

Walking in Purity – Part 2 Eph 5:1-20

Proposition: Paul tells us what walking in purity looks like practically and then how we are all enabled to do it.

I am so glad that the Bible is not complicated or obscure or cryptic. When it comes to how to live the Christian life and what is of God and what is not, it's actually pretty black and white and very, very clear.

I like that, because you and I live in an age where the images we are exposed to, the things we hear, the very culture that we are emerged in, all go to colour our view of the world and it is not always clear to you and me what is in and what is out. Maybe .. there are a few grey areas. Maybe this value or those teachings need to be re-evaluated in each new generation, people say.

I believe that the Bible is completely true from cover to cover and in it are timeless truths and principles that work and are true for all time and every age.

As we continue to study our way through Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus we open to our text which is the second half of his teaching on "how to walk in Purity" once you realize who you are in Christ Jesus. Its truths are timeless, the teaching ever so practical.

We need to begin in Eph 4:32 as 5:1 is a consequence to the previous verse

³² Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.

5 Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. ² Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.

Do as God does. Not, "think about it" or, "I would like you to" but, "just do it."

Do what? Be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you.

Why is it that so often this topic comes up in the Bible? Forgive others.

In fact when you read the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 right at the heart of it is this line "and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those that sin against us."

At the end of the Lord's prayer the only point in the prayer that Jesus goes back to and emphasizes is this issue of forgiveness.

Matthew 6

¹⁴ If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

I have always considered these two verses two of the scariest in the Bible.

When you study the passage I don't think Jesus is saying if you don't forgive people you will lose your salvation. Rather it seems that the consequences of not forgiving are so great that Jesus needed to put this strongly. You see, if you don't forgive someone there is absolutely no doubt that your sin of unforgiveness will hurt you more than the other person. It will cloud your relationship with God, you will definitely not be as close to God and able to receive from God, plus I believe unforgiveness will have an adverse effect on your emotional and physical health.

There is an Old Testament story that illustrates this well.

In Exodus 15 God reveals Himself in the most interesting way. He calls himself, for the very first time, Jehovah Rapha. Which means, "I am the God who heals you." So what just preceded God calling himself the God that heals us?

If you look in Exodus 15 sometime you will see there that the Israelites had just gone 3 days without water. They were seriously thirsty. All of a sudden, some guy yells out 'water' and there is a mass movement of people to a little lake where they all dive in and drink. They suck this water up eagerly and then they all spit it out in disgust because it's bitter. The masses are so thirsty and so angry they turn on Moses and talk about killing him. Moses prays, and

God shows him a tree that has always existed by the lake. He obediently throws it into the water and the water instantly turns sweet.

You and I know this story well personally. Some work mate, some relative, some boss treats us badly and it hurts and we feel bitter but then the Holy Spirit turns us to a tree that has always been there, a cross, and when we consider what He has done for us on the cross and how Jesus died for that person's sin, instead of anger and grumpiness our hearts change and we find we can forgive.

It fascinates me that immediately after bitter water is turned sweet by applying the tree that had always been there, God says, "By the way, my name is Jehovah Rapha. I am the God who heals you."

I suggest to you for your consideration that there is a direct link between physical health and a heart that is free from bitterness.

When you hang onto that injustice at work or from your ex or because of that abuse you get bitter and ulcers form and possibly some cancers can be attributed to bitterness. But when a person learns to apply the cross, recognise how good God has been to them and how every sin that has been or will be committed has already been paid for on the cross, bitter turns sweet; sickness turns to health.

I know that sexual sin, greed, gluttony, etc, all hurt us, but I suspect that Father knows that the damage done to your relationship with Him and to your health is greatest when we don't forgive.

So "just do it" Paul writes.

² Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.

Jesus didn't say, "This is unfair, unjust, I know my rights, someone has to pay for this." No, He gave His life as a sacrifice.

³ You are God's people, so don't let it be said that any of you are immoral or indecent or greedy. ⁴ Don't use dirty or foolish or filthy words. Instead, say how thankful you are. ⁵ Being greedy, indecent, or immoral is just another way of worshiping idols. You can be sure that people who behave in this way will never be part of the kingdom that belongs to Christ and to God.

Let me give definitions to a couple of these words for you:

Immoral/ fornication = sexual intercourse outside of marriage

Indecent = you and I might translate sleazy or sexually perverted.

Greed = wanting things we cannot afford to pay cash for and it is also linked to lust.

Paul is saying; you guys, you Christians are God's children and so forgive like Him, love like Him and avoid completely the things that disgust God.

No it's not OK ever to have sexual intercourse with someone you are not married to. The world says, 'try before you buy' and yet statistics show overwhelmingly that sex before marriage radically reduces the chance of that relationship working.

If you were to ask me why we should warn people not to sleep with someone before they are married my primary reason is not VD or Aids or an unwanted pregnancy. My primary reason for warning people not to sleep with someone before they are married is because it damages the soul of the person you are sleeping with. The world says it is just two bodies using each other to meet needs. The Bible says in Proverbs 6 that when you sleep with someone you are not married to, you damage them. That is, you take from them something of who they really are. I have seen this as a pastor so many times. I see a great young person at youth group, dynamic, full of life and personality and God's promise on their lives and then they end up in one or two or three relationships.

Does God forgive them? Yes, if they are repentant. But they lose something every time, and they take something from the other person every time, they become empty, damaged, shallow. What God could have done in their lives is lost. Something of who they are is lost forever.

Family, tell your kids that God designed sex. It was intended for marriage and intended to be fun; two become one flesh and joined spiritually. But outside of marriage you lose something and, yes you will be forgiven, but what you have given away in your soul will be lost forever.

In our text, Paul goes even further and says there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality.

You see, in Paul's day, Christians were always talking about Agape love, always eating together, always greeting each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek and unbelievers saw this behaviour and made up all sorts of perverted speculations about Christian morality.

In the end when Christians met they would always keep the windows open and always kept a candle burning so people could see in and speculations were avoided.

The reason that Christian men don't visit Christian woman on their own and go into the house and comfort and listen and ease the door jam is not because we think we will be seduced or that we are tempted. No it's so that the world doesn't speculate about what is going on. We live above the hint of immorality.

It is interesting to me that Paul warns against us being around those telling dirty jokes. One observation I would make of our society is that while we intuitively know that our bodies and sex are meant to be special, even sacred, when you have heard a lot of dodgy jokes and sleazy conversations and you laugh at what should be tapu, your respect for your body and for sex, etc, diminishes; the barriers between the sacred and the physical are eroded and people become much more likely to ease into sin. It pollutes our minds, it changes the value we place on our bodies and on sex and sexual promiscuity subtly becomes Ok and a bit fun.

Verse 5 finishes with these sobering words:

You can be sure that people who behave in this way will never be part of the kingdom that belongs to Christ and to God.

Who is not saved? The sexually immoral, the perverted person, the greedy person, the foul mouthed person, the dirty joke teller.

Christians will not face the wrath of God, but don't fool yourself, people who are doing these things will.

⁶ Don't let anyone trick you with foolish talk. God punishes everyone who disobeys him and says foolish things. ⁷ So don't have anything to do with anyone like that.

There will always be people that say, "Hey don't stress about your sexual activity with your boyfriend, don't stress about your greed or the perversions you are thinking about all the time. God is a loving God, He knows you have got needs, you are not hurting anyone. It will be OK."

No, actually it won't. Don't let anyone trick you with foolish talk.

⁸ You used to be like people living in the dark, but now you are people of the light because you belong to the Lord. So act like people of the light ⁹ and make your light shine. Be good and honest and truthful, ¹⁰ as you try to please the Lord. ¹¹ Don't take part in doing those worthless things that are done in the dark. Instead, show how wrong they are.

You used to live like that and think like that but your mind has been washed with the Word of God, Jesus has changed you as you have talked with Him, you are now a part of the kingdom, let your light shine. These verses conclude with what I think is a really tough challenge.

Not only don't hang around those telling dirty jokes or buy tickets to R rated movies but say something, expose and challenge the sin when you see it.

In NZ we are taught to believe there are no ultimate truths, no one has the right to judge you and what you are doing. Yet here Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says that when you are exposed to something wrong, correct it. Someone blasphemes, don't just say nothing correct it. That is, say, "Mate, Jesus might be just an expression to you but He has changed millions of lives, please don't say that again."

You walk into a garage and there are rude pictures on the wall. This passage would suggest we say something.

"Mr, thank you for fixing my car, I appreciate your help but I just need to say that I have a high opinion of women. This is inappropriate."

¹² It is disgusting even to talk about what is done in the dark. ¹³ But the light will show what these things are really like. ¹⁴ Light shows up everything, just as the Scriptures say, "Wake up from your sleep and rise from death. Then Christ will shine on you."

Paul says, "Christian. Young person. Old person. Wake up. Smell the coffee. Sharpen up. Have your eyes wide open to what is really happening in the culture around you." Christians, if we avoid Satan's snares and walk in purity, then God's light will shine on you. In other words, God's light will give you vision and illuminate the way forward. He will direct you.

But we ask, "How can we know God's will for our lives and how on earth do we get the wisdom and the power to walk in Purity?"

¹⁸ Don't destroy yourself by getting drunk, but let the Spirit fill your life. ¹⁹ When you meet together, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as you praise the Lord with all your heart. ²⁰ Always use the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to thank God the Father for everything.

How do I know the will of God and find the power to live the Christian life of purity?

Simple. Don't get drunk or stoned or into some form of escapism but be filled with the Holy Spirit, the phrase there be filled is in the present continuous which means be continually, daily filled with the Holy Spirit.

Scripture would suggest three ways in which you can be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

It will happen when you daily ask to be filled.

It will happen as you pray in your prayer language daily and

It will happen as you choose to turn your heart towards God in worship daily.

I love what King David did in 1 Samuel 6.

He was depressed. He was discouraged. He was getting it in the back from his soldiers.

He had sent out his men to fight the Amalekites and when they returned to the city they were staying in with their families (Ziglag) they found the city burnt down and all their families and things taken by the enemy. David was so discouraged and his boys turned on him and wanted to kill him. David, you egg, you took us out to fight and left our families defenceless, it's your fault. They wanted to kill him. And it says that David took time to encourage himself in the Lord.

We know from other scriptures that at times like this David would take time out to tell his soul that God was good and tell his spirits to rise up and trust the Lord and that he would sing and write songs.

Father, life stinks right now but you are God, you are Almighty and nothing is impossible for you. You have allowed this to happen, I don't know why but you are good, etc, etc.

David could have thrown a pity party, could have moaned and complained against God but he didn't, he worshipped. And as he did, the depression, the discouragement went. David got up from that place, he rallied the boys and took back every person and every possession that had been stolen and not one family member was lost.

Family, we are His kids, we have access to His presence constantly. Don't let the world try to trick you into saying this is good, don't be deceived. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality or perverseness or greed or coarse talk. And daily be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Can we walk in Purity? Absolutely, yes: when we are filled with His Holy Spirit daily and our mouths are not filled with coarse language but praise and thanks giving.

That is the life that you have been called and enabled to live. A life of freedom, of joy and of Purity!