

Ephesians 5:1-7 — Sex and Money

April 13, 2014

Good morning CrossWinds. We are working our way through the book of Ephesians. For those of you who are new, this is our typical Sunday morning game plan. We just keep studying our way through books of the Bible, asking God to make us more like Jesus. John 1 describes Jesus as the Word of God. This means the best way to become more like Jesus is to simply study the Bible. Jesus and the Word of God are the same.

So far, we learned that, even though we don't deserve it, we are incredibly loved by God. God loved us so much that he sent his own son to die in our places for our sins. He adopted us into his family, and through no credit of our own, made us the most blessed beings in the universe. This should make us pretty stoked. For those who love Jesus, life just gets better and better for all of eternity. This is incredibly good news for those God has called into his family.

In the first half of the book of Ephesians, we learned the good news of who we are because of God's undeserved love for us through Jesus. The second half of Ephesians tells us how we should live because of our new identity in Jesus. Christians don't live a different lifestyle to be saved, but we live a different lifestyle because we are saved. If there is no change of lifestyle when someone accepts Christ, that may mean they never trusted Christ in the first place. Knowing Jesus and a change of life always go together.

Last week, we looked at how knowing Christ changes the way we handle conflict. We are truthful with our words. We don't use words as weapons to beat

people up, but we use words to build people up. When we get angry, we try not to sin or hold our anger. Today, we will learn how Jesus changes the way we handle our sex life and our money.

This is a very important message because we live in a sexually charged materialistic culture that is fighting against us. In the areas of sex and money, the American culture is very similar to the ancient culture in Ephesus. Ephesus was the home of Artemis, a female deity that was sexually orientated in her worship. Ephesus made Vegas look clean. Ephesus was also a city that was filthy rich, like America. What God inspired Paul to write to the Ephesians in this book is very applicable to our culture. This is something we should listen to.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; Ephesians 5:1–7 (ESV)

There are three points we are going to develop our thoughts around this morning. 1) The way I handle sex and money must be notably different than the culture around me. 2) My speech must be notably different than the culture around me. 3) Failing to take this seriously may have eternal and immediate consequences.

The way I handle sex and money must be notably different than the culture around me.

How does the world handle sex and money?

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Ephesians 5:3 (ESV)

Sexual Immorality — Sexual immorality sounds very general. When I grew up and read in the Bible about sexual immorality, I thought the sexually immoral people were the pedophiles and the perverts. They were people that were arrested and locked away. When I got a little older, I read older translations of the Bible. I noticed they used a different word in verses like this. They used the word fornication. I didn't know that that meant so I looked it up in a dictionary and learned that fornication means premarital sex. A little dictionary research as a teenager told me that sexual immorality wasn't just sexual perverts but it was people sleeping together before marriage. Both of those are not part of God's desire for my life.

The problem I had, and the problem most young adults have, is while the act of premarital sex is wrong, where does the Bible draw the line for everything else? How far is too far? Can a Christian couple hold hands? Can you kiss your date goodnight? Can you make out with your girlfriend? How far is too far? The Greek word for sexual immorality is *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography. It is a junk drawer term that covers *every kind of sexual expression outside of marriage*. It is premarital sex. It is extramarital sex. It is homosexuality. It is bestiality. It is going to a strip club and eating at Hooters. It is looking at porn. It is touching your girlfriend. It is making out with your

girlfriend. In short, it is doing anything with your girlfriend you wouldn't do with your sister. For some of the young men among us, this is an incentive to treat your sisters better if you plan to have a girlfriend in the future.

Paul wrote to Timothy, who was the young pastor in the sexualized city of Ephesus, about how he was to treat the women in his life.

...older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:2 (ESV)

This is what I tell my boys. If you wouldn't do it with your sister, God does not want you doing it with a girlfriend or a fiancé before your wedding night.

Everything is off limits. Paul said there shouldn't even be a hint of sexual immorality in a Christian's life outside of marriage. I know, God sounds like such a prude. God would not be a fun date.

God is not anti-sex. Most people think he is. Sex was God's idea. Inside of marriage, he commands a husband and wife to be have regular intimacy. He commands a husband and wife to have an active sex life and to not be selfish about it. God's will is plenty of sex in marriage, but no sex life before marriage.

One of the great benefits of no sex before marriage is *you get to know a person, not a body*. When you awaken your sexual appetite, all you can think about is a body, and it is much easier to overlook character issues. The best way to know if you are marrying the right person is get to know a person, not a body, before marriage.

This is a very big issue in our culture, especially for men. Men's brains are built to respond to the visual presence of a woman's body. Women's bodies are everywhere. They are in advertising. They are in the popup adds on your web

browser. Youtube is a major problem. Men are constantly assaulted with sexually-oriented temptation. Add the Internet with instant and anonymous access to porn and you have a recipe for what sociologists and psychologists call the perfect storm against men.

Men in our culture, and an increasing number of women, are viewing and becoming addicted to porn. We joke about this in our home because in our neighborhood around 10 p.m. the Internet gets really slow. Why is there so much Internet usage in a residential neighborhood after 10 p.m.? We think we know the answer.

I recently read a book on how pornography reformats a man's brain. Let me share some of the results, because it shows the dangers of porn.

1. Studies show that when men view pornography they begin viewing women as nothing more than a piece of meat to satisfy their sexual appetites, just like men consume steaks to satisfy their physical appetites.
2. Porn burns a woman's body into a man's memory bank, and those memories dominate a man's thought life. A man will have flashbacks of a woman's body for years, if not his entire life, like a scared soldier returning from battle.
3. Men become incapable of viewing any woman they meet as anything more than an object. Women aren't people. They view them as sexual objects.
4. A man's ability to display emotional intimacy with a woman is snuffed out as he is dominated by physical intimacy. He is incapable of relating to a woman as a friend.

5. Men become incapable of providing the emotional transparency, fidelity and intimacy a wife needs in a marriage relationship. Men become incapable of being the mate their wife needs and the family is crushed.

As Christians, we are to be very different from the world. There is to not even be a hint of sex outside of marriage. God's plan for no sexual immorality before marriage or outside of marriage is his plan to help men become the great fathers, husbands and leaders that every man longs to be.

Statistically the happiest couples and the ones who have the greatest marital success are those with the most purity going into their wedding nights. Their sexual stickiness is strongest.

Cohabitation is also common in our culture. This is living together, and sleeping together, before marriage to ensure emotional and sexual compatibility. It is called practicing marriage. I know many young Christian couples don't see cohabitation as wrong. Why get married if the marriage won't work? The Bible says we don't practice marriage. Living together before marriage is sexual immorality. We are either married or we are not married. If you call yourself a Christian and you are living with somebody, you are in open rebellion against God. Either move out or get married. No compromise. No middle ground. There shouldn't be even a hint of sexual immorality among us is what the Bible says.

Some people say they can't afford to live apart. I don't agree. Before God, you can't afford to NOT live apart. I never met a guy who died of exposure and hunger because he moved out from his girlfriend's apartment to remain in

purity until their wedding night. Trust me. You will make it, and God will honor your marriage for doing it.

Our culture is doing everything it can to make sexual immorality normative. Movies and video games now carry a “mature” rating. Think about this. People who play games that flash flesh and use airbrushed women that are vastly out of proportion and wearing almost nothing at all should not be rated “M” for mature. I propose they carry a “P” rating for perverted. The truth is that mature people in Christ would never be comfortable playing those games.

Another example is “gentlemen’s clubs.” Think about this. This is a bait and switch with the words. Are the real gentlemen inside those clubs? Do real gentlemen ignore their wives while they watch other women dance as they eat dinner. Those people are not gentlemen. They are sickos. They are whack jobs. They are perverts. A real gentleman is home taking care of his wife, making her dinner, changing diapers and then washing the dishes and folding the laundry after dinner. Those are the real gentlemen.

Our sexuality is to be very different from the world, especially if you are single. There is a great deal of pressure to be intimate before your wedding night. I don’t just mean sex. I mean everything before sex. The Bible says there shouldn’t be a hint of sex in our lives before our wedding nights. The biblical picture is that when the pastor says to the groom, “You may kiss the bride,” that is to be the first time you kiss the bride. I know some of you think that is freakishly prudish. The reason you think that is prudish is because you aren’t

biblical. You are so caught up in our hyper-sexualized culture that you no longer know what is right and what is wrong.

Impurity — Impurity is a general term that is broader than sexual immorality. It is anything that is dirty and unwholesome. It is immoral thoughts. It is fantasizing about people. It is horror movies. It is using violence as a source of entertainment. It is some video games. It is being entertained by rape and murder in movies. It is anything that does not build us up and enhance our sexual purity. It is staring at the women's magazine when you take it out of your mailbox. It is messing with things that are dark and the occult. It is anything that isn't wholesome and good in our thoughts and lives.

Impurity and unwholesomeness is not just something we do to ourselves but it can be something you do to others. It can be how we dress. Men, do you dress in a way to get the girls to think impure thoughts about you? Women, do you dress in clothing that encourages men to see you as a sexual object? Spandex isn't wrong, but there are places and times it shouldn't be worn. Impurity is dressing in a way that encourages people to think unwholesome thoughts about us.

Is God against dressing nice and looking our best? No. I don't have the time to go through the study with you this morning but the Bible says we should not use our bodies to inflame the sexual passions of someone we are not married to.¹ Look nice? Yes. Cause people to lust? No.

¹ <http://www.christ2rculture.com/styled/answerstoyourquestions/files/howfaristooofar.html>

Covetousness — One of the real pressures in our culture is financial pressure to keep up with our neighbors. Does your neighbor have an HD television? If he does, we feel pressure to get one. Did your neighbor get a new car? Why am I driving a beater? Do your friends have a boat? I want a bigger one. In manufacturing, they only make things to last for three to five years because they want to give you something new so they can make you covet new things. A friend of mine is a retired executive for IBM. He told me IBM has the next three generations of their computers already designed and ready to go. They were just waiting until they began losing market share. That is when they would introduce the new features and use advertising to get people to covet. They are planning discontent so they can sell us something new.

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man.
Proverbs 27:20 (ESV)

The Ten Commandments tell us it is a sin to covet our neighbor's stuff.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

The mall is coveting central. We go to the mall to hear nice music, eat nice food and walk by windows featuring stuff we don't need which we can buy with money we don't have. It is all coveting, creative discontent.

Not only was Ephesus a sexual city that featured the worship of the goddess Artemis but it was a rich city. Just like us, the Ephesians always wanted to keep up with their neighbors. Whatever their neighbors bought, they wanted to buy something of equal or greater value. They faced incredible pressure to spend. Like us, their economy was not need driven by need but by luxury.

Sexual immorality and covetousness are related. Sexual immorality is an insatiable craving to have sexual pleasures that aren't ours to enjoy. Coveting is an insatiable craving to have stuff God has not provided for us to enjoy. Either way we are discontent. We are coveting.

That is not the way Christians live.

My speech should be noticeably different than the culture around me.

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

Just like before, there are some things that shouldn't be in my speech and one thing that should.

What shouldn't be in my speech?

Filthiness — This means any kind of words that when exposed to others would make you blush. These verses are specifically talking about verbal filthiness. If you can't say it in church, you probably shouldn't be saying it any other time. This covers obscenity of all forms. The "S" word and the "F" word. It covers any language that is degrading or disgraceful. It covers putdowns. It covers nasty come backs. It covers gossip. It covers saying nasty things on Facebook, Twitter, text and email. It is any time we use our words to tear others down rather than build others up. It is all of it. It is all dirty language and words.

It also covers what I call Christian profanity. Christian profanity is substituting something that is not a swear word, but sounds like a swear word, and using it as profanity. That is saying "dang nabit", instead of "God damn it." It is saying "crap" instead of the "S" word. Willie does this on Duck Dynasty all the time. It is "Oh, my gosh" instead of "Oh, my God." It is "What the heck?" instead

of “What the hell?” Christian profanity may not be official profanity but it is close enough that in other people’s minds they don’t notice a clear difference.

The standard is our words should build others up. They shouldn’t tear others down or sound like words that are filthy.

Foolish Talk — This is talking about dumb stuff that doesn’t matter. This is young men in college having serious arguments over whose armpits smell worse. It is ladies talking on the phone over nothing important. This is a woman getting off the phone and having absolutely no idea what the conversation was about. This is burning time watching pointless television shows like daytime soap operas, reruns of Oprah or Montel. It is ladies wasting their time reading romance novels, which is simply pornography without pictures. The Greek word for foolish is *moron*. The Bible says don’t waste your time in senseless talk, babbling like a moron. That’s biblical. You learned your first word in biblical Greek. Moron.

Crude Joking — This is something that is said or done in an innocent way that is twisted into something that is obscene or suggestive. It is what I call bathroom humor. I thought of a bunch of examples but I won’t share them because I don’t want to corrupt your mind. It is easy to come up with bathroom humor. Comedy Central is full of it. Saturday Night Live, David Letterman and Jay Leno are full of it. The really good comics, like Ken Davis and Mark Lowrey, make you laugh without needing to use bathroom humor. The Bible is clear that double-entendre’s and sexual slip-ups are not the way we honor God with our speech.

What should be in my speech?

...but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

Thanksgiving — When Christ comes into our hearts, we see our sin. We understand how helpless we are over our sin. The Holy Spirit also opens our hearts to begin to grasp the height, the width and the depth of God's love for us through Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts to see our sin and the eyes of our hearts to God's love, there is one thing that will always come out of our mouths: thankfulness!

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

Thankfulness to God in all things at all times — that is evidence of the presence of God in our hearts.

What about in tough times? What about in sickness or financial loss or when we have bad days? Should we give thanks then?

...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)

What is God's will for us at all times? Give thanks. It's not to use filthy language, not to babble like a moron, not to use bathroom humor but to be filled with thanks because we are the most blessed beings in the entire universe and we don't deserve it.

When we are whining, when we are griping, when we are complaining, we need to remember who we are in Jesus. We need to know that griping and whining are out of God's will. We are to have hearts and mouths filled with

thankfulness. What do we do when we don't feel thankful? Countour blessings, beginning with Christ.

Amazingly, many times when we are thankful with our lips, God uses our own mouth to preach to our hearts and change our hearts.

Why should I take this seriously?

If I persist in sexual sin or greed, I will not inherit the kingdom of God.

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Ephesians 5:5 (ESV)

A life characterized by sexual immorality and impurity will not inherit the kingdom of God. This doesn't mean that we won't make mistakes in this area but we repent and we try to change.

Some of you will say, "I thought we were saved by grace, through faith and not by what I do?" That is true. We are saved by Christ as a gift. Evidence of having met Christ is progress in these areas. It is conviction in these areas. It is not perfection in these areas. If there is no concern to avoid sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness we should ask ourselves if we know Jesus in the first place.

Why does God take sexual sin and covetousness so seriously?

Both sexual sin and greed can be forms of idolatry. We can worship sex and money instead of God. We can worship our sex drive or someone's body. We can worship money and make it our source of security and identity.

This means those who persistent in unrepentant sexual sin, and know better, should not be confident they will inherit the kingdom of God. I am not trying to freak anybody out. I am just reading the verse. It is a strong warning.

I like to think of this from the positive direction. Since I have Christ in my heart, I can be confident I will have progress in my struggles with covetousness and my sexual sins. Since Jesus is in my heart, I know there will be measures of success and victory.

The same is true with our money.

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

If I persist in sexual sin or greed, God may discipline me NOW.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 5:6 (ESV)

Most people will tell us our lifestyles don't matter. We can dabble in sin. Holiness is not important. God is like the big Stay Puft Marshmallow Man in the sky. He is harmless. There doesn't need to be much of a difference between Christians and the world. Don't be deceived. The last warning dealt with eternal punishment of those who claim Christ but chose not to be different from the culture around them with sex and money. This warning was meant to remind the people of a passage in the Old Testament like Numbers 25.

As ancient Israel came out of Egypt, the Israelites passed through the land of Moab. Balak, the Moabite king, knew he couldn't beat the Israelites because God always fought for them. His plan was to get God to fight against them. How could he get God to fight against his own people? In Numbers 25, we find he

sent the Moabite women into the Israelite camp and told them to flirt with the Israelite men and seduce them. Balak's plan worked. As God's men, they were to be different from the nations around them. They were to be sexually pure. Because the men started fornicating with the seductive Moabite ladies in miniskirts, God's anger broke out against them with a plague and 24,000 people died before God restrained his hand. Every leader who sinned with a Moabite woman was put to death and their bodies hung in broad daylight for everyone to see.

The point was, "Don't be deceived. God takes the sexual purity of his people seriously."

Conclusion

As God's children, we were chosen to be holy. We were chosen to be different. We were chosen to be sexually pure. We were chosen to be a people who don't just live for stuff. We were chosen to worship God, not sex and money.

When we return from Easter, we will find out God takes the pure lives of Christians and uses our purity as a way to reach the world around us for Christ without saying a word.



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