

Sermon Topic: The Christian's Way of Love and Purity, Rev Bernard Chao
Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:1-7

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

Introduction

- This sermon will not attempt to give specific examples of sexual immorality to tempt listeners further. Paul also makes no attempt in the passage to define or give examples of what sexual immorality can look like.
- Christian purity prioritises obeying God over obeying desires of the flesh.
- The sermon is based on the following assertions:
 - (1) Sex is good. Designed by God for procreation, it allows us to join God in creating life. It is also for the expression of intimacy between male and female in marriage that embodies the close union of our Triune God.
 - (2) While the passage is aimed at Christians (ref. v1 'deeply loved children') its teachings on love on purity are beneficial to non-Christians as well.
 - (3) As the Christian faith is a communal one, immorality not only affects the individual, but the Christian community that the individual is part of as well. Similarly, purity has a connection with our identity in a relational community.

a) The Connection between Purity and Community

- This passage in Eph 5 comes right after Paul's writings on Christian unity in Eph 4. Why did he see fit to address issues of immorality, impurity and greed at this point?
- This is because immorality, impurity and greed (v3) are **threats to relationships between believers**. They detract from God's way of loving others. As God's children, we are set apart from the world for Him, and our focus and priority must be on God. Indulging in immorality, impurity or greed **distracts us from God, and is idolatrous** (v5). Such practices create a false focus of worship away from God.

b) The Contest between the Self and Community

- Immorality, impurity and greed create an idol, which is the self. They usurp the Creator (God)'s place in our minds, hearts and actions with the created (ourselves). This is at odds with God's purpose for His people, the ones who are supposed to be set apart for Him.
- The action of loving requires community, and cannot be practiced in isolation. Our beliefs are not defined in isolation, but in relation to others in community (ref. commandment of loving our neighbours as ourselves). **We are guided by both divine instruction and communal concerns that go beyond our own personal preferences.**
- Impurity is thus both an offence to God and to the Christian community. It is considered improper (v3) because we are to follow in God's example (v1-2).
- God is rejected as the source of love when we choose immorality, impurity and greed over His commands. When God fails to be our priority and the self takes His place as the focus of our life, we fail to love others as well.

c) Redeeming a Relational Understanding of the Self

- We should not allow a single sin/desire/temptation/bad decision to define our whole identity.
- Similarly, we should not judge or define others in this way. We are also fellow sinners who have experienced God's grace and should put on a spirit of humility. Eph 4:32 says "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
- Paul makes a surprising suggestion in Eph 5:4 to give thanks. In contrasting thanksgiving with obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking, he writes that the speech of God's children should be characterized by thanksgiving in response to what Christ has done for us. An attitude of thankfulness is also a powerful weapon to combat temptations of immorality, impurity or greed.

d) Our Desires and Our Desire for God

- Christian purity is about desiring God more than desires we may have for people/things.
- V6 and v7 warn us of voices of this age that propagate seductive humanistic ideologies about the supremacy of individual human desires/beliefs. Anything else is intolerable and infringes "(my) human rights", which, in essence means "the human is right". To quote Karl Marx, "the only God of man is man himself".
- However, there is so much more to life! Creation alone bears testament to God's existence and power.
- The issue of immorality/impurity should not be framed around questions regarding sexual orientation/desire, but rather on my/the person's whole of life orientation is focused on. What or

who we base our whole of life orientation on will reveal whether God has true Lordship over us and whether we truly prioritize God over ourselves.

Discussion Questions

a) Is there any hint of anything that is impure - immoral, improper, or obscene - in my behaviour, decisions, actions, thought life, and/or speech?

b) How does seeing purity in connection with community change the way I think, feel, and act?