

THE REASONING BEHIND PAUL’S TEACHING

Ephesians 5:3-14

Intro: If you were here last Sunday morning, you know that I did not get through my text. I intended to get through the first five verses, but I only got through verses 1 and 2. The first two verses are really an introduction to the whole chapter, but especially to the first fourteen verses. In chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, Paul had exhorted them to walk humbly. In verse 17 of chapter 4 he had told them not to walk like unsaved Gentiles walk. When we get to chapter 5, as we saw last Sunday, Paul told the Ephesians to follow God, and to walk in love. And he went on to say that the pattern for the love that we need to show for each other is the love that the Lord Jesus Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.

So in these two verses, 1 and 2, Paul gave the Ephesians two things to do which if we are left to do these things in whatever strength we may have (and I am talking about spiritual strength), are simply not possible for any one of us. How can we be like God? And how can we love even each other the way the Lord Jesus loved us so as to give Himself as a sacrifice to God for us? And yet Paul was not setting goals before us that are unrealistic. By His enabling grace, by His power, we can! But how is such a life possible. Paul was not speaking of following God part of the time, or loving each other part of the time. He was speaking of the way we are to walk, which means, the way we are to live day after day after day. We are going to experience failures in both things. And we may not do either one perfectly. But that should cause us to turn to the Lord even more in prayer, seeking His help in our weakness. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” And remember that the Lord Jesus said, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Paul’s words are found in Philippians 4:13; our Lord’s words, in John 15:5.

But how does all of this come about? It comes about through obedience to the Word. So let us see what follows.

I. A LIST OF SINS TO BE AVOIDED, AND THANKSGIVING TO BE ADDED (Eph. 5:3-4).

Remember, as you read the sins in these two verses, that Paul was writing to a church (or churches). And he wouldn’t have done this if it were not possible for Christians to do these things, but, as he said here, they are sins or characteristics which should “not be once name among you, as

becometh saints.” Even “once” would be too much! He named six sins here, and they all could be subdivided into other sins in the same category. Christians are not expected to act like this; they are not expected to talk like this.

But notice he said that in their place should be the “giving of thanks.”

Bishop Moule, in his commentary on Ephesians, paid particular attention to these words, “giving of thanks, and raised the question, in so many words, Why this?” And then he went on to explain that thanksgiving to God is:

a symptom of inner wholesomeness and a means to its development. It is the positive exercise of spiritual health, the instinctive movement of holy happiness. It is the outcoming of the “joy of the Lord”; and that joy is not only our “strength” (Neh. 8:10) for toil and suffering, but our strength too, in a wonderful measure, against the very subtlest and the very fiercest forms of temptation (pp. 249, 250).

And Paul has mentioned some of the worst kinds of sin here. If we form the habit of being thankful to God for all that He has done for us in Christ, we are going to find that such thanksgiving, when it comes from the heart, is a strong defense against sin.

But then Paul does something in verse 5 which he does throughout this passage leading down to verse 14. And what he does is introduced by that little word, “For.”

This is a very common word which is used all through the NT. When Paul said, “for,” it means that he was about to explain what he had just said. He was going to make it clear, or possibly illustrate what he had just said. Our word “for” in English serves the same purpose. The explanation is given in verse 5. (Read verse 5.) He reminded them of something that they already knew and that was, that any person who keeps on sinning as Paul had just described, has no “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” It is sadly possible for a Christian to sin, but a Christian cannot live in sin! A person who does, even if he professes to be a Christian, is not telling the truth. His life denies his profession.

And Paul introduced verse 5 by saying, “For this ye know . . .” That is, they knew that he was telling the truth, and they needed to take stock of their own lives. And so do we! Cf. Paul’s words to the Corinthian

church in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Notice that Paul said here that they were not to be deceived, the same thing that he said in verse 6 of our text in Ephesians. So there is a very real and great danger that people can be deceived about their salvation, claiming that they are saved when they are not, or, on our part, accepting a person's claim to be a Christian when his life tells you that he is not!

But then Paul makes this point:

II. THE DANGER OF DECEPTION ABOUT WHO IS A CHRISTIAN (Eph. 5:6).

Notice that this leads to another "for" in this same verse.

Here Paul seems to be thinking of the Christian and what may happen to him if he does not hold on to the truth that he knows. The world will not leave us alone on this point. Perhaps you have met a person who claims to be a Christian, but his lifestyle tells you that he is not a Christian, and he seeks to get you to do something that you know is not pleasing to God. A non-Christian will not call an act a sin when God says that it is. And he or she will try to convince you that he is right and that you are wrong. In our generation adultery is not considered to be a sin. But it is! It is a most grievous sin to God. Lying is not considered a sin by the world, but it is to God. Greed and covetousness are not considered sins. We are besieged all of the time to want more than we have. Paul said here, "Let no man deceive you with vain words. God's standards of right and wrong do not change just because society breaks down and approves things that God condemns. What is the truth? Paul rightly said (and here we come to our second "for"), "For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Don't be deceived by people who try to get you to do things that God has condemned in His Word because His wrath, the wrath of God, is coming "upon the children of

disobedience.” A person who encourages you to violate the Word of God is not a child of God, but a child of disobedience under the wrath of God. Societies and cultures change, but God does not change, nor does His Word change. What was right when Paul wrote Ephesians, is still wrong. And the person who says things like this change, is deceived and headed for the wrath of God. God has appointed a day in which He is going to judge the world. The fact that it hasn’t come doesn’t mean that it won’t come. It is coming. What people need to know now is that they need to flee from the wrath of God, and the only way to do that is to turn to Christ to be saved.

Verses 7 and 8 give us another “for.”

III. A WARNING AGAINST PARTICIPATING WITH SINNERS (Eph. 5:7-8).

In the light of who you are, and who they are, the words of Paul mean, “Don’t even begin to do as they are doing.” Don’t pay any attention to any person who will argue with you against Scripture.

Why? And here we come to another for: “For ye were sometimes [once] darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” And so what is our guidance? “Walk as children of light.” We are not to live like we used to live, or like others want us to live who would turn us away from God and His Word. The darkness which we were before is gone, and now we are light in the Lord. And so we are to “walk as children of light.” The Psalmist said long ago, and it is still true, “The entrance of Thy Word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple” (Psa. 119:130).

One who is not a Christian must never be allowed to draw us away from what God has revealed in His Word. The Word will keep us from sin if we obey it! Or sin will keep us from the Word.

Are we beginning to see the reasoning behind Paul’s teaching? I really hope so.

Where do we find our next “for”? It is in verse 9. Our translators have put it in parenthesis, indicating another reason why we cannot be partakers with those who do whatever they want to do regardless of how God has expressed Himself in the Bible.

IV. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Eph. 5:9-10).

Already, before we get to chapter 5 in Ephesians, Paul had told the Ephesian believers, “Neither give place to the Devil” (Eph. 4:27), and “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30). When anyone compromises with sin, even when a Christian does, he is giving the Devil just the opportunity to move into our lives and take over. The Holy Spirit is grieved by any sin in our lives. Let me repeat, “any sin.” We are inclined to categorize sins as big and little, but you don’t find that category in the Bible. All sin is sin.

Let me back up a little as we talk about the Holy Spirit. The moment you and I were saved, the Holy Spirit came to live in our hearts. He, a Person of the Godhead, indwells us. And He will never leaves us. And He bears fruit in our lives in the form of character traits. His fruit, perhaps you know, is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” or self-control. But we are also told in Galatians 5:16-17 that we are to “walk in the Spirit.” This is what Paul wrote to the Galatian believers:

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Every Christian has experienced this inward conflict where the Spirit of God is fighting against our old nature to keep us from doing what we otherwise would do if the Spirit of God were not indwelling us. Now the Spirit of God is working in us to change us, but He also works to keep us from doing what our old nature would want us to do. Now instead of expressing it in Ephesian like Paul did in Galatians, we find it expressed here in Ephesians 5:9 was another reason why Paul was teaching them to beware of, and to stay away from, sin. Here in Ephesians Paul said that “the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” The opposites of “goodness and righteousness and truth” are “uncleaness,” and sin, and error. So Paul was teaching that we can walk as children of light for two reasons: because now we are light in the Lord (we have been changed), and because the Spirit is continuously producing good fruit in our lives. And this is true of all of us.

Verse 10 shows what will happen if we walk as children of light. We will be “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” We do this by our obedi-

ence to Scripture. And by our obedience to the Lord, and the blessing that it brings, proves what is well-pleasing to the Lord, and what pleases Him is what always brings the greatest joy to us. People engaged in sin because they are looking for pleasure, but “the wages of sin is death.”

And now we come to our last “for” in our text. And in this one Paul shows that another reason behind his teaching is the need for sin and sinners to be reproved. But this is not done in the way we might think.

V. THE NEED FOR SIN TO BE REPROVED (Eph. 5:11-14).

Notice the word “reprove” in verse 11, and “reproved” in verse 13. It is the same word that our Lord used in John 16:8 where, speaking of the Holy Spirit, He said, “And when He is come He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” It means *to convince* or *to convict*. Our relationship with sin and sinners in the world is not just defensive, protecting ourselves from all of the wicked, worldly influences all around us, but it is that we need to be on the offence. We are left here to turn others to the Lord. But the main way to do this is not the way we might think: by argument. In fact, the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy that “the servant of the Lord must not strive.” We don’t argue people into salvation. We don’t have to do what they do in order to have some influence with them. Notice carefully Paul’s words in verse 11 and 12.

To have “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” is to become like they are, and/or to do what they do, so that we can win them. We are not to compromise with sin and sinners in the hope of turning people to Christ. Doing that we are more likely to get caught by sin ourselves. We are not to compromise with sinners in order to win them. In fact, notice what Paul said in verse 12. (Read.) We don’t need to know what people are doing. We don’t need to watch X-rated movies to acquaint ourselves with what people are doing. This verse is a verse against a lot of things that some Christians do. It is a strong condemnation of pornography. Paul said that it is “a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.” People think that they are getting away with their sin because they do it in secret. They don’t know that both the day and the night are alike to God.

Verse 13 tells us how people are reproved, convicted, so as to see their

need of a Savior. Conviction of sin comes through the manifestation of light to people who are darkness, and living in darkness. What is the light? Back in verse 8 the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian Christians, “now are ye light in the Lord.” The Word of God is light. In Psalm 119:105 we read, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” The Lord Jesus Christ said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

People are going to be convicted that they are in the darkness of sin as they hear about our Lord, as they are exposed to the Word of God, and as they observe the lives of people, like you and I, who are walking in the light of the Word, whose lives show that we are no longer the children of disobedience, but are the children of the living God. They need to see their own need, and it is in the light from our lives that the Holy Spirit may be pleased to draw them to the Savior.

Verse 14 is not a direct quotation from Scripture, but maybe a compilation of several Scriptures. Most likely it is from Isaiah 60:1 where we read,

1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

The Apostle Paul, writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, had every right (which we do not have) to adapt Scripture to his present purpose. It could even be possible that this was a case of special revelation to Paul for his purpose in writing as the Lord had led him to write. However it might be, the call is to those who were sleeping in their sin, who needed to be raised from spiritual death, with the promise that Christ would give them life. No special signs are given to the unsaved. They have all that they need in the Word, where they see Christ, and in observing the lives of Christians who show by their lives the power and truth of the Gospel. We need to be living godly lives, and speaking to people from the Word about Christ. God is the One Who calls His chosen ones to Christ and to salvation.

Verse 14 is like an appeal after the Gospel has been preached for sinners to awake from their sleep of death, and turn to God Who will give them life through Christ.

Concl: The point of this passage for those of us who know the Lord, is that the greatest testimony we have for people who need the Lord, is a life lived, not to please the world, but to show what is well pleasing to God – a holy life.