

**02/25/24 “A Solution to Temptation”
Ephesians 5:3-4**

Welcome...

Let’s read Ephesians 5:3-4...

It is a wonderful time of year when we see the grass is turning green, leaves begin to bud and spring forth, and flowers beginning to bloom. We don’t have a fence in our front yard, so last night I sprayed our small olive trees, our gazania flowers, and our salvia bushes with a product called Liquid Fence that smells like rotten eggs. The purpose of the spray is to deter the deer from coming and eating the leaves and flowers. It really works. There is a similar product with a very clever name- it’s called Not Tonight Deer.

Paul has been describing in the book of Ephesians how are lives change in Christ. Old patterns of sin need to die and new patterns of thinking, speaking and acting need to grow. There are certain characteristics of thinking, speaking and acting that may be prevalent and even popular in our world, but to God they have the stench of rotten eggs.

And in contrast there is an attribute which is immensely fragrant to God and attractive to others, and provides a way of escape when we are tempted to sin whether in acts of immorality, impurity, greed or foolish speech. Paul says a solution to temptation is to have an attitude of gratitude.

Main point: In Ephesians 5:3-4 Paul contrasts sinful actions we must avoid with a sacred attitude we must adopt so that we escape temptation and walk as children of God.

I. Sinful Actions We Must Avoid

Verses 3-4a

II. A Sacred Attitude We Must Adopt

Verse 4b

My prayer is that we realize who we are in Christ and all that He has done for us and is doing in us, and instead of being discontent and choosing to sin in acts of immorality, impurity, greed or foolish speech we would faithfully give God praise and be thankful and thus be a fragrant aroma of joy and satisfaction in Christ.

I. Sinful Actions We Must Avoid

Notice Verse 3...

Verse three begins with the word “But” which is a term which conveys a very strong contrast with that which produces a fragrant aroma before God. Verse 2 says...

But the contrast is now the sinful actions that Paul lists here; they are a “stench” in God's nostrils rather than a fragrant aroma as we saw in verse 2. The self-centered vices in conduct and speech that Paul now lists in verses 3-4 are the opposite of the self-sacrificing love spoken of in verses 1-2.

We need to also consider the context of the society Paul was addressing. In the Greek culture of that day, prostitution and fornication were considered permissible activities. A married man in Greece could engage in extramarital sex as much as he wished, but this practice was forbidden for the wife! Athenaeus, a writer in the second century said, “We keep mistresses for pleasure, but wives we have in order to produce children legitimately and to have a trustworthy guardian of our domestic property.”

Notice Paul begins with two deeds that relate to sexual sin. The first, “immorality,” translates the Greek word *porneia* which shares a common root with our word “pornography.” It includes all kinds of sexual sin outside of marriage, including fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution. While these outward actions should all be avoided, in the Sermon on the Mount Christ focused attention even more pointedly at their inward source.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28, “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Once again, we are reminded that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

Paul also refers to “impurity,” using the Greek word *akatharsia*, which is related to our English word “catharsis” but formed as a negative. Just as something cathartic cleanses us, something “akathartic” pollutes us. Thus, *akatharsia* refers to the effects of immorality on our hearts, minds, and bodies—moral uncleanness that leads to guilt, shame, obsessions, and enslavement to sin.

What a tragedy that our dark modern world actually champions immorality and impurity! Almost any kind of sexual expression is encouraged on television, in films, and in social media. Many believe that the free expression of sexuality is harmless or even healthy, wrongly assuming that nobody gets hurt.

Pornography is a “spiritual trap” to be escaped. You need to get away as fast as you can! God gives such a clear and strong command because *porneia* is so serious, so seductive, so corrupting and so destructive to spiritual relationships, both human and divine! 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee immorality.” So, flee for your life.

An excellent well-known illustration of “fleeing immorality” is found in the account of Joseph when he was tempted to sin by Potiphar’s wife. We read in Genesis 39:6: “Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. It came about after these events that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?’ As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me!’ And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.”

Joseph was alone when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. While there may be safety in numbers, sometimes there is more safety in flight!

A pastor cautioned his youth pastor about the dangers of immorality in the ministry. The youth pastor replied, “Don’t worry I always do my socializing in a group setting, you know there is safety in Numbers.” The wise pastor replied, “Yes, that is so, but there is more safety in Exodus!”

We can forget that sex is God’s creation and a gift to a husband and wife. Within marriage, sex is beautiful, intimate, and fulfilling. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 speaks of how husband and wife are to give themselves freely to each

other, so that they will not be tempted to sin. Some married couples fail to fulfill this duty to each other because of selfishness or perhaps because one or both spouses have an unbiblical view of sex as being merely for procreation.

Paul tells husbands and wives not to focus on their own wants and desires (or lack of desire) but to selflessly give themselves to each other sexually as an expression of love and commitment.

Look at Proverbs 5:15-19 with me...

A man is to drink exclusively from his 'own cistern' (5:15), which means that all of a man's sexual energy is to be directed to his wife. She is his exclusive source of sexual refreshment.

Negatively, verses 16-17 say he is not to disperse his sexual energy outside his marriage. Any sexual act or thought which is not directed towards his wife is sinful and destructive. Outside of marriage, sex is prohibited by God, for it is destructive and is like fire. But in the fireplace of marriage, sex is encouraged, and the fire is warm and comforting. Outside the fireplace, the fire is destructive. Outside of marriage, sex devolves into sinfully using the other person for your own gratification.

In Proverbs 6:27-28 Solomon presented a similar fiery metaphor in asking the rhetorical questions, "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?"

Billy Graham said with temptation "Satan fails to speak of the remorse, the futility, the loneliness, and the spiritual devastation which go hand in hand with sexual immorality."

Think of a fish in a stream swimming with other fish and then all of sudden there is this attractive worm that appears out of nowhere! And one of the fish sees it and immediately devours it, but little do they know they are the one about to be devoured. That fish ends up in a frying pan.

When it comes to sexual sin, there is a hook in the middle of that bait. Don't be deceived, it looks attractive and satisfying but you need to avoid it at all costs, or you will get hooked. Paul will explain it is not just saying no to sexual sin, it is saying yes to trusting God, yes to contentment, yes to thanking God for your circumstances.

Jesus declared in Matthew 15:18 that "the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications (*porneia*), thefts, false witness, slanders."

Jesus' point is that the basis of all sin is the heart which would include our thought life, the thoughts preceding the sinful outward act.

Forty years ago, Christians would have had to make a special effort to view pornography. You would need to go to certain places, go to a store, be seen in public that you are making certain choices that showed a particularly stubborn heart and a determination to sin sexually. Now, it is available with a click of the mouse or a touch of the finger on a screen of a Smartphone or iPad. This means a Christian needs to be alert and to keep your eyes on Jesus.

Job declares in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." I would encourage us men to make the same type of covenant. It is a commitment that has been decided beforehand, so that when the temptation comes, we already know what to do. Look the other way, and if necessary, flee.

God has so much better to give us than what we chase after in the dark. That is why verse 3 says the sins of “immorality or any impurity or greed should not even be named among Christians, as is proper among saints.”

The meaning of saints is “holy ones” – those who have been born again and adopted as God’s beloved children. Those who have been set apart to bring glory and honor to God and have nothing to do with *pornea*, sexual impurity and immorality.

There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. Think of someone who habitually smokes cigarettes, and they try to mask it with mouthwash or breath mints, but when you are talking with them you can still smell the tobacco. The idea here in Ephesians 5:3 is that there shouldn't be any whiff of these sins among believers.

The next sin in Paul’s list is greed. The word translated “greed,” could also be translated “covetousness” and in fact, Paul uses a related word in Ephesians 5:5 to refer to a “covetous man.”

Colossians 3:5 relates it closely to the sinful deeds of the earthly body, including immorality, impurity, passion, and evil desire. So “greed” includes an insatiable appetite for sex, but it also involves a hunger for more material possessions. Both Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5 link greed and covetousness to idolatry, because greed “makes a god of what it seeks to possess.”

If we look at history, we see a constant struggle for increasing mounds of possessions. Do you know that there are now more than 50,000 self-storage facilities in the country, offering over 1.7 billion square feet of relief for a legion of customers starting home businesses, combining households, getting organized after a move, or just unable to stop buying?

The self-storage industry has expanded fiftyfold since the 1960s, from virtually nothing to \$15 billion annually, making it larger than the U.S. music industry.

Paul says in verse 3...

To be immoral, impure, and greedy is not fitting, not proper, not appropriate if you are a Christian.

From immoral deeds that indulge fleshly desires which should “not even be named” among the saints in verse 3, Paul turns to immoral words that are “not fitting” among believers in verse 4...

“Filthiness” refers to shameful, disgraceful talk, including degrading obscenities that rob people of their dignity. This would also include innuendos and lewd or suggestive speech.

The phrase “silly talk” is one compound word in Greek: *mōrologia*. From its root we derive the English word “moron,” which means “fool.” It’s not a stretch to translate this colloquially as “talking like a moron.” In Scripture, fool doesn’t primarily refer to a person lacking intellectual ability but to somebody who denies the reality of God. David wrote in Psalm 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Historically, the word *mōros* pointed to “a practical denial of God as the Judge of good and evil.” *Mōrologia* refers to pointless, empty, and foolish talk—unnecessary verbiage that’s neither profitable nor edifying.

Verse 4...

“Coarse jesting” refers to talk that is more pointed and determined. It carries the idea of quickly turning something that is said or done—no matter how innocent—into that which is obscene or suggestive. It is the filthy talk of a person who uses every word and circumstance to display his immoral wit.

It is the stock-in-trade of the clever talk-show host or the stand-up comedian who is never at a loss for sexual innuendo. But the low obscenity of silly talk and the “high” obscenity of coarse jesting come from the same kind of heart, the heart given over to moral filthiness.

In light of such clear teaching of God’s Word, it is strange that so many Christians not only discuss but laugh and joke with impunity about almost every form of sexual intimacy, corruption, and perversion. But God’s standard is clear: there must be no filthiness and silly talk or coarse jesting.

Look again at verse 4... “which are not fitting.” In the NT the word for “fitting” appears three times. It is used in Colossians 3:18 of wives who are exhorted to be subject to their husbands as it is fitting in the Lord. In Philemon verse 8, Paul commands Philemon to forgive Onesimus for it is fitting. The word fitting means it is attractive, it looks right not only in the eyes of God, but it is attractive to those who see our lives. Here in Ephesians 5:4, the word is used in conjunction with the negative particle, signifying that it is not proper or fitting for believers to have the conduct and speech that Paul has just described.

At this point, a clarification is in order. Paul’s condemnation of filthiness, silly talk, and coarse jesting has nothing to do with a healthy sense of humor. In fact, I firmly believe that God gave us laughter as a gift. Think about it. We humans, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27), are the only creatures He made with a genuine sense of humor. In other words, we have the mental and emotional capacity to be delighted by humor and laugh out loud at irony.

Paul’s condemnations are not about a healthy sense of humor, even though we acknowledge that there is “a time to weep and a time to laugh” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Paul’s rebuke addresses the problem of inappropriate jesting ... or joking at an inappropriate time. Sensual talk and gutter humor provide no benefit. In fact, they tear people down.

Ephesians 5:11-12...

So, after listing all these powerful and destructive sins, you may be asking, “Paul what is the solution?” In a perverse and corrupt world, how are we as Christians going to fight the good fight of the faith and not participate in these sins? How can we be victorious?

Verses 3-4...

The words “But rather” are a strong term of contrast. Paul makes a 180-degree turn from the negative to the positive, from fleshly energized sinful deeds and words to a sacred attitude energized by the Spirit.

II. A Sacred Attitude We Must Adopt

It may surprise us that Paul tells us that our weapon of choice is thanksgiving. There are other solutions to temptation like to flee temptation, or kill the temptation – get rid of your smartphone, get rid of your internet access, etc.

But what Paul chiefly has in mind is what needs to begin in your heart if you are to be set apart and live unashamedly for Christ. The selfish and unloving person does not give thanks because he thinks he deserves whatever good thing he receives.

The unselfish and loving Christian, on the other hand, focuses his life and his concern on the glory of God and the needs of others. Whatever good thing he receives from God or other people he counts as undeserved and

gracious. He is always thankful because his spirit is one of loving and giving. Instead of using others, he serves them.

Instead of trying to turn the innocent into the immoral, he prayerfully seeks to change the immoral into what is righteous and holy. The Christian is thankful because the obedient life in Christ is the satisfying life. He can lay his head down on his pillow at night giving thanks to God and knowing He is trusting God and not living a double life. And people see his love for God, how thankful he is, how joyful he is, and how content he is in Christ.

In Luke 17 Jesus was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and cried out to Him, “Jesus, have mercy on us.” Jesus said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” The priests were the ones who could officially pronounce a leper cleansed from his disease. As the ten went to the priest they were cleansed. Of the ten healed, only one of them, a Samaritan, when he saw that he was healed, returned to Jesus praising God and thanking Jesus. The other nine did not.

We read that story and we think, “How could those nine men be so ungrateful as to not even turn back and say a word of thanks to Jesus?” And yet far too many of us are guilty of the same sin of unthankfulness.

Spiritually, our condition was once far worse than the physical condition of leprosy. We were not diseased; we were spiritually dead. We were slaves to the world, to Satan, and to the passions of our own sinful nature. We were by nature objects of God’s wrath. Ephesians 2:1-5 says...

Jesus giving us spiritual life is a far greater miracle than healing from leprosy, and the spiritual benefits of eternal life are infinitely greater. And yet, when we pursue pornography, immorality, and filthy and foolish talk, we are not only being ungrateful, we are essentially saying, “God, what you have provided me is not good enough.”

Take for example the list of sinful actions that Paul has listed. Each of these (sex, possessions, speech) is a blessing we have received from God but much like Romans chapter 1, we see a distortion of the gift.

Look at Romans 1:21-25 with me...

Verse 21 tells us their enslavement to sexual sin described in Romans 1 began with their failure to honor God as God and their failure to give Him thanks.

When we read this passage, we realize the description could be applied to our present-day culture with hardly changing a word.

Sex has been so distorted by the world that we as Christians can view it as something to be avoided and it has become something negative. But sex is not something for Christians to condemn as evil. It is only the distortions of sex that we deplore. Sex has been given by God for the context of marriage is something for which we should be thankful. Within marriage, sex is beautiful, intimate, and fulfilling. Thankfulness recognizes sex as God’s gift to be only shared between husband and wife and for that very reason seeks to use it to please and honor Him.

The second blessing for which we can be thankful is our share of the world’s material possessions. When distorted such thankfulness turns into greed. Thankfulness means being content with what we have and therefore being free to use our possessions for others. Greed means always feeling like we don’t have enough.

Greed distorts our value system. Which is more important to you? Life? Relationships? Or money? John D. Rockefeller, was one of the richest men alive when he said, “The poorest man I know is the man who has nothing but money.”

Which would you have preferred growing up? That your parents spent more time at work so that your family had more money and possessions, or that your parents spent time with you and you had a real relationship with your parents?

But there is another distortion too. some Christians (and even non-Christians) argue. “Greed is bad; therefore, things are bad,” So they live in self-inflicted poverty. Now, a person may choose to live simply, for the sake of being better able to witness to the poor or to have more to give others.

But neither greed nor abstention is the Christian way. The Christian way is to receive what God gives and to be thankful for it; and if God gives more, to recognize that the increase means an increase of responsibility in how one uses the possessions. The more we have, the larger the percentage we should give to others.

The third blessing in the context of our passage is truth and the ability to express it by words. It is the ability of words to do this - particularly to communicate truth about God, ourselves, and salvation - that makes the cheapening of words through foolish talk and coarse joking so wrong. Again, a good sense of humor is not bad. The problem lies rather in our making light of what is eternally important and instead of speaking edifying words and ministering God’s grace (4:29) we are silly, crude, and coarsely joke.

Thankfully, God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. He reminds us that the indwelling Holy Spirit is ever at work in our hearts, energizing, and stimulating in us to see a solution to the ever-present temptation around us. The Spirit illuminates the Word of God to show us how truly blessed we are in Jesus Christ and to find our satisfaction in Him. And in Christ, we have the desire and then the necessary power to say, “Thank you Father, thank you Jesus, thank you Holy Spirit.”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “Let the things of the Spirit of God characterize our lives, so that as people come to talk to us, they find something attractive about us, something clean and pure, something uplifting, intelligent, thoughtful and profitable; let them feel there is an element of praise and thanksgiving in your whole life, which causes them to say, ‘What do you find to be so thankful? What do you find to praise God about? Where do you find it in a world like ours? I wish I were like that!’”

Let’s pray...