

## EPHESIANS 5:5-6 6-23-13

### *Lifestyles of the Poor and Doomed*

(Ephesians 5) Next week I have something special for the conclusion of summer camp. Today I want to get in one more study from Ephesians before we get into the heart of our summer. Our text for this morning is Ephesians 5:5-6 but let's give it some context as we read starting at verse three. **3-10** *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;<sup>4</sup> and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.<sup>5</sup> For 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.<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.<sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be partakers with them;<sup>8</sup> for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),<sup>10</sup> trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Before I get into the main body of our study today I want to go down one side road which I get from our text but I just couldn't fit it in with the rest of my message. Notice in verse 5 the connection made between greed and idolatry. It speaks of the covetous man who is an idolater. Now that word "covetous" could mean one who lusts for money or for sex or some other pleasure, but it certainly refers to someone who lives for himself and is controlled by his lusts. Paul says that person is guilty of idolatry, the worshipping of a false god? Yes, and I hope you can see the reason why. In a sense, your god is whatever you think will make you happy. For example, if you're single, maybe you think a husband would make you happy. If you're married you think it would be a better husband. For some, it is career success, for others it is alcohol or drugs or other types of bodily pleasure. Certainly, sexual pleasures are treated by some as a god. And when we look to anything but the Lord God Himself to meet our needs and satisfy our souls we are guilty of idolatry. We have replaced the Lord of glory with something unworthy. We have said, "This is more important to me than God." We may not have totem poles in our culture and statues of Diana to fall down and worship but we are a nation of idolaters none the less. In Philippians 3 Paul writes of some whose god is their appetites. These things hit awfully close to home. Now it should be said that Christians are not so unworldly that

a juicy steak doesn't do something for us, that sexual pleasures hold no attraction for us. The difference is that we have found something both superior and different to those things. We aren't disinterested in carnal delights. God says we may enjoy those things in proper ways. We don't devalue them, we just lift up the value of knowing God to which nothing in this world can compare. And if he's not top priority in your life the Scriptures say you are an idolater. Think about it, and then follow me now off the side roads to the main highway.

Let's begin our main consideration this morning with a fill-in-the-blank question. *Blank* lifestyle. What adjective, what word comes to mind in conjunction with the term "lifestyle?" Quite honestly I thought of the term *homosexual*. Quite often I hear reference to the homosexual lifestyle. But another adjective that comes to mind is "Christian." Is that a proper use of the term? Is there really such a thing as a Christian lifestyle? I'm gonna suggest to you today that there certainly is. There is Christian belief and non-Christian belief. There is a Christian way of thinking and a non-Christian way of thinking. And too there is a Christian lifestyle and a non-Christian lifestyle. The non-Christian lifestyle is described in verses 3-6 and the Christian lifestyle in verses 9-10. But what I want you to see right off is that the distinction between the children of light and the children of darkness is being pointed out at the level of lifestyle. The distinction here is not that one group has prayed a certain prayer and the other hasn't. It's not that one group has been baptized and the other hasn't. It's not even that one group believes certain things and the other doesn't. The notable thing is that one group lives one way and the other lives a very different way. In our text in verse 5 it speaks of the immoral person, the impure person and the covetous man and it says of him that we know by his behavior that he is not a converted person, he is not a child of God, he is not a true Christian. You can tell the sheep from the goats by their conduct. You could see the same thing in any number of Scriptures. I Corinthians 6 is very similar to this **9-10** *do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,*<sup>10</sup> *nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. These verses describe the lifestyles of the poor and doomed. Again we are told that by their lifestyles we shall know them. John 3:36 describes the two great divisions of mankind **36** *He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.* Those still under God's wrath are described how? By their disobedient lifestyle. They*

have no regard for the law of God. In Ephesians 5:6 they are called *the sons of disobedience*. I John 3:**10** *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God.* Once again, the distinguishing mark of the unregenerate, those outside the family of God, is what? A big 666 on the forehead? No, it has to do with their practice. It is simply a lifestyle of unrighteousness that distinguishes them for what they are. And since this is so, what you say about yourself is not all that important, it is what you do that matters most. If someone says, “I’m not a Christian” I’m sure you can take them at their word. But if someone says, “I am a Christian” is the assessment over? Is the issue settled by that? Not at all. The New Testament teaches us that lots of folks claim to be true disciples and really are not. I John 2:**4** *The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.* He has been betrayed by what? By his lifestyle. Let me ask you this: Is it legitimate to say something like this: Can we say, *That person is apparently not a true Christian; they do such and such?* Are we to think that way? Let our text answer the question for you 5-6 *For 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.* <sup>6</sup> *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* Look further at the I Corinthians 6 passage and I think the answer is obvious. Actions speak louder than words, your lifestyle may betray your creed.

Now, I know that what I have said in the last five minutes leaves a great number of you uncomfortable. You are asking, *But, Pastor, what about grace? The things you are saying and showing us in Scripture don’t seem to be consistent with the whole idea of salvation being a gift of God and coming by grace like those things we studied back in Ephesians 2.* If you are thinking that way, I commend you to a point. First, I commend you for thinking. You are already ahead of the pack just by doing that. Secondly, I commend you for having a grace-centered mentality, for wanting to make sure that salvation by grace is not threatened in what we say. But having commended you so far I want to call you now to go a step further in your understanding of God’s grace. It is fascinating to me that when you talk about the necessity of a Christian lifestyle, when you talk about the New Testament concept of assessing a person by the fruit of their lives you are charged with speaking against grace. You are told that you don’t understand the amazing grace of God. I am convinced that the opposite is more the case. It is

the antinomian, that person who claims that lifestyle doesn't matter because salvation is all of grace, that is the person who is underestimating the power and the magnificence of the grace of God. My Bible tells me that the grace of God that saves us from the guilt of our sin also saves us from the power of it and therefore changes the way we live. Titus 2:11 *the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us.* Instructing us to what? Instructing us that since salvation is by grace that lifestyle no longer matters? Hardly 12 *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,* That is why Paul can say that those still living an immoral lifestyle have no share in the kingdom. Their unrepentant and ongoing immorality indicates that they have never been touched by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Paul understood and taught that this grace was too powerful and wonderful to leave us wallowing in the mire of our own sin. It frees us from guilt and it lifts us up to a whole new life.

Well, I know some of you like to follow my outlines on the Scripture sheet. That's great, so let me clue you in that we have just finished point #1 which is *lifestyle and grace*. I want you to see that God's saving grace does not make our lifestyles irrelevant, it makes them pure and obedient and distinctively Christian. Let's go now to my next point which is *lifestyle and faith*. Once again some of you will object to the line of reasoning in Ephesians 5:5 because it seems to undermine the New Testament teaching that the key difference between the saved and the lost is that one has faith in Christ and the other doesn't. Isn't that what counts? Isn't that the gospel, that if we believe we have eternal life? And the answer is, "Of course, you are absolutely right." If you are thinking that way I commend you not only for thinking but for wanting to maintain the centrality of faith as opposed to works as the means by which a person may be justified. But after commending you I need to ask that you go a step further in your thinking. Look again at Ephesians 5:5 *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.* What specifically does the apostle say that these people lack? An inheritance. This is something we studied back in Ephesians one. I'm sure you remember doing so; it was on June 14, 2011. You probably still have your notes there in your Bible. Ephesians 1:13-14a *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,<sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.* Look closely at that and tell me this, when did we become heirs, and receive

the pledge or down payment on our inheritance? Clearly this occurred when we heard the gospel with faith, when we believed. Belief is the critical issue in this matter of the inheritance, but Paul says that he knows with certainty that folks of immoral conduct and lifestyles don't have it. Where's the connection? The connection is found in the undeniable link between belief and practice. You look at that word in Ephesians 1 again. What does it say is the pledge or down-payment of our inheritance? It is the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But if the fruits of the Holy Spirit are absent in your life guess what that means? And in the same way, the fruit of faith is obedience, and if the fruit of faith is absent what must also be absent? The faith itself. James 2:**17-18** *faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*<sup>18</sup> *But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* The point is clearly that lifestyle is an outgrowth of what you really believe. So, if I ask you whether being a Christian is a matter of belief or behavior what's your answer? The answer is "yes." Christianity is a belief that leads to certain behaviors. In Ephesians 5:6 Paul refers to the children of darkness as *the sons of disobedience*. He could have called them *the sons of unbelief*, but you can't see someone's unbelief. You can observe their lifestyle. John 3:36 is so simple and instructive. **36** *He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.* That verse breaks all men into two groups. The Eternal Lifers are noted for their faith. The poor and doomed are noted for their what? Their lifestyle of disobedience. The implication is clear. Where there is true faith there is obedience, and where there is disobedience there is not true faith. So, don't try to insert a third category into this. The New Testament does not envision a segment of born-again believing, heaven bound people who are disobedient and immoral. That whole notion is a perversion of gospel teaching. Please now, what I say now is critical. The issue here is lifestyle. We are not suggesting in any way that true Christians never sin. Heaven will be filled with those who, as Christians, committed adultery, and, as Christians, got drunk, and, as Christians, stole money. How is that statement consistent with our text? Am I wimping out here? Paul says there won't be any immoral, impure and covetous people in the kingdom of God. May I suggest to you that there is a huge difference between a liar and someone who has lied. If I get sick next week and can't preach I don't know what I'll do because Bobby is gone that weekend. I'll have to call you to preach. If you preach for me that Sunday would it then be accurate to call you a preacher? By "preacher" we mean someone who does it regularly don't

we? And the same thing applies to Paul's language here. There is a difference between committing adultery and being an adulterer. David committed adultery and I expect to see Him in glory but I don't expect that David would fall under Paul's categories here. He did not walk in, live in and stay in that lifestyle. Am I saying that adultery once or twice is okay? Not at all. I am just saying that it is lifestyle, assessed as a whole, not any one given day or one given act that becomes an indicator of whether someone has really believed in Christ or not. The issue is not the perfection of a life, but the direction of a life. Does your life direction fit with a belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord?

That question leads us to our next heading which is lifestyle and assurance. ⑥. If the Scripture says that immoral, impure and covetous persons are not kingdom-bound where does that leave you? Does that make you wonder if in fact you are truly saved? Does that make you question if you are ready to die? Good! I think it is supposed to have that very effect. If you come to me and say, "Pastor, I've been a Christian since I was a kid but I've been living with my girlfriend, and selling illegal drugs for the last five years" what should I say to you? "Don't worry about that, as long as you believe, as long as you walked that aisle, prayed that prayer, joined that church." Would I be true to God's word if I said that? Not for one moment. As a teacher of this word I would advise you to fear for your soul. You have every reason to do so and I am not about to remove that motivation from you in order to offer a spurious form of assurance and comfort. II Corinthians 13:5 *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?* Some of you do fail the test! An honest look at your life and at your heart may reveal that you are not a Christian, you do not have real faith, the Spirit of God does not reside in your soul. What you need is to repent, to quit pretending and bow down before King Jesus and say, "I now surrender all." You do that for real and a lifestyle change is inevitable. And you know what? As that lifestyle changes for the better, you will gain greater and greater assurance that you really do belong to the Lord. God's word says you are either saved or lost, in your sin or in Jesus, but your confidence of that may go up and down, it may vary from day to day, and is supposed to increase and strengthen. In II Peter we are called to pursue greater assurance. II Peter 1:10 *be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.* What are the these things he speaks of here? They are mentioned just prior in

this chapter. **5-8** *applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge,* <sup>6</sup> *and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness,* <sup>7</sup> *and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.* <sup>8</sup> *For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is increasing holiness of life and perseverance that will strengthen your confidence in the Lord and convince you that God has indeed laid hold of you by His grace.*

Fourthly now, let's look at lifestyle and wrath ☹ - specifically God's wrath. Here is where we get into verse 6 *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* You note here the warning at the beginning about being deceived. Apparently there were some folks who were teaching falsehood concerning the relationship of one's lifestyle to one's faith and one's assurance and to God's grace. I encounter this type of false teacher regularly. These are they who attack what they like to call "legalism." And they say of others, "they deny grace by teaching the law." Watch out when you hear that kind of talk. Paul says there are folks downplaying sin in the church and he says they are just full of empty words. Then he goes on to say that it is exactly these things he has been speaking of: immorality, impurities, greed that provoke our holy God to wrath. Wow! There you see it my friend. Can you believe it? Right there in our text it refers to the wrath of God - in the New Testament! And you were told that the God of wrath was an Old Testament novelty. Not so. Don't be deceived in that way either. Wrath is the response of a holy God to sin and the New Testament God is the same Holy Lord who thundered at Mount Sinai. Immorality will always provoke God to wrath. It makes God mad when His creatures sin. Romans 1:**18ab** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* Do you understand the point the apostle is making here? He is giving us further reasons to not sin. Last week He said that we ought not to sin because we are above that as saints. Today he says not to sin because it provokes the wrath of God. Simple enough. You think of Biblical stories such as the one about Moses not being allowed to enter the promised land because of his disobedience to God. There are plenty other such stories to be found by reading the Old Testament. But better yet, heed Paul's counsel and stay out of sin. Stephen Schwambach says that a good part of wisdom is finding where God's fist comes down and then having the good sense not to stand in that spot. When you walk in the way of

immorality and disobedience to the law of heaven you can expect one thing for sure. Your lifestyle may give you pleasure for a while, maybe, maybe not, but for sure you are coming under divine wrath. God promises. Why do some people go to hell? Why does God condemn them in that way? The predominant answer of Scripture is simple. You go to hell for living a life of sin and rebellion. Because of these things the wrath of God will come. Why will some go to heaven? Because they live a different way? No, some will go to heaven because a gracious God became a man, took on Himself the punishment for their sin, then gave to them the faith to believe in Him and the power to live for Him a new, a different and a holy life. All of that we call “grace” and in Jesus name we offer that grace to you in hope that you might escape the wrath to come and enjoy with us an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Let’s pray.