

EPHESIANS 5:3-4 6-16-13
The Purity of Gratitude

Ephesians 5:**1-2** *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and 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.* The apostle begins this chapter with an exhortation to walk in love. The word “love” is, of course, one of those words that is bantered about freely in our society, recklessly. It is beaten, abused, battered. It is a term used to define or represent almost any kind of ethical system. In the 1960s a bestseller was written by an Episcopal clergyman named Joseph Fletcher. The book was called “Situation Ethics” and in it Fletcher argued that the only enduring ethical principle is that of love. The sum of Fletcher’s ethics was “do the loving thing.” But Fletcher’s notion of love was without bounds or guidance, and opened up for our culture the very moral malaise we are in at present where we find ourselves surrounded by loving fornication and loving adultery and loving abortions and loving theft and even loving murder. So stretched beyond recognition is this modern concept of “love” that Christians who suggest that some acts are always wrong are looked at and spoken of as being unloving. The key to holding up against such accusations will be found in a solid grasp of what God’s word means by *love* and how it relates to ethical absolutes. Read on in Ephesians 5, for right after calling us to walk in love, here is what the word of the Lord says **3-4** *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks*

We are going to wrap our thoughts today around four brief thoughts, each properly beginning with the word “proper.” “Proper” is a word I heard frequently in my short visit to England where it is used with much greater frequency than it is here and in a slightly different way. I like the word *proper*. So, first, you see in our text a call to proper conduct. This call is expressed in the negative, in a prohibition, in a statement about what we should not be doing. **3** *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* In a word, we are called here to moral purity, especially to sexual and relational purity. When he says that these evil things are not to be named among us, the apostle doesn’t mean that we aren’t to talk about them, that we aren’t to carefully warn each other about them. For these things not to be named among you means that there should be not even any suspicion of them. The New International

Version says “there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality.” It is something that should be as foreign to the people of God as cannibalism. I don’t know any pastors, not one, who have fallen from leadership due to cannibalism, and that’s the same number who should have fallen due to adultery. And laymen as well. Listen, my friend, I don’t care what the talk show people say, according to God’s word you can no more have loving adultery than you can have loving cannibalism. Therefore, it is totally out of bounds for a people controlled by love. It is not within our realm of choices. In I Corinthians 6 Paul waxes eloquent on this point and tells us that it is absolutely and always improper for a child of God to give himself over to sexual sin. I Corinthians 6:15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!* The old appeal that claims anything is okay between two consenting adults is straight from the pit. I Corinthians 6: 19,20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.* You see, because of what God has made you to be; because you are special and set apart for him there should be no thought of fornication and adultery, much less homosex.

These things are not proper among saints, among believers in Jesus. Hold this text up to your newspaper some days and you will see some astounding conflicts. The mainline Presbyterian Church has upheld the ordained status of pastors living as lesbians. The Episcopal Church in our country has already sold it’s soul for sexual license. How outrageous is that, that a Christian denomination still pretending reverence for a Bible which calls homosexual conduct an “abomination” could take such a view? But they say it is all about love. They are pro-love and don’t believe there should be any boundaries on such “love.” But God’s view of love is consistent with his revulsion at such things. He says 3 *immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.*

Then our text goes on to call us to a second thing, which is proper speaking. 4 *there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* Here again it is stated in the negative. There are things that you must not do and things that you must not say. You don’t commit acts of sexual indecency and you don’t talk about them. You don’t joke about them or about anything else that is in poor taste. Three types of speech are forbidden here: “filthiness” - foul language, crude language, a delighting in profanity and lewd stories. “Silly talk” is the next one. The NIV calls it “foolish talk” and I think that is clearer for us. The Greek word is

one you may recognize. It is the term *morologia*. *Logia* means *words* and *moro* is the granddaddy of our English word *moron*. Literally it is *moronic words*. And finally there is *coarse jesting*. What's he talking about here? This is a description of lockerroom language isn't it? This is the way the boys at North Allegheny High talk as they put on their gym clothes. I've been around adults doing the same thing. This is exactly what you hear day in and day out on American TV - talk shows, soap operas and sit-coms. But if you are a Christian you are called to be different. You can't swim in the same cesspool the boys at work swim in. This kind of language may be okay for a child of wrath, but not a child of God. For you it is not fitting. Do you hear me young people? You are to go beyond just saying no to drugs and to illicit sex and to cheating, you are to learn to speak with purity. In the midst of your youth group or your soccer team or your history class, watch the ways of your mouth. Before you tell a joke or offer a comment, ask yourself, "Would I say this if Jesus were standing right here with me?" And then consider what you are exposing yourself to by what you watch on TV and the internet and the movie theatre. Listen, you will answer to God, not me, for how you spend your time and money; but I have to tell you that it grieves me to hear of Christians who make a regular habit of attending to the trash pouring out of Hollywood these days. What marks these films? Precisely the things we are called here to avoid. Like a lot of us, I don't watch any TV soap operas or sit-coms but I know enough from what I have seen and from what I have read to know that these shows offer a steady diet of immorality, impurity, and talking and joking about those very things that God says are not proper and fitting for his children. I ask you simply this morning, "Would it honor God and help your soul and your schedule to swear off a certain TV show, or website, or magazine that is a pollutant of your soul, that is a blatant violator of this part of God's word to you?"

On toward our third point which is proper motivation. You know there are lots of different ways the Lord motivates us to do what is right. There are promises and reasonings and sometimes even threats. I like the one He uses here. To answer the question, "why should I stay away from impure activities and impure speech?" the apostle chooses two words which mean the same thing. They are the words "proper" and "fitting." In verse 3 he says that immorality, impurity and greed are not "proper among saints." The next verse says too that impure speech is not "fitting." When things don't fit it means they aren't supposed to go together right? Take a look at these pictures will you? (show hybrid beasts – first the chimpdog). What is that huh? The body of a chimp, the face of a dog. That's not right. (show dog with eagle head) How about this one? The body of a dog and the

head of an eagle. (cat-bird) Here is bird head, cat bod. And we have a whole collection of other bird-dogs, or are they dog-birds. (show 3, then show green thing) I don't even know what this is supposed to be. But those are weird aren't they? The heads of one, the bodies of others, and they don't fit. They aren't proper dogs and cats and birds. Those pictures are sort of visible oxymorons are they? We've already spoken of morons today, now let's talk about oxymorons. An oxymoron is a term or phrase that seems self-contradictory, like *Jumbo Shrimp* or *freezer burn* or *sanitary sewer*. The point is that Jumbo and Shrimp don't go together. They should be mutually exclusive terms. So too should Christian gangster or Christian adulterer or Christian liar. These are things inconsistent with a profession of Christian faith and commitment. That is what God is saying to us here, that there are things we can't be doing because of who we are. And who are we? What does our text say? We are saints. The word means, "holy ones." That is what God calls us. So, of course, we can't be immoral holy ones. There are adjectives that fit with the word "saint" but "immoral" and "impure" and "greedy" and "foul-mouthed" are not among them.

Now, the Scriptures could have just said to not do this stuff because it is wrong. But God knows that we need additional motivation that he supplies for us here by reminding us of who and what we are. As you may know, I coached my kids' basketball teams for about fifteen years. I am now retired from coaching, but a huge part of coaching is telling athletes what they are doing wrong, and there are lots of ways to do that. Some will motivate, others will de-motivate. One of the best ways to point out an error without demotivating is to tell a kid what he did wrong and then say, "you're too good a player to do that." You are telling the kid that his mistake was beneath him. God is doing that same thing here. He says to us, "You are my holy ones, my saints. Sexual sin and nasty speech is beneath you. That is what I expect out of the ungodly, but not you guys." Verse 7,8 do the same thing **7,8** *Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.* Again he says, "I expect folly and corruption from the unregenerate, but that's not you anymore." Listen, we go a long way towards holy living when we just remember who we are, who God has made us to be. We are saints, we are Christians, we are followers of Jesus, therefore there will be no immorality, no impurity and greed named among us, and furthermore, we won't even talk about those things because of who we are. In remembering that we find proper motivation.

On now to our final point which is proper gratitude. Paul says that filthiness and silly talk and coarse jesting aren't fitting for saints, but what is? What is appropriate to flow out of the mouth of

Christians? Well, you answer that by asking, “what is a Christian?” And to this point in Ephesians, Paul has shown us that a Christian is someone who was dead in sin and bound for hell, but who has been chosen by God, purchased out of bondage to sin by the blood of Christ Jesus, and made a child of the Lord Himself, destined for eternal glory. What then is fitting speech for a Christian? Why of course, it is the giving of thanks. Christians are people upon whom has been lavished massive grace and from whom will properly flow massive thanks. And so in verse 4 Paul says that instead of filthy speech we want to be marked by grateful speech. Colossians 2 says to be overflowing with gratitude. The more you understand the gospel, the more your response to this point of grace will be, “of course!” Anything else would not be proper or fitting. A grumbly Christian is an oxymoron. The evening before thanksgiving we have a thanksgiving sharing service and these are always such a huge blessing to me. Typically, when our time in that service is up there are still people waiting to share. That is so right and so proper, that when the pastor asks, “who would give thanks to God?” that many would step forward. And please don’t think, as I know many do, that it is okay to just feel grateful. Giving thanks and feeling thanks are not the same. Who is blessed by you feeling grateful? God says to express that gratitude. You know the story of the ten lepers in the gospels? Those ten men were healed by Jesus and as they went away to wherever, only one returned to thank the Lord. But do you not believe that the other nine felt grateful? They had to feel grateful to Jesus. They were lepers who had been delivered of this dreaded disease. Oh, they felt grateful alright, but only one expressed it. He is the one we follow. Ephesians 5:20 says we are to be **20** *always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.* When you are a grateful person as opposed to a grumbly, complaining person what you say to those who meet you is that, “My Jesus satisfies my soul.” That’s the testimony of joy and contentment and gladness. How can it not be ours if we have been made children of the King?

I read a marvelous story in the Focus On the Family’s Magazine about a man named Marcel Sternberger, dateline, New York City, 1948. Mr. Sternberger was a Hungarian immigrant, now a reporter who boarded a subway and found himself sitting next to a man in his late 30s who was reading a Hungarian newspaper. Marcel asked him in Hungarian if he could read it too and when their Hungarian bond was discovered they began to talk. The other man’s name was Bela Paskin, a law student in Hungary when the war started, he had been put into a German labor battalion and sent to Ukraine. After the war he covered hundreds of miles on foot to reach his home in Debrecen,

a large city in Eastern Hungary. When he came to the apartment once occupied by his parents and siblings he found strangers there. The upstairs apartment he had lived in with his wife was also occupied by strangers, none of whom had heard of his family. He found other relatives though who told him that his family was dead, having been taken away to Auschwitz. Paskin was too heartsick to remain in Hungary so he walked all the way to Paris and immigrated to the US in 1947. Marcel Sternberger writes this of his time with Bela Paskin. *All the time he had been talking I kept thinking that somehow his story seemed familiar. A young woman I had recently met had also been from Debrecen, had been sent to Auschwitz and had been transferred to a German munitions factory. Her relatives were killed but she was liberated by the Americans and was brought to the US in 1946. Her story had so moved me that I wrote down her phone number. It seemed impossible that there could be any connection between these two people, but I found the woman's name in my address book and asked my new friend, "Was your wife's name Marya?" He turned pale. "Yes!" he answered. "How did you know?" I said, "Let's get off the train." I took him by the arm and led him to a phone booth. I called the number in my address book and Marya answered. I told her who I was and asked her what street she had lived on in Debrecen. Asking her to hold the line I turned to Bela and said, "Did you and your wife live on such and such a street?" "Yes!" Bela exclaimed. He was white as a sheet and trembling. "Try to be calm" I urged him. "Something miraculous is about to happen to you. Take the phone and talk to your wife." He took the receiver, listened a moment to his wife's voice, then suddenly cried, "This is Bela! ®" and then began to mumble hysterically. I took the receiver from his shaking hands. "Stay where you are" I told Marya, who also sounded hysterical, "I am sending your husband to you. He will be there in a few minutes." Putting Bela Paskin into a taxicab I directed the driver to Marya's address, paid the fare and said goodbye. Bela Paskin's reunion with his wife was a moment so poignant, so electric with suddenly released emotion, that afterward neither could recall much about it. Marya says, "I remember only that when I left the phone, I walked to the mirror like in a dream to see if maybe my hair had turned gray. The next thing I know a taxi stops in front of the house and it is my husband who comes toward me. Details I cannot remember; only this I know...that I was happy for the first time in many years."*

Relate that miraculous story to your life for a moment. What possibility was there of you and God ever getting together? The divide between you which consisted of your sin and hostility was bigger than the ocean. What would it take? A miracle to be sure. One day you just happened into a

church or a Sunday School class or a youth group and you meet somebody who had God's phone number and introduced Him to you. After years of separation you and God meet. How do you respond to such a grace? With indifference and boredom, even worse with careless immorality, or do you respond to grace with a heart that is thrilled and a mouth that is filled with thanksgiving and with praise? One of our hymns says, *O the love that drew salvation's plan, oh the grace that brought it down to man, Oh the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.* When we survey the wondrous cross what shall we do but lay aside selfish impurities, and foolish speech and unclean habits of life in order to say by deed and by word "Thank You Mighty Savior!" Prayer