

BEING PURE

Ephesians 5:1-14

One of the pictures of the church that Paul touches on in his letter to the church at Ephesus is that of the church being the Bride of Christ. Although Paul does not use the word “bride” in his reference to this idea in 5:25-27, the idea is clearly about a bride. There Paul mentions that the church will be presented to Christ as a radiant church without blemish, spot or wrinkle. This certainly captures the idea of being pure.

Marriages are among the events that are “big deals” in the life of many families. In most cultures, this is a significant and celebrated happening. A lot of preparation and expense go into having a proper wedding. The “Marriage Supper of the Lamb” is referenced in the Revelation and as we read about it we properly sense that this is going to be a “big deal” when we all get to heaven. The Hebrew word for bride is *kallah* which literally means the complete and perfect one. So, since the church is to be the bride of Christ, then there is a lot of preparation needed to be presentable.

In the latter part of chapter four and the continuing on into chapter five, Paul wrote about the preparation process for getting the bride ready. We are to walk in such a way that the life we are now living is preparing us for eternity.

Live in Love - 5:1-2

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. Ephesians 5:1-2 (NASB95)

To better understand Paul’s admonition in these two verses we need to back and see the context of the exhortation. If we go all the way back to verse 30 of chapter four we see that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. If Paul was preparing the reader for the introduction of the Bride of Christ description of the church, then we could argue that this “day of redemption” would be marriage of the Lamb to His bride the church. We could also see that when we were saved that was the beginning of the engagement period that would lead the wedding. Just as the engagement time was a time of preparation for the bride to make herself ready for the wedding, we are being made ready in our Christian walk by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If His purpose is to prepare us, then we do not want to disappoint and thwart His efforts.

As we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, then we will put away undesirable traits and take on that which is pleasing to God. In other words we are to behave as if we had the very nature of God in us (which we do). Is this not what it means to be His children? This might lead to another question and that is, “how should His children behave?” We can answer that by discovering how God’s uniquely begotten Son conducted His life. Simply stated, He walked in self-sacrificing love. Since love is more than an emotion but is something we do, then what did He do that demonstrated self-sacrificing love? He presented Himself as a pleasing sacrifice to God on our behalf. We knew this, already, didn’t we?

Does this then mean that we are expected to present ourselves as a pleasing sacrifice to God on behalf of others since we are told to imitate Him by walking in self-sacrificing love? I believe the answer to that question is a definite “yes.” In fact, He gave His disciples a New Commandment that they love one another even as He had loved them and gave Himself up for them. Is it just a possibility that this is what Jesus meant in John 14:6 when told them “I am the way?” Do you think that this is related in any way to what He said in Luke 9:23?

“and he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,

and follow me.”

I believe it all fits very nicely together and from this we see how important discipleship is in preparing the church for eternity.

Live Without Impurity - 5:3-7

³But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not be partakers with them; Ephesians 5:3-7 (NASB95)

It is helpful to see that the bad behaviors mentioned in verses 3-6 are the results of self-centered love. These are in stark contrast to behaviors expected of self-sacrificing love that Paul wrote about verses 1-2. Self-centered love explains the actions of lost humanity and is so unacceptable for the nature of a born-again child of God that we should never find immorality, impurity or greed excusable for a Christian. These behaviors are not compatible with who we are in Christ. Warren Weirsbe made the following comments on verse 5:

It is beneath the dignity of a saint to indulge in the sins that belong to the world of darkness, some of which Paul names here. He warns us against the sexual sins (fornication, uncleanness) which were so prevalent in that day—and are prevalent today. Sad to say, these sins have invaded the homes of Christians and brought grief to local churches too. “Covetousness” may seem out of place next to fornication, but the two sins are but different expressions of the same basic weakness of fallen nature—uncontrolled appetite. The fornicator and the covetous person each desire to satisfy the appetite by taking what does not belong to them. “The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16) would describe these two sins. “Let there not be even a hint of these sins!” said Paul.

The point of certain behaviors being beneath the dignity of a saint is a somewhat dated argument in today’s culture. When I was growing up, it was not uncommon for parents to appeal to their children to have proper behavior because to do otherwise would reflect badly on the family. I don’t hear that very much (or at all) in today’s world. If it comes up at all, it is presented as a negative, in that the child responds with “you don’t really love me, all you care about is your reputation.” If a “saint” behaves badly, does such behavior reflect poorly on anyone besides the person who is engaged in the bad behavior? Absolutely, such behavior brings criticism on the church and upon the name of Christ. When saints behave poorly it hurts the cause of Christ and can result in a lost person failing to find salvation.

As a matter of academic interest, the Greek word translated as fornication (in KJV) or immorality (NAS) is the root word for pornography. The Greek word translated impurity is the root word for catharsis plus a negative modifier.

In addition to what we **do**, what we **say** is also an important factor in the witness we have. We can ruin our Christian witness and hurt the cause of Christ by obscene talk. Most Christians understand this and many guard what they say to avoid obscenities. But what about “silliness” or silly talk? What is silly or foolish talking? It may be helpful to look at the Greek word that is used here: *morologia* which a compound word made up of *moros* and *lego*. *Lego* simply means “to speak.” What would you guess is the English word that would be equivalent to *moros*? Of course, it is the Greek root of the English word “moron.” Why would such silliness be detrimental to your Christian witness? One obvious reason is that those who have observed that what you say is usually to be taken as a joke, then when you attempt to be serious in sharing Christ, they may view what you say as just more joking around. The most famous case of this happening was in the case of Lot who lived in the Sodom and Gomorrah area. He tried to warn his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, “hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!” but his sons-in-law thought he was

joking.

The other caution is listed as jesting or coarse jesting. The idea of this word is related to the ability to turn a statement into a double meaning. This ability is a two-edged sword which can be used for positive or negative effects. Many times quick-witted people will try to turn everything someone says into some sexual innuendo. This is usually bordering on obscenity and is certainly not in keeping with what one would find coming from someone who is imitating Christ.

While we can readily see that crude innuendo is to be avoided, what might be a downside of good humor repartee coming from a Christian? Problems usually arise when the repartee is carried out with a person whom you do not know very well. Such conversation can be easily misinterpreted as a put-down or a criticism when neither was intended.

How much better it is for us to be quick to give thanks! This is certainly the best way to give glory to God and keep the conversation pure. If the direction of our conversation is focused on acknowledging God's providence and blessing and giving Him thanks, then there is little chance of being misinterpreted in our motive and intent.

There is truth in the statement that "righteous is as righteous does." Our lifestyle provides evidence of what we believe and what our values are. Those who are lost show ample evidence that they are incompatible with the kingdom of God because of the pattern of their behavior. The three general categories of immorality (pornea), impurity (lacking cleanliness), and uncontrolled materialism are alien to the nature of God and are excluded from where He dwells. Paul pointed out that covetousness or greed is akin to idolatry in that things of the creation are deemed to be more important than the Creator. (Some commentators equate all three of these evils with idolatry.)

The deception that Paul referenced was likely related to the Greek philosophy that the body and soul are not interrelated. This would say, that physical action does not impact who I am as a person and who I am spiritually does not influence my physical actions. That is so far from the truth as to be ludicrous. The impurity of action is evidence of impurity in thought. What is God's response to those who will not repent but pursue immorality, impurity and greed? We are told in Genesis that before the flood "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." While there is not going to be another flood, there are consequences of immorality, impurity and greed. You can say that AIDS is an example of the wrath of God against immorality. You could also argue that it is a natural consequence of perverted behavior. The fact that such consequences spill over and impact those who are innocent is all the more reason for a society to have restraints in place that help protect people from themselves and prevent the innocent from being harmed in the process.

Paul warned that Christians are not to be partakers with those who are lost. One obvious way of partaking would be to practice the same kind of behavior. Most of us would not be guilty of doing this. There are other ways that "what we do or don't do" could be construed to be partaking or helping those who are disobedient. One way is to enable those who are lost in their unseemly behavior. You can probably come up with many examples, but one that is somewhat common today might be the following: A Christian couple has a child who is now an adult. He is not married but has a live-in girlfriend. They visit at Thanksgiving and the parents allow them to occupy the same bedroom while they are there. Are they "partaking" by enabling behavior that is clearly condemned by God? Another example might be that a married couple in a church gets a divorce because of unfaithfulness by the wife. She then marries the person with whom she

had been unfaithful and after they are married, he then wants to move his membership to the church. The church welcomes them and they start teaching in the Youth Sunday School. Has the church become partakers with them? There are alternatives!

Live as Light - 5:8-14

⁸for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ⁹(for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; ¹²for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. ¹⁴For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:8-14 (NASB95)

It is interesting that Paul did not say that you were formerly IN darkness but that you were “darkness.” Now you are (not just in the Light) but you are Light. Under the Old Covenant, people could experience the light of the Lord as it would shine upon them. They were to reflect this light. In writing about the anticipated coming of the Messiah, Isaiah wrote in 9:2 “the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” Now that we are born-again of the Spirit of God and Christ dwells in us, then the Light is IN us. This means that we are not to be just reflectors of the Light but that we are to be emitters of the Light that dwells within us.

Since we have the Light within, then we will be shedding light on everything that we contact. As things around us are illuminated by the spiritual light that is in us, then we should be able to clearly see the nature of whatever we encounter. Verse ten tells us that we are to “try” (as in test) whatever we encounter to “prove” whether or not it meets the criteria of being goodness, righteousness and truth. If it fails this test, then we would need to recognize it was unfruitful deeds of darkness which are to be avoided and exposed for what it is.

When we discover things that may appear to be good but are really attempts to ensnare or harm others, then we have a responsibility to make the truth known and to rebuke those who are secretly attempting to lead people astray. Those who have the “light” have the responsibility to counteract darkness. We find the promise of this Light for those who are “awakened” from their spiritual deadness by the new birth. The exact quotation that Paul used is not found in the Old Testament, but there are similar expressions in Isaiah 9:2, 26:19 and 60:1. D. A. Carson has suggested that Paul is quoting from an early church hymn that was sung or recited at baptisms that would be appropriate for the ceremony. The KJV expresses verse 14 as “Christ will give you light” which is probably preferable to the later translations that say “Christ will shine on you.” This seems to be in better agreement with the idea that we have been given Light within us and it is that Light which is emitted to the world around us. This is all the more reason for us to walk in purity.