

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Ephesians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	11		Josh Walker
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THE SAINTS IN LIGHT AND THE SINFUL WORLD

Walking in the Light (5:3-5)

5:3: “The conjunction [at the start of this verse] simply functions to introduce a new set of moral exhortations. Paul begins with an appeal for the readers to eliminate sexual immorality from their lives. This is similar to the exhortation he gave to the new Gentile believers of Thessalonica when he calls them to abstain from sexual immorality as he explains to them what it means to be sanctified (1 Thess 4:3). The term has a long history of being translated ‘fornication,’ which was commonly used to refer to two unmarried people having consensual sex. The term clearly encompasses this, but should be understood in the broadest possible sense of any kind of sexual activity outside of a committed marriage relationship. This would include premarital sex, adultery (Matt 19:9), sex with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:12-20), homosexual liaisons (Rom 1:29), and incestuous relationships (1 Cor 5:1). Jesus spoke of ‘sexual immorality’ as one of the evils that flows from a corrupt heart (Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21).

“The second term in Paul’s list of things to avoid is ‘impurity,’ which was discussed at 4:19. Although under the old covenant it was used to refer to various kinds of ritual impurity, Jesus pointed to the deeper issue of the corruption in the heart of individuals, which renders them impure (Matt 12:34; Mark 7:20). There are a variety of thoughts and behaviors that constitute impurity under the new covenant, but sexual immorality is one of the most prominent. Paul explicitly links them in several contexts (Rom 1:24; 2 Cor 12:21; 1 Thess 4:7), and the connection may be implicit in Gal 5:19 and Col 3:5. The term was already used in contemporary Jewish texts for sexual impurity. Paul uses the adjective ‘every’ to emphasize every form of sexual impropriety.

“The final term, translated ‘greed,’ [or ‘covetousness’] is connected to the other two by the use of [the conjunction ‘or’]. This does not necessarily mean that it belongs to a different class of vices than the two just mentioned, since the [conjunction] can be used in a series of light objects (e.g., ‘a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal,’ 1 Cor 13:1). Paul spoke about the vice of greed earlier in his description of the lifestyle of the Gentiles. Here he warns against the residual and powerful impact of the ungodly desire to acquire more and more.”¹

5:3: “Paul is not being exhaustive with his list of sins in v. 3 but illustrative of deep-rooted sins that characterize any group of people in the fallen world. Yet the ‘saints’ are not to be just any group of people, for they were chosen out of the world ‘to be holy and blameless’ (1:4; 5:27).”²

5:4: “The warning of v. 3 about avoiding sexual sins is here continued in the triad of terms that refer to sinful speech: *obscenity*, *foolish talk*, and *coarse joking* about sex are to be avoided as entirely inappropriate among those who are saints. Over against these and the preceding vices of v. 3, however stands thanksgiving, the fundamental Christian response of gratitude, expressed by those who have experienced God’s grace in Christ (cf. 1:3-14).”³

5:5: “Paul claims that those whose lives are characterized by the vices will not have a share in the kingdom. Paul has already made it clear, however, that believers will have an inheritance with God because they have been sealed by the Spirit (1:13)... Paul wants them to be assured that they are heirs of the eternal kingdom. Because of that, they should now live like Kingdom people and serve their loving and merciful God with a heart full of gratitude.”⁴

Shining the Light (5:6 and 5:11b–14)

5:6: “Because the eschatological kingdom is inaugurated but not consummated, God’s people must alertly live in a time when false teachings attempt to undermine the truth, even biblical teachings that are well known and clear (i.e., ‘you know this full well,’ v. 5a; cf. 4:14). Christians are at war over truths such as these (6:10–13) and need to keep watch lest they be led astray (e.g., Matt 24:4–5, 11, 24) or taken captive (Col 2:8; cf. 1 Cor 3:18; Gal 6:7; 1 John 3:7).”⁵

5:11: “[Paul] utterly repudiates these sexual sins, but desires to convey their seriousness without mentioning the details of the depravity.”⁶

Being People of the Light (5:7–11a)

5:7: “Paul does not specify the degree to which he wants believers to dissociate themselves from the ungodly. He clearly does not mean that they should have no contact with sinful, unbelieving people (1 Cor 5:9–10). His principle concern is that believers do not participate with them in their immoral activities.”⁷

5:9: “The three characteristics which briefly depict what the new life is like remind the reader of points already conveyed, especially in 4:20–5:2. The first, rendered ‘goodness,’ has a range of meanings as wide as its cognate adjective ‘good,’ though it can have the nuance of ‘generosity,’ as in the Old Testament, where it sometimes refers to the Lord’s goodness. According to Ephesians, God has created his people in Christ Jesus for the purpose of *good* works (2:10). Similarly, Paul prays that the Colossians may ‘bear fruit in every *good* work’ (Col. 1:10). The ‘new person’ of Ephesians has been created to display those ethical qualities that belong to God himself, such as *righteousness* and *holiness*, which have their origin in his *truth* (4:24). As a result, the new person speaks the *truth* in love (4:15, 25), since he or she has found the *truth* in Jesus (4:21).”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹Arnold, Clint E., *Ephesians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2010), 319.

²Baugh, S. M., *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Lexham Press, 2016), 420.

³O’Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1999), 360.

⁴Arnold, *Ephesians*, 325.

⁵Baugh, *Ephesians*, 426.

⁶O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 372.

⁷Arnold, *Ephesians*, 327.

⁸O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 368.