

Ephesians 5-1-6

Not even a hint!!!

Promote 5.5.5 reading plan (Piper's ten reasons)

Recruit drum and bass players...

Dismiss children...

Prayer for illumination: please join me in prayer....

Sermon introduction:

America is drowning in sexual immorality. Listen to these stats...

“Porn is a 60 billion dollar a year worldwide industry. Americans spend over 12 billion dollars a year on porn. This is more than Americans spend on pro baseball, basketball, and football combined. America’s favorite pastime is not baseball, football, or basketball, it is porn.” (study from UVA)

More money is spent on porn in America than the revenues of CBS, ABC, and NBC combined (from a sermon by Mark Driscoll).

“A 2002 study by London School Economics found 9 out of 10 children between the ages of 8-16 had viewed internet pornography.” (Chester)

Christians are not immune....

“A 2003 survey from an internet filter review reported that 47 percent of Christians admit pornography is a major problem in their homes.” (Chester)

Porn is devastating! It leads to broken marriages, sexual abuse, lost jobs, and sexually unsatisfied people.

Yet porn is just one aspect of sexual immorality. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, prostitution and incest are all on the rise in our culture.

These brings us to Ephesians 5. Ephesus was just as sexually depraved, if not more, as our culture.

The Ephesians were drowning in sexual immorality. Maybe you are drowning in sexual immorality? Maybe you feel enslaved! You desperately want to be rescued, but nothing seems to help. This brings us to this morning’s text. ***Paul seeks to persuade the Ephesians Christians to flee sexual immorality.*** How does he do this? By addressing two topics.

The commands to flee sexual immorality

The motives to flee sexual immorality

We will start with....

The commands to flee sexual immorality (v. 3-4)

There are two commands....

First, **sexual sin must not be named among you**

Ephesians 5:3 (ESV) — 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

The term “sexual immorality” comes from the word *porneia*. This is where we get the word pornography. The word *porneia* encompassed every form of sexual sin (adultery, fornication, incest, pedophilia, homosexuality, and prostitution). All of these sexual sins are condemned elsewhere in the NT.

Paul often linked the phrase sexual immorality with the word impurity (Rom. 1:24; 2 Cor. 12:21; 1 Thes. 4:7). The term covetousness (often translated greed) is also linked to sexual immorality. People were greedy for more and more and more sensuality, coveting the bodies of others, but never satisfied. Why? Sexual sin never ultimately satisfies.

To understand these verses, we need to consider the historical context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

The city of Ephesus was known for its temple to Diana (the Greek goddess Artemis). She was a fertility goddess. People worshipped her by having sex with male and female temple prostitutes.

One scholar writes,

“Illicit sexual activity was an enormous problem for new Gentile Christians to overcome in the early church. Adulterous relationships, men sleeping with their slave girls, incest, prostitution, “sacred” sexual encounters in the local temples, and homosexuality were all a part of everyday life.” (Arnold)

Another scholar writes,

“Murals in Roman homes, such as those found in the ruins of Pompeii, often depicted pornographic scenes, and sexual profligacy was expected among Roman men.” (Osborne)

In the midst of all of this, Paul pens the words of Ephesians 5:3.

Ephesians 5:3 (ESV) — 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

The NIV 84 reads like this...

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV84) — 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

Many Christians often think, “what is the big deal”

“It is just a little porn”

“It is just a lustful look”

“It is just a fleeting fantasy”

“It is just one or two pages of graphic sex in an otherwise good novel”

“It is just one explicit scene in an otherwise good show.”

“It is just a little flirting with a married coworker.”

But, these behaviors are a big deal, since Paul says, “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality... because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

Illustration:

I was shocked when the dean of the graduate school I attended informed me that my professor and doctoral advisor had been fired from the seminary. Why? It came to light that he had been dabbling in adultery. BTW... adultery always comes to light.

Why was this so shocking? Because it sure seemed like my professor was really godly. He used to open class by reciting from memory whole chapters of the Bible. Then he would pray long, beautiful, theologically rich prayers.

He wrote the best book in print on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching.

While teaching at the seminary, he was simultaneously pastoring a large, healthy, growing church in Portland. He even wrote a book on the seduction of worldliness.

He traveled around the world preaching the gospel. He started a large successful ministry for pastors in Portland. I chose the doctoral program at Western seminary to be mentored by him specifically.

Yet, despite all of his ministry success and fame, he succumbed to sexual immorality. How in the world did this happen? I guarantee you I did not happen all of a sudden. It happened very slowly over time as he made one little compromise after another until his conscience was totally seared.

It all started with a hint, and then another hint, and then another hint. These small compromises eventually ruined his life and the lives of others.

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV84) — 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

First, *sexual sin must not be named among you! But there is another command...*

Second, sexual sin must not be discussed among you!

Ephesians 5:4 (ESV) — 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Based on the context of verse 3, Paul is forbidding sexually immoral speech in verse 4.

He uses three terms- filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking. **According to one scholar**, "All three refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in dirty conversation." (Stott, 181)

Verse 4 is not limited to sexually explicit talk, but based on the immediate context, sexually explicit talk seems to be Paul's primary concern.

In other words, Paul forbids Christians from joking about sexually explicit things. This can be challenging. Before I was in full time pastoral ministry, I worked with lots of non-Christians in lots of different jobs. Some of them were very foul *and* very funny. At times, I needed supernatural power to refrain from laughter.

Instead of joking about sexual things, Paul tells us to give thanks.

Ephesians 5:4 (ESV) — 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Give thanks for what? We have much to be thankful for as Christians. Thanksgiving should characterize our lives. But the context of these verses is sexuality. Instead of joking about sexuality, we must give thanks for the sexuality.

One scholar writes,

“We are not to joke about our sexuality, but to give God thanks for it. Christians are not repressive about sexuality. Rather, they hold it in highest respect. Joking degrades it. Thanksgiving preserves it.” (K. Hughes)

Why give thanks for sex?

Sex was God’s idea.

The Bible is not prudish about sex...

In the opening chapters of the Bible the man and the woman were naked and unashamed.

There is an entire book of the Bible (Song of Songs) written to celebrate the joys of sexual intimacy in the context of marriage.

In 1 Cor. 7:5 the apostle Paul commands husbands and wives to have sex often. He then tells them to only refrain from sex for the sake of prayer and fasting.

Sex in the context of marriage is designed by God to be a great source of joy and intimacy.

Sex is like fire, in the right context fire is a very good thing—it provides us with warmth, light, and energy. But in the wrong context fire is very destructive and deadly. It can end lives and destroy cities.

Application:

In Ephesians 5:3-4, the apostle Paul tells us to flee every hint of sexual immorality, which raises an important question, are you forsaking every hint of sexual immorality?

If you are enslaved to internet porn are you willing to get help? Are you willing to get rid of your computer or smart phone? (Matt. 5:27-30)

If you are tempted to watch sexually explicit material on Netflix, Amazon Prime, or HBO are you willing to get rid of these services?

If the book you are reading turns explicit are you willing to stop reading it?

Illustration:

Lust is like a flame on a gas stove. The flame gets more and more intense as it is fed more and more fuel. We can only manage the gas stove by limiting the amount of fuel going to the flame. Indulging in sexual sin is the equivalent of adding fuel to the flame.

If you are struggling with sexual sin, please talk to a pastor or a home group leader.

Ladies, please talk to your home group leader’s wife or your discipleship group leader. You will only get the help you need when you walk in the light.

Consider reading *Finally Free* by Heath Lambert

The best thing you can do to fight sexual sin is immerse yourself in the Word.

Accountability is a good thing, yet all the accountability in the world is not going to help, unless you are willing to spend time in the Word. Our only hope is a person, and his name is Jesus, and we relate to him through the Word (John 15).

At this point, maybe you are thinking, I understand that I must flee sexual immorality, but why? This brings us to the critical topic of motives...

We looked at the commands to flee sexual immorality... now...

The motives to flee sexual immorality

Just like there are two commands, now there are two motives...

First, Paul motivates with love!

Ephesians 5:1–3 (ESV) — 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Verse 2 and verse 3 are connected by the word “but” in the first part of verse 3. In other words, verses 1-2 provide the basis for verses 3-4.

Here is what we need to be remember from verses 1-2.

We are loved by God the father. He loves us so much that he has adopted us into his family and made us joint heirs with Christ. We are called beloved children in verse 1.

Furthermore, we are loved by God the son. According to verse 2, God the son “**Gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**” In other words, Jesus Christ came to earth to give up his life on the cross, in our place. Our sexual sin deserve death, not just any death, but death on the cross. After the cross we deserve to spend eternity separated from God.

But Jesus, motivated by extravagant love, died in the place of sinners, taking the punishment they deserve upon himself. This enables sinners to be forgiven. When you place your faith in Jesus, all of your sins are forgiven, including your sexual sins. Maybe you are thinking, “But Dave, I have sinned so many times! Does God still forgive?” God still forgives, and forgives, and forgives, and forgives, since all of your sins were placed on Jesus.

God loves you. He proves this by sending his son to die for you so that you could be forgiven. When we realize how much we have been forgiven, it causes us to love God in return. How do we express that love? By obeying his commands.

Some of you need to be reminded this morning of God’s loving forgiveness. He forgives you of all of your sin, even your sexual sins. But others need a different motive.

First, Paul motivates with love!

Second, Paul motivates with fear!

Ephesians 5:5 (ESV) — 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.

Paul begins verse 5 with these sobering words, “For you may be sure of this...” We may be sure of what? We may be sure that anyone who continues in sexual sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God. In other words, Paul guarantees that people who persist in sexual sin will go to hell when they die. Which means that they were never Christians in the first place.

Over the years, I have read these verses to several men enslaved to pornography. I always say to the young man in front of me, “look, I’m not God, I don’t know if you are saved or not. But I know what the Bible says.

The Bible says that saving faith changes people and you are not changing.
The Bible says that saving faith produces real repentance and you are not repenting.
The Bible says that faith without works is dead and you are not working.
The Bible says that Christ destroys the power of sin in believers and you still seemed enslaved.”

The young man often says, “but I have faith... I believe!!! Plus, God is love, God is gracious, and God forgives.”

According to Paul, these are empty words...

Ephesians 5:6 (ESV) — 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Paul says the same thing in Galatians, the book of grace...

Galatians 5:19–21 (ESV) — 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **21** envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Consider the word of Jesus...

Matthew 7:21–23 (ESV) — 21 “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. **22** 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?’ **23** And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

See also 1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:50; 1 John 3:7-10; James 2:14-26

The Bible clearly teaches that one is justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our works have nothing to do with our salvation. Nothing!!! We are justified through the life, death, and resurrection of someone else, and his name is Jesus. Yet, our works do serve an important function. They prove that our faith is real faith.

A word of caution is required at this point...

Paul is talking about “professing” Christians totally enslaved to sexual sin. He is not talking to the Christians who occasionally falls into sexual sin, repents, and continues the fight.

In other words, Paul is talking about people totally enslaved to sin. We must all fear God, but people enslaved to sexual sin, must REALLY fear God. The fear of God is the key to overcoming sexual sin.

In his excellent book on the Holy Spirit, JD Greear writes,

“I often tell college-aged guys at our church that they can turn their sexual drives on and off like a light switch. They never believe me. I tell them, ‘I’ll prove it to you... Imagine that you are alone with your girlfriend, sitting with her on the couch at her house. Your sexual desires begin to take over and you feel like there is no way you can turn them off. At that moment, you feel totally out of control. Like there is no way to say ‘no’ to the power of temptation.’ They say ‘Exactly.’ I tell them, ‘At just that moment, her Army Ranger father walks in.... See? Sexual desire, off like a light switch!’ Where did it go? It is not that they suddenly lost libido, it was just that in that moment their fear of her Ranger father was weightier to them than the sexual lust. Desire for her was surpassed by a desire to avoid death. The reason many of us feel like we can’t say no to temptation is that God does not have that kind of weight in our hearts.” (Greear 98-99)

If we want to win the battle against sexual sin, we must fear God.

I heard a story about a man who was actively involved in his church, theologically sound, very clear on the gospel, and by all appearances an excellent husband and father. Yet, he lived a double life. The public life of a Christian and the secret life of deviant sexual sin. Finally, after many years of deception and guilt, he told one of his pastors about his double life. When he was asked why he confessed his sin, he said, “I don’t want to go to hell.”

Conclusion:

Let me conclude by talking about two types of the fear of God.

Christians should fear God because he disciplines those that he loves. Sexual sin leads to God’s loving discipline, which is often very painful. Christians don’t have to fear punishment, since Jesus was punished in their place, but they must fear God’s fatherly discipline.

False professors on the other hand must fear God’s punishment. According to the apostle Paul, false professors enslaved to sexual sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, they will be separated from God forever.

I’m going to read our text one more time...

Ephesians 5:3–6 (ESV) — 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Let’s pray...