

## Straight Talk in a World of Fornicators – Ephesians 5:3-7

**Introduction** – We live in a world saturated with sexual immorality. But reading through the New Testament (as well as any honest study of the ancient Greek and Roman world) reveals that there is no perversion present today that was not an issue, front and center, for the Christians in Paul's day. If you look at a statue of Artemis, the fertility goddess of Ephesus, you will be embarrassed as you try to explain to your children what is on her body. Homosexuality, prostitution, extra-marital sex, pornography (in the media of its day), and other sins which should not even be named (v3) were just as much issues for them as they are for us. Sexual immorality, or fornication, is any sexual activity in the absence of a marriage covenant (defn: Wilson, "Fidelity"). Paul addresses this temptation as well as greed in these next verses.

**Staying Away from it All** (vv3-4) – *"The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above"* (Prov 4:14). It is not enough to avoid obvious forms of fornication – for two reasons. First, even entertaining ourselves with watching, listening to, reading, talking about, joking about, listening to others joke about, such uncleanness is an affront to God, and you are His temple (1 Cor 6:19 is not about eating foods with GMOs; it is about sexual immoralities). But second, such activities and conversations cause people to drift farther and farther into sexual sins, rationalizing more and more as they go. Especially with sexual sins, one starts with thinking about it, making light of it, excusing it, and finally falling for it.

**Nor Covetousness** – Along with these sexual sins, Paul notes the sin of the tenth commandment. Lust and greed are not an unlikely duo. Both are stirred with the deceitful lies that God has not provided enough, that He is withholding from us and that we should go and take for ourselves to satisfy our desires. They are the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and together with the pride of life, they constitute the triad of temptation that brought our race into corruption (1 John 2:15-16, Gen 3:6).

**Standard Issue Sins Which Must Be Killed** (Col 3:5) – There is a parallel verse in Colossians because all cities, all people, battle these sins. In that passage, we are commanded to mortify, put to death, these members. It is important to note that Paul is not warning Christians that we must restrain sexual desires because they might become tainted. Even as Christians, we will confront desires coming from within ourselves which are attractive to us, partially because they are prohibited by God. If we live by the Spirit, it is not that we won't have those desires; it is that we are enabled and commanded to mortify them (Rom 8:13).

**Thankfulness: The Means of Mortification** (v4) – Throughout this section, Paul has exhorted us to not do this, but that instead: not to lie, but to tell the truth (v25), not to steal but to work (v28), not to be bitter but rather kind (vv31-32) and so forth. Here, we are to replace dirty jokes, crude entertainment, actual fornication, along with covetousness - - not with nice words, but with thankfulness and contentment. This is powerful and important.

**The Way We Fall** – Rom 1:18ff describes for us why the wrath of God has fallen upon mankind. To sum it up, "...they did not glorify God, nor were thankful..." – v21. We did not believe God was absolutely sovereign over all things, glorifying Him, and we did not believe He was absolutely good, thanking Him.

**The Way We Rise** - What is the will of God? *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1 Thess 5:16-18). Remember, we don't teach our children to wait until they feel thankful before they say "thank you." In addition, cultivating thankfulness is not at odds with bringing all of our requests, concerns and complaints before God (Phil 4:6-7).

**Cultivation of Contentment in Biblical Marriage** – For individuals and for society, the way out of sexual perversions (and all the horribly dishonorable things done to women and children in the name of sexual freedom) is not sexual asceticism. It is a healthy honor and contentment with the marriage bed (Heb 13:4-5). We are not called to be Victorian prudes. Quite the opposite, we are to cultivate and enjoy God-given desires in the context of a commitment to marital vows (Prov 5:15-20 and all of the Song of Solomon).

**Sober Warning** (vv5-6) – Do not be deceived with empty words (like *"it doesn't matter what you do, you prayed a prayer once..."*). Fornicators and the covetous will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. This is made clear in other passages (1 Cor 6:9-10, Rev 21:8). There really is a place of horrible wrath and judgment prepared for such. Two things to notice. First this is a real warning to a real church with professing Christians. It is possible to be in the church and not be regenerate. You have no assurance of your salvation if you are walking in these sins and not dealing with them. Second, many are saved from such sins and so it is possible for you to be saved from such sins. The answer is the grace of God to which we all must turn (Titus 2:11-14).