
Christian Purity

Ephesians 5:1-17⁸

Pastor Michael Engle

Introduction

Blue and pink sidewalks. You heard me right. Blue and pink sidewalks. Some of you who have been Christians a long time or have been associated with certain religious institutions, and ways of thinking, will know what I'm talking about. You see that word up there? The word is purity and in some circles the answer to purity, or how to make sure someone remains pure, especially young people with so little self control, is blue and pink sidewalks. Some of you are still confused. The concept goes like this, the girls can walk on the pink sidewalks and the boys can walk on the blue sidewalks. Therein never having to pass within reach of one another and never having the temptation to be impure. How many of you think that works?

If you watch much of the news today or travel in middle eastern countries mostly under Muslim control you would, especially if you are a woman, notice that much, if not all, of a woman's body must be covered so as to alleviate the men in those countries from impure thoughts. With the added effect of transferring responsibility for purity to the women. Convenient, huh. How many of you think that works?

Purity in our day is a tough subject. In the public square purity has been tossed to the wayside and if you don't believe me, you are likely blind. Women are mere objects to be viewed, used, abused and set aside for a better version. Just watch sporting events. What are the women therefore? If it's not a sport where the women are the players they are likely just convenient distractions for the men. Ladies, don't think your off the hook. Purity for you is just as bad, though often it puts on a better face. Think soap opera's, romance novels and lately worse if the New York Times best seller list and Amazon are any indication. Young people, perhaps you thought you had escaped the battle for purity, but you and I know better, don't we. You and I know what goes on in dating relationships even if your parents are clearly in the dark. I like to put it this way for the adults. Would any of you be okay with me, Pastor Michael, spending the entire evening watching movies with the young pretty single Mom who has just joined Clearcreek...alone at her apartment. No, you say. Why? Don't you think I have enough self control to be in that situation. I'm a Pastor after all. You say, that's a recipe for disaster? Then why do you let your young adult with copious amounts of self control do the same thing?

Again, purity is a tough thing in our day and it seems the only people fighting for it reside in the church and often, sadly, they are no different from the outside world. But today I

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have good news for you, The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart". The battle may be difficult but we can turn who we are as believers in Christ into how we live!

Context

Look down at your Bibles. I'll start reading at verse one of chapter five.

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

We see in our first verse the setup for our main subject today. God tells us to be imitators of him since we are his children. We are to **walk in love**. How do we do that? He tells us, we are to love like Christ loved us. How so? We should love in a way that is giving ourselves up for one another. In doing so our giving up will smell sweet to God. We are to desire, to want, one another's good more than our own. We see here as we see all over the Bible that we are to love our neighbor as we already love ourselves.

Be imitators of God, love others sacrificially like your older brother Jesus did. In that you will please God. This call to the believer is set up in direct opposition to what comes next. Look at the first word of the next verse, verse three. BUT!

Text ...v3-5

"3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 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."

Results of impurity...v3-4

Here in verses three and the first part of four we see what impurity looks like as it takes shape in a life. These things are not what makes one impure, but they are the fruit of impurity in a life. Did you hear that? Think on that for a moment. The things Paul lays out for us here are not what makes someone impure they are the result of impurity. Sexual immorality, impurity or covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are the fruits, not causes of impurity. Often we look at people involved in these sins and we label them according to their fruits. It makes it a lot easier for us to point the finger of accusation at someone else. We look out around us at a world that is feasting on impurity and say, look at the homosexuals, thank God I'm not like them. Look at that person, he's an adulterer, she's a fornicator, he's a pedophile. That music is filthy, that talk show is full of foolish talk. That movie is full of crude humor. We so easily excuse ourselves from the table of iniquity without realizing we have feasted on the same meal as other only to shove our accusing fingers down our throat in a vain attempt to purge what we have gorged ourselves on so that the outside world is kept in the dark. Ha, ha look at me world, no bad fruit here! Well God is not kept in the dark. You may be adept at hiding the evidence of your impurity from those around you, but it will work itself out in the fruit of your life. God will not al-

low it to go undealt with if you are his. Now you may sit here today and be relieved that no one has found you out, but I'm telling you that you should be terrified if that's the case. One of two things is happening in your life, either you are about to be found out because God is at work and would never hate you so much that he would leave you in your sin, or, worse yet, you are like the people in these first verse, unbelievers, and he's not after you at all. That should be the terrifying part. God may have left you to yourself, proving that you are not his after all and he is not interested in your good. You will glorify him, yes, but only in your judgment and payment for your sin in Hell for all of eternity.

You see we want so badly not to look like the things we label impure in this world. We spray some spiritual incantation on the tree to kill any visible fruit, but those incantations do little if anything to kill the root of tree. The root thrives while we look good on the outside.

Sexual immorality, impurity or covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are the fruits of a tree that has far deeper roots.

It's cause...v4b

These roots have been hinted at in verse three and in the second part of verse four it is laid bare for all the world to see. God's word says this, "but instead let there be thanksgiving". What? You stop at this and say, "Huh? Thanksgiving?". Yeah, thanksgiving. Now I know some of you are new to the Chapel and the way we speak about things can take some getting used to, but surely you have heard lots of talk about the heart. The heart, the seat of all that you are. The essence of you is your heart and this verse gets right to the heart of why we, and them, struggle with impurity. We are an unthankful people. We want what God has not given us and we pursue it with a zeal that should be reserved the things of Heaven, not earth.

Let's be really practical in our thinking here. Why do people commit adultery? They are not thankful for what God has given them in there spouse. They covet another. Why do our young adults and singles commit fornication? They want what is not theirs. Why does the married woman watch steamy soap opera's or read semi to full on raunchy novels? Because they hold something out to her that she does not have. She covets some other kind of relationship. Why do men, and women, indulge in pornography? Because they are not thankful for whatever relationship, or not, God has given them.

God has a word for these kinds of people. People who are not thankful for what God has given look to something other than Himself to fulfill their desires. We'll see what that is in verse five as we look at the consequences of impurity.

It's consequence...v5

God's word says this, "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." Did you hear it? The root cause of impurity is unthankfulness, and in that you long for something other than God. You have, and I don't say this for effect, but as a fact, taken God off the throne and replaced him with whatever it is that your are running

after. Is it pleasure, comfort, ease, romance, companionship? Whatever it is that you are not thanking God for in your life, but seeking out in someone or something else has been labeled by God idolatry. Knowing that, it's no big surprise then that we see idolaters not inheriting the kingdom. God is not interested in your leftovers. Remember the first and greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind and strength, right!? You can't do that when you have taken him off the throne and put your true desires atop the pedestal that only he can sit on. You fool. Your silly god will never suffice in the day of trouble, it will come back to ruin you with it's false promise of long lasting joy and happiness and you will long for the day when it's grip is released. Make that day today, repent of your sin and come to Christ. Thank God for his sacrifice on the cross and empty tomb. Bow in reference with your entire being and give your life to him for his service.

It's idolatry. The root of all impurity is idolatry.

Purity...v6-10

Well, Paul doesn't stop with condemning the idolaters. He goes on to tell us who we were and who we are in verses 6-10. God's word says this...

Who you were...v6-8a

"6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness,"

First of all, don't be deceived with empty words. Don't let them fool you into thinking these things are okay. We hear it all the time don't we. It's everywhere and the message is this, it doesn't matter what you put before your eyes, it doesn't matter what you do with your body, it doesn't matter what kind of friends you have or how you talk and joke with them as long as it's good for you. Right?! This is the message all over the place. Why would you disagree with what happens between consenting adults. You have no right to judge. These are empty words. They are not filled with truth. Don't let there clever arguments that sound so good in our day and age deceive you for **because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience**. Believing these things is what puts people under the wrath of God. You are not, so don't do it. Is the essential message. Have we heard it put that way before church?

And by the way, since they are sons of disobedience, don't partner up with them for though you were once like them....

Who you are...v8b-10

but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

Paul has just answered our question as to how you are made pure. Being made "light in the Lord" is what makes you pure. What happens when God "deliver[s] [you] from the domain of darkness and transfer[s] [you] to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"? These verses tell us...

1. Your identity changes. You are no longer in the darkness he tells us and since you are now light you must "walk as children of light". You are a child of light.
2. Notices your fruit has changed. No longer are you a tree with bad fruit hanging from it, but a good tree with fruit that is good and right and true.
3. And most importantly your root desires have changed. You are now, verse ten, trying to discern what? What is pleasing to the Lord! You have gone from being unthankful for what the Lord has given you and falling into idolatry to being a child of light who is now actively running after what is pleasing to the Lord. This here is the answer to the question many have asked about how do you get away from impurity. You are changed at the heart level by God and your desire for it becomes less. You saturate yourself in the word and your mind runs after God where it used to run after the things of this world. Because your basic desires have changed.

Paul moves on to show us what our new life in light will look like in verses eleven through fourteen. This is what God's word says...

The Effects of Purity...v11-14

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

Expose sin...v11

Look what it says my dear brothers and sisters. He told us earlier that these things should not even be named amongst us. Now he says take no part in them, but instead expose them. Whatever your particular purity issue is...expose it! Sin hates to be made known. We are secret keepers. Why, because we are ashamed of our sin and we should be. If you are a child of light your first step of action in purity is to expose your sin. Tell others. This might be difficult, but it is incredibly important. If you are still hiding the things you do in the darkness, are you really a child of the light? Scripture is clear that we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we believe and serve God when we really don't. If you are continuing to hide and deceive others so you can enjoy your sin....you need some serious heart inspection.

Don't Speak of it...v12

Paul goes farther in verse twelve, as children of light you should not even be talking about the things they do in secret. This is incredibly difficult in our day when the things they "do in secret" are plastered all over the news, advertisements, and almost any form of media you can imagine, but the point still stands that we should not be condoning

these things by speaking about them casually as if they are just part of life. We are not to joke about and speak flippantly about these things. That kind of speech just lends itself to what verse four warned us about; foolish talk and crude joking. Let's have no part of it.

Imagine for just a moment you are someone who struggles with homosexuality and somehow by the grace of God you walk into a church where people call what you consider your most important relationships sin and yet they joke about and make light of the very thing they are telling you to take so seriously. Would you come back to that church? Or would you consider them the kind of people who talk out of both sides of their mouths. Would you think they loved you and wanted what was best in for you, or they just liked using you as a punchline for their jokes. How horrible of God's people. How different the conversation might be with the homosexual community if we actually loved them like Christ loved us.

Side note: When we do have to have conversations about these sorts of topics we need be sure we use the wording that God gave us. We have a way of making sin seem more palatable with our words. People do not have "affairs". They commit adultery. Young people don't "hook up". They commit fornication. People don't sleep together, now do they. If all they were doing was sleeping we would have nothing to say, other than goodnight. Right. So please, don't remove some of the seriousness of sin by calling it something God does not.

If all of that seems to difficult I want you to focus your heart on verses thirteen and fourteen. There is great hope for the impure. For when impurity is exposed to the light it becomes visible. When Christ shines on the dead they are given life. The sexually immoral, the impure or covetous, the filthy, the foolish talkers and the crude jokers all have hope in a God that sheds light on darkness and turns it in to light itself. Don't be afraid in a world that threatens punishment for speaking the truth about sin because it's worth the suffering to see the sleeper awake and arise from the dead. Be gentle, be compassionate, be patient and never stop speaking the truth into lives that have been destroyed by impurity. Never stop. You may be just who God wants to use.

A Warning...v15-17

Lastly, we have a warning to all of us here. Look at verses fifteen through seventeen with me. This is what God's word says...

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

What a needed admonition in our day of foolishness; to be careful how we walk. To walk in wisdom and make good use of our time. No, I don't think blue and pink sidewalks are the answer. But perhaps there are things that in wisdom you need to get rid of. Perhaps what we call necessities are not so, and should be set aside for the good of our souls and those of our family. Perhaps we need to swim harder up stream against a culture that has

no guardrails for our children and young adults. No not perhaps. We do need to do these things.

And verse seventeen shows us just how to do so. By not living careless lives of foolishness but by understanding what the will of the Lord is. God has given us his word that we might know him. He has given you godly leaders to go to. He has given you friends that would love to help guide you on your way. Read, pray, fellowship and the Spirit will show you the will of God.

Reflect and Respond

And with that we come to the end of another imperative from Ephesians. Be pure. If you sit here today and know nothing of this Christ from whom's word we have read, please, please, please, don't walk away thinking, "Yeah, another bunch of judgemental Jesus followers". The warning is strong yes, but it is a warning that applied to all of us at one time. That warning was to flee impurity and be made pure. None of us had the power to cleanse ourselves, but Jesus, God in the flesh was there to make us clean in spite of our best efforts. We stand, not over you, but next to our God and Savior Jesus ready for you to come and be made pure through His righteousness.

For my fellow believers...if you listen to this and are reminded of the past and impurity that was once yours...stop. Remember it no more, you have been made a child of light. Walk in it. Enjoy the righteousness that has been given to you and love God for how good he has been to you. He has as David said, washed you whiter than snow.

