to focus on practical living, emphasizing positive aspects of the Christian life. In chapter 4 the emphasis is on becoming like Christ, living like God. The emphasis continues in 5:1-2. The section 5:3-20 really marks the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian, some of which has been seen already, particularly spelled out in 4:17-19.

Outline the Passage

- I. Let there not be named among you: (3)
 - A. Sexual immorality
 - B. Impurity

- C. Covetousness
- II. These are out of place: (4a)
 - A. Filthiness
 - B. Foolish talk
 - C. Crude joking
- III. Let there be (4b)
 - A. Thanksgiving
- IV. These will not have an inheritance in the Kingdom of God: (5)
 - A. Sexually immoral
 - B. Impure
 - C. Covetous
 - 1. Which is idolatry
- V. Let no one deceive you with empty words (6)
 - A. For because of these the wrath of God comes
 - 1. upon the sons of disobedience

Questions from the Passage

1. What does Paul say must not be named among Christians?

Specifically, Paul mentions sexual immorality, all impurity, covetousness.

2. What is sexual immorality?

From the Greek *πορνεία* meaning, generally, sexual immorality and referring to pretty much the whole range of sexual sin. BDAG says, “various kinds of ‘unsanctified sexual intercourse’.” Any sexual activity that goes beyond what God has ordained for human sexual behavior.

TDNT:

As individuals are to steer clear of *πορνεία* so it is the apostle’s supreme concern to keep the communities free from such sins, since toleration of the offender makes the whole church guilty and constitutes an eschatological threat, 1 C. 5:1 ff.; cf. Hb. 12:14–16. Thus Paul demands that the congregation expel the impenitent wrong-doer (1 C. 5:13) and break off all fellowship with those who live licentious lives (5:9).⁸² 2 C. 12:19–21 expresses a concern lest the impenitence of those who have committed fornication should make necessary his intervention in the affairs of the community. The *πορνεία* of individual members makes the whole church unclean and threatens the whole work of the apostle, which is to present pure communities to Christ, 2 C. 11:2.

3. What is impurity?

From Greek ἀκαθαρσία meaning refuse or immorality. A more general word than Πορνεία, it refers to a wide range of behavior considered immoral, vile, reprehensible. TDNT describes this word as the opposite of holiness: “Gentile ἀκαθαρσία is the direct opposite of the righteousness of Christian sanctification (R. 6:19; 2 C. 12:21). Unclean motives (πλεονεξία, v. 5) are completely ruled out in the work of Paul (1 Th. 2:3). At 1 Th. 4:7 again ἀκαθαρσία denotes the immoral state of the pre-Christian life; the primary allusion is to πορνεία and πλεονεξία, as at Eph. 4:19 and 5:3, 5 (opp. ἁγιασμός).”

4. What is covetousness?

From the Greek πλεονεξία meaning greediness or, BDAG, “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due.” Insatiable desire, covetousness. Five of its ten NT uses translated by ESV as *covetous*; three as *greed*; one *greedy*; once *exaction*.

5. What does he mean by named?

Of naming, TDNT says, “There was and is a world-wide belief that the name of an object, man, or higher being is more than a mere label only incidentally associated with the one who bears it. The name is an indispensable part of the personality.” The implication from Paul could be that such practices must not become a central part of their personality, something they become known for. But the tone seems to place the prohibition broader than that. Paul is not giving them room to dabble in these sins so long as they don’t get carried away, he seems to say there ought not to be any hint of it. Thus the meaning would be that no one from outside should be able to look in and identify cases of these sins among the body.

We always focus on sexual immorality but Paul moves beyond that to include impurity generally and greed particularly. One can live a sexually pure life and still have greed named in him, thus falling under condemnation by this verse.

Again, *it must not even be named among you* would seem to mean that no one in the community should be identified as engaged in these sins as heart-dwelling characteristics of their lives.

The focus here is on the community rather than the individual, though individual application is obvious. Saying *these things must not be among the community* also means *these things must not be in your own life*.

Could also mean, as the majority of commentaries seem to indicate, that believers should not speak of or mention these kinds of things, a prohibition against dwelling on talk of sexual matters. Not an absolute prohibition or Paul himself could not have spoken on it, but a general instruction to move away from talking on such things. This fits with the shift in the next few verses to talking about the kind of speech that should not be present among believers.

The instruction to remove such people from the community remains in 5:7 and 1 Cor 5.

6. Why must these things not be named?

As noted above, these things must not be named among believers because they run contrary to the Christian life. As we will note later, the Christian life involves a heart transformed by God's power, breaking the power of sin. Sin will not be eradicated completely but it must not be dwelled in or tolerated. Individuals must not live lives dominated by sin and the community must expel any whose lives are dominated by sin.

To claim to be a Christian yet walk in sin makes a mockery of Christ and the work he has done for us. It is to tolerate sin and ignore the price God paid and it presents to the world an image of a God who does not hold his people to high expectations of behavior. As we are to live in the likeness of God, it paints a terrible picture of who God is and what he does.

7. What does Paul mean by which is proper among saints?

The phrase is potentially confusing. Paul certainly does not mean that it is proper to find sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness among saints. He has already said such things must not be found. Rather, it is proper for such things not to even be named among the saints. It is good and right and proper and expected for a Christian community to have none of these things in its midst.

8. What does Paul say is out of place for Christians?

Filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are out of place for Christians.

9. What is filthiness?

From the Greek word *αἰσχρότης* meaning filthiness, obscenity, shamefulness. *Hapax Legomenon*. BDAG: "behavior that flouts social and moral standards." Taking in the context of the next two, Paul probably applies this to obscenity in talking or, more specifically, things said that should bring shame to the speaker. The word itself, however, can have more general application to any shameful activity.

10. What is foolish talk?

From the Greek *μωρολογία* meaning foolish, silly talk. Also *hapax legomenon*. It relates to any talk that is foolish, pointless, a waste of time and energy.

11. What is crude joking?

From the Greek *εὐτραπεία* meaning coarse jesting, crude joking. The third in a series of words related to speech, this one is yet another *hapax legomenon*. In extrabiblical sources the word is

often used in a good sense of a clever wit. Here, however, it takes on a bad sense, improper or coarse joking. Language used badly.

12. What is meant that these are out of place?

The Greek word is ἀνήκω, meaning something like appropriate or fitting. The ESV translation comes across a little weaker than the Greek. It is not simply out of place for Christians to speak in such ways, it is not appropriate, improper, unfitting. Speech unbecoming a Christian. In Col. 3:8 it is *fitting* for wives to submit to husbands. In Eph 5:4 it is *not fitting* for Christians to speak in such ways.

13. What should be among Christians?

Paul says that there should be thanksgiving among Christians.

14. What is this kind of thanksgiving?

From the Greek εὐχαριστία meaning gratitude or thanksgiving. Related words are often used by Paul in opening his epistles, telling the Christians that he gives thanks to God for them (Rom. 1:8). Rather than obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, the tongue of the Christian is to be used for thanksgiving. We should give thanks to God, expressing gratitude to him because of his goodness to us.

15. Who is it that has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God?

Those who are sexually immoral, impure, or covetous have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

16. Is there any difference in the list in v5 and the ones in vv3-4?

Essentially, no. In v3, specifically, the characteristics are named. In v5, the people doing those characteristics are named. It is notable that the negative characteristics in v4 are not included in the list in v5. One difference, perhaps is that in v5 the covetous person is also called an idolater, something addressed in the next question.

17. How is covetousness idolatry?

The wording in verse 5 is such that Paul seems to be limiting the covetousness that does not participate in the Kingdom. The covetousness or greed that is like idolatry will not be found in the kingdom of God. It is not wrong to desire material things. That is not covetousness or greed. It is wrong to so desire material things that our focus turns away from God and toward acquisition. That is when desire becomes covetousness and idolatry.

18. What is meant by the kingdom of Christ and God?

Two parts to this question: (1) what does Paul mean by naming Christ *and* God; (2) what is this kingdom?

On the second, I take it as the kingdom of God. It is the realm of those living in submission to God's authority. God has authority and control everywhere but not everyone submits to him. They are still ruled by him, but they would fight his rule if they could. Those within the kingdom of God are those who yield to God's rule.

On the first, by saying *kingdom of Christ and God* Paul is perhaps reminding the reader that these two go together. One cannot speak about Christ without speaking about God. Also, when we speak about God, it is the example of Christ that should come to mind. In 4:24 we are to put on the new self made in the likeness of God. In 5:1 we are to imitate God. In 5:2 we are to walk in love as Christ loved us. The example of what it means to follow God is to follow Christ. Paul is not making a particular distinction between Christ and God in 5:5, rather he is reminding us that they go together.

19. How do these vices prevent one from having an inheritance in the Kingdom?

Part of the answer can be found in Matthew 15:10-11, 18-20. Jesus says that the things coming from the heart defile a person, sinful behaviors proceed from a sinful heart. God will transform a person's heart at salvation, taking away the sinful heart thus taking away sinful behavior. Paul's meaning, then, is that a person committing these sins displays an untransformed heart. He shows no marks of repentance or salvation and has no participation in God's kingdom. To be in the kingdom of God is to live in submission to the rule and command of Christ. It is to live in obedience to God's commands as revealed in the Scriptures. Those not living under the reign of God are not in the Kingdom and thus have no inheritance in the Kingdom.

20. What is the inheritance to be found in the Kingdom?

There are numerous references to the inheritance of believers in the NT: Acts 20:32; Gal 3:18; Eph 1:14; Eph 1:18; Eph 5:5; Col 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4, etc etc. These are just the references using the same Greek word, there are other words translated in ESV as *inheritance*.

The idea of inheritance would draw from the promised inheritance of the OT, the promises of God to the children of Abraham. This was primarily the land. As history progressed, the land remained central but before and during the exile the promise was that God would not destroy the people but would restore them safely to the land. After the exile the promise was also seen to be God's continued faithfulness and eventual full redemption of his people by replacing their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

It is sometimes said that heaven is the inheritance, as it was the inheritance of the Jews. This seems wrong, on the basis of 1 Pet 1:4: *...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...* The inheritance, whatever it is, is kept in Heaven, and is not Heaven itself. Jobes, commenting on the verse, quotes Beare saying, “The paranomasia of the three verbals is most effective; the inheritance is untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time; it is compounded of immortality, purity, and beauty.” (ECNT, 1 Peter, 86)

Perhaps I limit it too much. The inheritance is not all of Heaven but could, nonetheless, be a part of Heaven. That is, the promised inheritance is to bring to mind the promise of land with the expectation that a home is being prepared for believers so that each believer will receive an inheritance of a home, of land, in Heaven itself. This would mesh nicely with John 14:1-3. This language also works well with the theme in Hebrews of pilgrims looking for a home, as in Heb 11:10. The promise is not ultimately for a dwelling place of human construction but a dwelling place given by God.

Clowney sees the language as somewhat metaphorical: “Our inheritance is not simply a land, a city, or even a new earth. It is all that God will give us; his *salvation*.” Drawing from Piper, I would say the inheritance is more specifically God himself. Clowney says this and notes that in the OT “God said to Aaron, ‘You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.’” (49). Revelation 21:3 promises an eternal state of God dwelling with man. He is the promised inheritance.

Those who claim Christ but do not live within his rule and authority have no inheritance in the Kingdom. They have no dwelling place within the realm of God, no inheritance stored for them in Heaven. When they die they will not find a place prepared for them with God so they will be cast into the outer darkness, chained with the devil and his angels in the fires of Hell.

21. Who has an inheritance in the Kingdom? How?

Those who live within God’s kingdom, meaning submitting to his rule and reign, have an inheritance and will have a dwelling place with God.

How we gain entry into the kingdom of God is described in 1 Cor 6:11. After describing those who have no inheritance in the kingdom, Paul says: *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.* Sanctification and justification have brought unbelievers into the kingdom.

Other things about this inheritance are said in Eph 1. 1:11, 14, and 18 each mention the inheritance. 1:11 we have been predestined to this inheritance. 1:14 says the Holy Spirit will guarantee we receive the inheritance. 1:18 speak of the riches of the inheritance we will receive.

Of interest for this question are 1:11 and 1:14. 1:11 shows that the Father brings us into the kingdom while 1:14 shows that the Spirit keeps us there. Those who do not have an inheritance

in the end were never in the kingdom or the Spirit would have brought them safely to their inheritance.

22. What are the empty words that might deceive?

Probably not a reference to the words in v4, these empty words are from those who want to convince others that such actions are acceptable for Christians. There are those who would defend their sin by claiming it is reasonable behavior. The truth is their hearts are full of unrighteousness with none of the fruits of salvation. They seek to lead others into error rather than face the truth of their condition.

The empty words, then, are meaningless words with no truth or substance behind them, words used to deceive the gullible and weak minded. These are the people of 4:17-19 who are dark in understanding and given up to impurity. These are the people of 4:14 who are tossed about by every wind of doctrine, inventing new doctrines to suit the pleasure of the moment. These are also described in 2 Tim 3:1-5 and 4:3-5, people who seek teachers who will say what they want to hear. Meaningless, empty words that will bring the wrath of God.

23. Why does the wrath of God come?

Wrath will come because God's just commands have been ignored. His truth has been revealed, his commands made known, but people loved darkness instead of light and sought their own way rather than God's way. He will judge those who do not live in obedience to him, even if those people claim to be Christians. Mt. 7:21 comes to mind, not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of God.

24. What is the wrath of God?

It is God's just judgment against sinners because of their sins. In John 3:36 the wrath of God is something that remains on a person, likely meaning something like this person stands under the wrath of God while the forgiven person has God's wrath removed from him. It does not mean the person is presently experiencing the fullness of wrath and judgment as though this life were some sort of Hell. In Romans 5:9 present justification means future salvation from God's wrath. The day of wrath is coming, but believers will be kept safe in that day. The execution of God's wrath takes place in Hell, as Jesus taught several times that sinners will be cast into Hell.

25. Who are the sons of disobedience?

A reference to those whose lives are characterized by disobedience rather than faithfulness to God. All unbelievers can be called *sons of disobedience*. No true believer can rightly be called a *son of disobedience*. We know this because these sons of disobedience will experience the wrath of God whereas believers have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, kept safe until the day they

receive their inheritance (Eph 1:13-14). As noted above, this should remind of Mt 7:21 and Jesus's warning that not all who call out his name will enter the kingdom of God.

Note Eph 2:2 and its reference to the *sons of disobedience*.

Related Passages

1 Thess 4:3, the will of God, your sanctification, flee sexual immorality
Eph 4:19-20, they have become... greedy for impurity... but that is not how you learned Christ.
Mt 15:19, out of the heart comes evil
Rom 1:29, full of all manner of unrighteousness
Rom 6:13, do not present members to sin, present self to God, instrument for righteousness
1 Cor 5:10-11, remove association with rebellious Christians
1 Cor 6:9, unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom
Gal 5:19-21, works of the flesh... these will not inherit
Col 3:5, put to death what is earthly in you
1 Thess 4:3, the will of God, your sanctification
1 Thess 4:7, God has not called for impurity but holiness
2 Pet 2:10, bold and willful, they do not tremble as they sin
Rev 21:8, these sinners will burn in the lake of fire
Psalm 119:26, incline my heart to your testimonies and not selfish gain
2 Tim 3:2, people who are lovers of self
2 Pet 2:14, eyes full of adultery, hearts trained in greed
Eph 5:12, shameful to speak of what they do in secret
Eph 4:29, no corrupting talk, only what is good
Rom 1:28, God gave them up to a debased mind
Psalm 92:1, it is good to give thanks to the Lord
1 Thess 5:18, give thanks in all circumstances
1 Jn 2:3, we will know that we are his if we keep his commandments

Comments on the Verses

Perhaps a surprising passage for some, along with passages like Revelation 21:8 and others, Paul shows that there is a standard of behavior for believers and those who do not live within this standard will not receive an inheritance within the kingdom of God, ie, Heaven.

There are two groupings of sinful behavior in these verses. Verse 3 speaks of sinful behavior, particularly sins of a sexual or greedy nature. Verse 4 speaks of sinful speech, along with a call to use the tongue for thanksgiving.

In verse 5 Paul returns to the sins mentioned in verse 3 and warns the people that those continuing on in this kind of a lifestyle will not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Contrasting 3 and 4, it seems that Scripture tolerates more the struggles a Christian may have

with his tongue than the struggles he may have with his body. A person engaged in a lifestyle of sexual immorality or these other sins does not display the fruit of the Spirit, while a person misusing his tongue might have the Spirit but needs to grow in his control of his speech.

In verse 3, these sinful behaviors must not even be named among believers. It must not be identified in the fellowship of the body. The implication, drawing as well from other passages, would be that those claiming the name of Christ while engaged in these sins must be removed from the body so that their sin cannot be named among the believers.

In verse 4, Paul gives the alternative action. It is not proper for Christians to have filthiness or foolish talk or crude joking, but it is proper for Christians to engage in thanksgiving. Let the tongue be used for praise, not for filth.

In verse 5, as seen already Paul returns to the sins of v3 to say that none of those going on in these sins will have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. As noted in the question notes above, the issue is that those living this kind of life show none of the work of the Spirit and will not receive that which the Spirit seals.

For more comments, see question notes.

Notes From Commentaries

ESVSB, v3: Sexual immorality, the Greek term covers all sexual sins, including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc.

ESVSB, v4, notes that thanksgiving counters covetousness.

Boice, p180: The positive answer to this view, Christian marriage, is going to be discussed later in the chapter. **[I note this as a reminder to comment on the coming virtues that counter the present vices.]**

Sproul, v5, p124: One may make a profession of faith in Christ, and then continue in a licentious lifestyle. This would reveal quicker than anything else that the profession of faith is false and the person is not in the kingdom of God.

Henry, v5: those who are impenitent, and allow themselves either in the lusts of the flesh or the love of the world, are not Christians indeed, and so belong not to the kingdom of grace, nor shall they ever come to the kingdom of glory.

Henry, v6: Let none flatter you, as though such things were tolerable and to be allowed of in Christians, or as though they were not very provoking and offensive unto God, or as though you might indulge yourselves in them and yet escape with impunity.

Calvin, v3: To this precept he adds the authoritative declaration, that he demands nothing from them but that which becometh saints, — manifestly excluding from the number and fellowship of the saints all fornicators, and impure and covetous persons.

Calvin, v5: When men have repented, and thus give evidence that they are reconciled to God, they are no longer the same persons that they formerly were. But let all fornicators, or unclean or covetous persons, so long as they continue such, be assured that they have no friendship with God, and are deprived of all hope of salvation.

O'Brien, v3, pp359-360: At Colossians 3:5 'greed' appears as the final vice in a fivefold list, and was especially accented as a gross sin. There the apostle begins with the outward manifestations of sin ('sexual immorality') and moves to the inward cravings of the heart ('ruthless greed'), from fornication to covetousness. Here in Ephesians, greed occurs at the end of a (threefold list). It is distinguished from the two preceding vices by the disjunctive particle 'or', as Paul moves from the acts of immorality and uncleanness to their inner spring — 'greed', that insatiable desire to have more, even the coveting of someone else's body for selfish gratification.

O'Brien, v3, p360: believers should not only shun these sins but also avoid thinking and talking about them. Clearly, such vices will be mentioned in lists as here, but they are not to become the subject of Christians' conversation. Thinking and talking about sexual sins 'creates an atmosphere in which they are tolerated and which can . . . even promote their practice'.³ The motivation for the avoidance of such conversation is what is fitting⁴ for 'saints' (cf. 1:1).

O'Brien, v4, p361: All three terms refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in vulgar conversation. This kind of language must be avoided as utterly inappropriate among those whom God has set apart as holy.

O'Brien, v4, p361: Christians, because of the grace given to them in Christ Jesus (cf. 1:3–14, 15–23), are to live out their lives with joyful thanksgiving. It should be the accompaniment of every activity, being the appropriate response of those who have been filled by God's Spirit (Eph. 5:18–20).⁹ Here in v. 4 thanksgiving reflects a Christian attitude to sex that is antithetical to a pagan attitude with its immorality and vulgarity.

O'Brien, v5, pp361-362: Two severe warnings follow. They serve to underline the preceding admonitions of vv. 3 and 4, and are intended to motivate the Christians solemnly to heed them (note the introductory 'for'). These warnings spell out the dire consequences for those who are immoral or sexually covetous: the first (v. 5) speaks with certainty of exclusion from the kingdom of Christ and of God, the second (v. 6) of the experience of the wrath of God. [**Note the warning of v6, consider including v6 in sermon.**]

O'Brien, v5, p363: Those who have given themselves over to immorality, impurity, and greed, even if they call themselves Christian, show that they are excluded from eternal life. The apostle is not asserting that the believer who ever falls into these sins is automatically excluded from

God's kingdom. Rather, what is envisaged here is the person who has given himself or herself up without shame or repentance to this way of life.

O'Brien, v5, p364: There is a tendency in Paul's letters to distinguish two phases of the heavenly kingdom, reserving the expression 'the kingdom of God' for its future and eternal aspect (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21),²⁰ while 'the kingdom of Christ' denotes the present phase of God's rule (1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:13; cf. also Eph. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18), which is destined to merge with the future. So in 1 Corinthians 15:24 Christ, after reigning until all things are put under his feet, delivers up the kingdom to God the Father. Thus, the double formulation the kingdom of Christ and of God signifies the divine kingdom in both its present and future aspects, from which those who have given themselves over to immorality, impurity, and greed are excluded.

O'Brien, v6, p364: It is all too easy for believers to be influenced by the surrounding world and to succumb to its ways of thinking and behaving. The result is that what is acceptable to the culture of the day becomes acceptable in the church. This is particularly true in contemporary Western society in the area of sexual morality.

O'Brien, v6, p365: As in 2:2, the forceful expression 'sons of disobedience' points not to those who commit the occasional act of disobedience but to men and women whose lives are characterized by disobedience. They do not submit to God's authority; instead, they prefer to rule their own lives and go their own way.

Baker, v3: Stating it differently, the admonition to "walk in love" is followed here by the condemnation of love's perversion.

Baker, v3: Greed is selfishness. It characterizes the money-grubber. Nevertheless, in the present connection, because of its close association with immorality and impurity, it may well apply especially to ravenous self-assertion in matters of sex, at the expense of others: the going beyond what is proper and defrauding the brother...

Baker, v3: "Let it not even be mentioned among you," says Paul, meaning: so far should you be removed from the sin of this type that the very suspicion of its existence among you should be banished once and for all. He cannot have meant that sex must never be discussed, and that warnings with respect to the evil of immorality and its attendant sins must never be heard, for he himself is at this very moment discussing it and issuing such a warning.

Hodge, v6: It is common not only among the Gentiles but among the mass of humanity in all ages and nations to extenuate the particular sins which the apostle refers to here. It is urged that such sins have their origin in the very constitution of our nature, that they are not malignant, that they may co-exist with amiable tempers, that they are not harmful to others, that no one is the worse for them if no one knows about them, etc. Paul, therefore, cautions his readers in every age of the church not to be deceived by such vain words, assuring them that on these things (immorality and greed) the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience (kjkv).

IVP, vv5-6: The terms idolater (v. 5; see B[1]) and disobedient (v. 6; see B'[1]) reveal the fact that it is not just the actions of these people but who they are in the depth of their being that calls for judgment. That judgment comprises (1) exclusion from any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (v. 5; see B[2]) and (2) God's wrath (v. 6; see B'[2]).

WBC, vv3-4, p321: The adversative δέ marks the move from the topic of self-sacrificial love to that of self-indulgent sensuality. Sexual sins now dominate the vices mentioned in vv 3–5 and are primarily what is meant by the language of “deeds of darkness” and “what is done in secret” in vv 11, 12.

WBC, vv3-4, p322: Because of the context, πλεονεξία, “covetousness,” should also be taken as the sort of unrestrained sexual greed whereby a person assumes that others exist for his or her own gratification. The tenth commandment contains the injunction against coveting one's neighbor's wife

WBC, vv3-4, p322: The writer wishes to stop such vices before they gain access to the communities to which he writes, and so he asserts that they must not even be named. It is sometimes claimed (e.g., Schlier, 233; Bratcher and Nida, Handbook, 125–26) that the prohibition is not to be taken literally and simply means that the vices are not to occur. But the use of the emphatic μηδέ and, in particular, the repetition of this notion in v 12—“it is shameful even to speak of what is done by them in secret”—suggest that the writer actually meant that these sins should not even be talked about. Believers' distancing from such vices must extend to their conversation. Presumably, the assumption behind this prohibition is that thinking and talking about sexual sins creates an atmosphere in which they are tolerated and which can indirectly even promote their practice.

WBC, vv3-4, p324: What is to replace the six vices and to be at the heart of Christian speech is thanksgiving, which appears like an oasis in a desert of negatives.

WBC, v5, p324: Sexual lust elevates the desired object, whether a person's own gratification or another person, to the center of life and is antithetical to the thanksgiving which recognizes God at the center.

Simeon, v5, p376: The whole voice of Scripture declares it. Even reason itself may be considered as bearing testimony to it: for what delight can a holy God take in an unholy being? or how can the Lord Jesus Christ, “who died to destroy the works of the devil, exalt to a participation of his kingdom one who is fulfilling the works of the devil? We may as well conceive that “Christ and Belial should have communion with each other,” as that a man who regards and retains iniquity in his heart should enter into the kingdom of heaven

Sermon Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. From Virtue to Vice
 - B. Sins not held by saints
 - C. **Ephesians 5:3-6**
- II. Exposition
 - A. Spiritual Vices
 1. Sins of the body
 - a) Sexual immorality
 - b) Impurity
 - c) Covetousness
 2. Sins of the tongue
 - a) Filthiness
 - b) Foolish talk
 - c) Crude joking
 - B. Do not let them be named, they are out of place
 1. Do not dwell on them in conversation
 2. Do not let your words be crass or vulgar
 3. Whatsoever things are pure, **Phil 4:8**.
 4. It is not fitting for Christians to engage in vulgar talk
 5. **Luke 6:45** - what does your mouth say about your heart?
 - C. Christian, do not be deceived by those who would lead you astray
 - D. The danger of these sins
 1. Those going on in these sins are sons of disobedience
 2. No inheritance in the kingdom of God
 3. The wrath of God
 - E. The body's response to the unrepentant member
 - F. The answer to these temptations: be a people of thanksgiving
- III. Application
- IV. Conclusion

Sermon Content

Ephesians 5:3-6

I want to begin with a story this morning. In this story there is a group of refugees, struggling across a desert wasteland. They are hot, tired, dressed in rags. Many are weak and on the verge of death. They have no supplies and all around all they can see is the shimmering heat rising off of dry desert sand. They are doomed, hopeless. Then out of nowhere an oasis appears in their midst. With great cries of rejoicing the people plunge in. The oasis has an endless supply of water and abundant food, clearly enough to last the people for ages. The people enjoy the delights of the oasis for a time but a very peculiar thing starts to happen. One here, two there, a group over there, they all begin to return to the desert wilderness. No destination in mind, no other hope in sight, they return to their wandering. Their thirst quenched, hunger satisfied, they returned to the world of death, destruction, and despair, ignoring the peril all around them.

I wonder how many people in this room today are like those returning to the desert wasteland, returning to brutal slavery, returning to the stench of sin. We claim to be a people forgiven and set free but we live as though nothing has changed. Once we take care of our guilty feelings we return to the wasteland of sin and the world's ways. We claim Christ but are shocked when actually expected to live like Christians.

Today we look at **Ephesians 5:3-6**. Up to this point Paul has said a lot about our lives as Christians, including what we should and should not be as followers of Christ. But he has not given us many specifics on things we should avoid. Back in **4:22** we were told to *put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires*. In today's passage Paul mentions six things Christians are to put off.

The New Testament contains various lists of virtues and vices. In our passage we find the only vice list in Ephesians. This vice list focuses on sins of a sexual nature. Let's take a moment to look at these six vices.

The first two, sexual immorality and impurity, cover a range of sexual sins, from sins of the body to sins of the mind. God created human beings to enjoy sexual activity within certain parameters: one man and one woman united in marriage. Anything else is sin, whether it is sexual activity that takes place physically or mentally. In **Matthew 5:28** we learn from Jesus that even lust is a form of adultery. Sometimes people, especially young people, will ask how far is too far. It is an evasive question, we already know the answer. Any activity of a sexual nature is too far. Paul warns Christians that they should avoid any sexual activity that goes beyond what God intended for human sexuality. Here is a simple formula. If you are not married, do not have sex or engage in sexual activity, period. If you are married, reserve all activity for your spouse.

The third vice, *covetousness*, could be taken two ways. Covetousness is greed, a desire to have something belonging to another. Here, Paul could mean covetousness in a general sense in

which we might desire more money, more possessions, more influence, the power and prestige held by someone else. Certainly that is a vice Christians ought not hold. But given the context and focus on sexual immorality, I think Paul means covetous of a sexual nature, desiring someone that is not yours.

The next three vices all focus on the way we speak. In **verse 4** Paul says, *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking*. Again, the focus is on sexual things, only this time Paul says we are to have no speech of a degrading sexual nature. This ties into what he says in **verse 3** that such things are *not to be named among you*. There he means that such sins should not be abiding points of casual conversation. Paul wants us to be people with pure lips. In **Colossians 4:6** he tells believers to *let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*. We cannot obey Colossians 4:6 while having mouths full of impure things.

Christians are to have nothing to do with the works of darkness. That includes how we speak. Paul is not delivering an absolute prohibition against mentioning such sins or he could not write about them and I could not preach about them. What he means is your speech should not dwell on these things and certainly should not take them lightly. Humans enjoy making light of sin, whether we are joking about sin or simply lingering on topics about sin. The end result is we become desensitized. We become more open to sin, more accepting of it in the lives of others and, eventually, in our own lives. Paul wants our minds to be pure, so our hearts must be pure.

In **Philippians 4:8** we are told, *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*. How can we obey that command while thinking and speaking of topics that are degrading or immoral? In **Luke 6:45** Jesus tells us, *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*. What does your mouth say about you? What do your words reveal about the condition of your heart?

Whether in our words or in our actions we are so prone to being led astray. We live in a day when much evil is acceptable. Christians are mocked when they draw lines against sin. We are called legalists when we try to uphold what Scripture upholds. Even those claiming the name of Christ will ridicule others who seek to live and call others to live according to the Bible. There are dangers everywhere. Temptations lurk around every corner, snares wait across every step. You will hear people try to convince you that sin is acceptable. Paul says have nothing to do with such things. In **verse 6** he warns us, *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*.

Today we live in a Christian culture absolutely consumed by sin. Rates of adultery, divorce, and unmarried pregnancy are as high within the church as without. Even among pastors

the rate of immorality resembles the world. Too many Christians believe that in some way their sin is compatible with their faith.

It usually goes something like this: "I know sin is wrong. I know God commands us not to do these things. But my desire is great and I feel I cannot resist. God is a loving, forgiving God and I am already a Christian. If I give in to this temptation, the desire will go away. I will be sinning, but God will forgive me." We find a myriad of ways to justify our sin. We explain away our immorality, whether it be physical acts of sexual sin or impure thoughts or vulgar talk or celebrating immorality through filthy jokes and filthy images. Paul says Do Not Be Deceived! Those words that seek to lure you to sin are empty, meaningless!

He goes farther than this. His word of warning would shock many if they bothered paying any attention to what he says. There are two warnings given to people who would commit such sins. First, Paul says in **verse 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.* Second, in **verse 6**, *because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* Paul is telling us that people who continue in these sins will experience the judgment of God.

In the first warning he says that such people have no inheritance in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the realm of all who submit to the rule of God. It is made up of all who follow Christ Jesus as Lord. There are many who claim the name of Christ but do not submit to him as Lord. Such people may claim the Kingdom but they have no part in it. You must submit to Christ to belong to the kingdom of God. If you stubbornly insist on the sins of the flesh you show your refusal to honor Christ as Lord and you have no inheritance in God's kingdom. If there is no place for you in the Kingdom, the only other place for you is Hell.

In the second warning, he says that because of these sins the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. We have seen this phrase before; in **Ephesians 2:1-3** we read, *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

We were all once sons of disobedience but by the grace of God we have been saved out of that and made children of God. But children of God do not live in open rebellion against their Father. We will sin, we will struggle with temptation, we will fall. But we will see our sin and repent of our sin and cling to Christ, crying out for forgiveness and strength in the day of trouble. A true child of God will not embrace the world. Saints will not hold fast to their sins.

But there are those who love their sin, sons of disobedience who cling to wicked ways. Upon these the judgment of God will fall. Among these are many who call themselves Christian, many who feel secure because they have named Christ as Saviour though they have not begun to

serve him as Lord. We have this warning in **Matthew 7:21-23**: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*

It does not matter what things you claim to have done for Christ. If you ignore his commands, you are not his. The New Testament has this continual expectation that the people of God will not act like people in the world. If you need more evidence, read **Galatians 5:19-21** or **Colossians 3:5-6** or **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** or **2 Peter 2:10-22** or **Revelation 21:8**, and the list could go on and on. These are not isolated verses of Scripture, minor texts that we can ignore while we continue in our sins. This is the resounding call of God: "My people will be holy!" And if we refuse to submit to his rule, we are not his people and we will face the fires of Hell.

I am not saying that your works save you. We are not saved by living holy lives. But if we are saved we will live holy lives. Not without sin, but it will be our pattern and our desire. We will not casually accept sin in our lives but we will fight and strive for holiness.

Paul gives us an answer to temptation. When you struggle with sin, what can you do to find victory? Remember the works of the Lord and your heart to him in thanksgiving. In **verse 4** Paul says to us, *let there be thanksgiving*. The person who is filled with joy over the works of God is not at great risk of giving in to sin. When God is his delight, he finds pleasure in doing the things pleasing to God, and a righteous life is pleasing to God.

When your focus is on the things of the world, you will do the things of the world. When your focus is on God, you will do the things of God. Hear the instruction of **Hebrews 12:1-2**, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

We have been saved from so much. Will we now return to the wasteland of sin? We have claimed so much! Will we by our actions turn our back on our claim? Will the people of God be the people of God and not the people of the world? Turn from your sin. Turn from every hint of sexual immorality or vulgar talk. Turn from celebrating the works of darkness. To ignore these things is to display a heart that is not regenerate, not transformed by the Holy Spirit, not covered by the grace of God. To cling to the world is to cling to your sin and when you stand before a holy God you will be held to pay for your own wickedness.

But there is forgiveness and restoration to those who come to Christ with humility and repentance. When you come to Christ you will not find a closed door but a welcoming Savior. Lay your sins at his feet, confess your wrongdoing to him, and turn to the path of righteousness. In this way sinners will be made saints and saints will be brought safely home.