Ephesians 5:3-20

This is a real letter, written to real people, in a real church who were confused, scared and fighting the same battles we fight today. They needed someone to tell them plainly who they were and what was expected of them as new believers. Paul was the one for the job!!

Paul spent the beginning half of Ephesians defining what our identity is in Christ and the righteous lifestyle that follows. God saved believers by grace and brought Jews and Gentiles into one community. The second half (chapters 4-6) shifts from deep theology to daily practice. It focuses on how to put the doctrine of chapters 1-3 into practical application, living in this world as we seek to imitate Christ and walk in love, light and wisdom. Last week in Chapter 4 and the beginning two verses of Chapter 5, we learned the importance of unity, spiritual maturity and being imitators of Christ's love. Now, we move on to Chapter 5 vs. 3-20 which serves as a warning for the believers of the Church of Ephesus and the Church of New Life Dresher. So, let us begin.

Read Chapter 5 vs. 3-20

To understand what inspired Paul to write this letter to the believers in the Church of Ephesus, we must recognize that at the time of salvation, believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The good news was Jews and Gentiles alike were being brought into a new community or family and into a transformed way of life by this spirit. The problem was, even though they had made a decision for Christ, they were not maturing in their walk with Christ. **They were perfectly forgiven, but were not on the road to perfect sanctification.**

Paul is making it abundantly clear that if we have zero desire for a life that actually practices holiness, we have no basis to claim that we have been declared holy in the first place. And it was all because the believers were not tapping into the power that was within them, therefore, they were not making a conscious decision to follow the example Christ set before them. What they needed to learn was how to surrender to the Holy Spirit who would align their thoughts, actions and desires with those of Christ, ultimately pleasing God. It was about inviting the Spirit to direct their lives from within, replacing self-reliance with His strength to produce spiritual growth. Their lives needed to reflect the change God made in them when they became believers in Christ.

Chapter 5, written approximately 62 AD, was targeted at the believers in the Church of Ephesus. Ephesus was a major port city dominated by the Temple of Artemis where fertility worship and associated orgies were deeply tied to the local culture. The believers were swayed by the pagan cultural influences. They were also surrounded by Greco-Roman culture which normalized sexual immorality and self-serving relationships. Greed, lust and unclean speech as we read in verses 3 and 4 characterized their behavior. Ladies, doesn't that sound like today! Consequently, Paul wrote to warn them that their behavior was not matching their new identity in Christ. He exhorted them to give up these evil practices and replace them with a heart of gratitude. And, they were told that if they did not, they would not be a part of the Kingdom of God. Their lifestyle had to change. They had to separate themselves from those who would deceive them into believing what they were doing was acceptable. God's wrath was awaiting them otherwise.

From the study of Ephesians by Scotty Smith published by Serge, we read Holiness is an issue of the affections and direction of the heart. Paul drives home this point by taking on two primary expressions of sin's devastating

effect on our hearts: sexual immorality and covetousness otherwise known as greed. Sexual Immorality and Greed are so destructive because they cause our lives to lie about the savior who made us; thus, stealing our calling to love God with everything we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Paul calls greed "Idolatry" or broken worship. Our Generous God made us for a life of contentment, generosity and thanksgiving. But greed robs us of these positive, Godly character qualities. Likewise, God made us to steward our sexual longings so that sex becomes a symbol of the intimacy, joy and fellowship of a husband and wife. When we follow the passions of our lust, using sex for self-pleasure, control and harm, we are mocking the one who gave us this wonderful gift. In short, these qualities are not who we are as a child of God.

If we can be honest, how many of you read these opening verses and couldn't imagine how this could possibly apply to you. When first given this assignment, I spoke with my neighbor and fellow sister from NLD, Karen Schoch. I remember saying to her these are not my sins, until Karen asked me if I had ever read a romance novel and fantasized that I was the main character, or watched a movie that made me squirm? GUILTY. Relentless in her effort to help me, she continued asking had I ever wanted more of something, more money, more clothes, a bigger house, a nicer car? GUILTY. Finally, had I ever participated in laughter of a dirty joke, let a bad word slip or gossip? GUILTY. Clearly the Ephesians believers fell into the same trap and quite honestly, I am no better than them. The truth is you can love Christ with all your heart and still be in habitual sin. Immorality, Greed, obscenity and lust represent what our flesh desires. God wants to renew our mind in such a way that illuminates these things in our life and makes us realize there is no place for them in our righteous walk with Him. The good news is there is forgiveness of our sins that leads to a Holy life, the best life we can live. God loves us so much that He sent His son to die for us. He knew without

the power of the Holy Spirit, we could not overcome the power of the evil one.

A verse that has become a favorite of mine was shared with me when I was tempted to go down the negative road of life. It was Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, and sisters, whatever is true whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things." God used His people and His word to redirect my path. And at this point in the church of Ephesus, God is using Paul to first highlight their sin, and then to show them how to live a life that brings honor and glory to Him. In their defense, they were faced with **active spiritual warfare** and **the schemes of the devil** that were trying to combat their new identity. But God provided a way out. Paul clearly instructed them not to be deceived by their empty words or partner with those who were idolaters. But, rather by being thankful, there was a way out. How does this work? Thanksgiving fosters a heart of gratitude which defeats the devil when we exhibit contentment and trust in God. Being thankful stops the desire for more things. It helps us see the good in what we already have and it stops greed and envy right in its path.

Paul uses the term "Darkness" to describe the behaviors that are not in alignment with God's ways. It represents a lack of knowledge regarding God's will and spiritual truths. This is not the first time darkness is used in the Bible. In two books we have recently studied we see the following… from Exodus 10, God executed darkness in the 9th plague and, in John 23, darkness fell at the crucifixion of Christ.

In Ephesians 5: 8-14, there is a change of direction from what we should avoid, to what we should embody. Before the Ephesians accepted Christ, they were darkness, but now they represent the Light of the Lord. Notice, I didn't say they were "in" darkness" or "in" light, On the contrary, they were darkness and then they became light. As believers, we are the embodiment

of Christ. Our identity is in Him. And therefore, the light of Jesus brings forth Goodness, Righteousness and Truth. The truth is in the word of God. It is our plumbline, that which determines if we have the knowledge of God's word and live accordingly. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path." God uses the light of His word to bring activities of darkness into a visible state. It is through the instruction of the word of God that you and I can live a righteous life. John 8: 12 reads "Jesus said, I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So, ask yourself…. when unbelievers look at you, do they see a difference in you? Do they see the light of Jesus in you? Does your speech reflect pure and lovely words. Do your actions reflect your self-indulgence or that you care about others first? Is your identity wrapped up in that which is moral and good? Are you exercising wise living because you know God's word and His expectations. In First Thessalonians 4:3-8 it says "It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being, but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit."

I am going to give credit to John Stott as I approach this next section, verses 5-20. In this portion of Chapter 5, Stott is emphasizing four powerful Incentives to righteous living. Stott says the Bible gives us this doctrine of humanity which is concerned not only with obligation, but with motivation. As I proceed, ask yourself which of these four points motivates you to live a God honoring life. This will make a good discussion in your small group, so listen carefully.

The **first incentive is the certainty of judgment.** The truth is many people think they will get away with their immorality on earth. BUT, God sees everything!!! Lewis Schaffer was quoted as saying **secret sins on earth are open scandal in heaven**. God's kingdom is a righteous one and all unrighteousness will be excluded. There is hope, however. Stott highlights for believers who fall into such sins through weakness, but afterwards repent in shame and humility, there is forgiveness. On the other hand, for the unbeliever, the only option is God's wrath.

In the days of Paul, Gnostics were defending the point of view that bodily sins could be committed without damage to the soul and with no danger of punishment. That is a perfect example of why Paul was warning the believers of Ephesus. They were not to listen to deceivers, otherwise, they too would share in their doom. The Apostle Paul was warning them they could lose their inheritance in Heaven. It is important that I stop at this point and clarify what Paul is saying. If you are truly saved, you will not lose your salvation. But, the **assurance of our salvation is not an excuse or permission to be disobedient.** Stott clarifies that those whose lust has become an greedy obsession will have no share in the perfect kingdom of God as they are demonstrating that they are idolaters rather than true worshippers of God. **So, let me ask the question….would the judgment of eternal life in Hell motivate you?**

The **second incentive is the fruit of the light**. The radical transformation made at the acceptance of Christ as our Savior leads to our identifying with God's light. Verse 9 says the fruit of the light is goodness, righteousness and truth. And, the light will expose the fruitless deeds that are done in darkness. In vs. 14 it says Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Stott explains our former condition in Adam is vividly described in terms of sleep, death and darkness from all of which Christ rescues us. Conversion is nothing less than a waking out of sleep, rising from

death and being brought out of darkness into the light of Christ. **Would radiating the fruit of the light motivate you?**

The **third incentive is the nature of wisdom**. In verses 15-16, Paul exhorts us to use our time wisely because the days are evil. Paul points out the surrounding culture is hostile to God and full of temptation. Being alert helps believers avoid falling into foolish or harmful habits. He also says wise people understand the will of God. My favorite prayer is the same one Christ gave as an example …Not my will but yours be done, AND, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We do not always know what is best for us. We will not know God's will unless we are steeped in the word. General principles in scripture guide us. It is the more detailed decisions that are discovered by prayer and seeking the wisdom of mature believers. **Would being filled with God's wisdom motivate you?**

The **fourth and final incentive to living a righteous life is the fullness of the Holy Spirit.** I want you to pay special attention to this as I believe it is the most practical application of this whole lesson. When we first accept Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our heart. From that day forward, we tap into that power source of God by being filled with the spirit daily. So, we are clear, we have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That is step One. Next, we are to be daily filled with the Holy Spirit. Let me show you what this looks like with an analogy credited to Corrie Ten Boom. I have placed a glove on your seat to help you visualize the filling of the HOLY SPIRIT. The glove represents us and without our hand inside it, it can do nothing. The glove is limp, useless… just like us. Now, place your hand inside, and then discover what you can now do…... pick up a pencil, play the piano, plant a garden or cook a meal. Your hand represents the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. It is the Holy Spirit in us that does the work, giving us the strength, skill and ability to serve. This is an intentional act every day to be filled with the HS. Being filled with the HS requires you to daily surrender

your mind, heart and actions to His power. When we do, we cautiously consider our actions and yield ourselves to the Spirit's power allowing Him to guide, influence and govern our behavior. We carefully align our daily choices and decisions with the wisdom and truth Scripture teaches. Sin and rebellion against God will hinder us from being filled with the Holy Spirit. When we give in to sinful temptations and worldly desires, we lose control and do what we know is wrong. We grieve the Holy Spirit because he is not allowed to reveal Himself in our lives and give us the fruits of the spirit.

Paul compares and contrasts being filled with the spirit to being drunk with wine. Both influence behavior, but excessive alcohol leads to chaos, and being filled with the spirit leads to worship, unity and joy. John Stott substantiates this concept by saying people who are drunk give way to evil, immoral and uncontrollable actions. On the other hand, the results of being filled with the holy spirit are good choices and living a life that imitates Christ. **So, I ask, would being filled with the Holy Spirit motivate you?**

Finally, moving on to verses 19 and 20, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and songs from the spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have spent my life in music and more importantly, playing his praises on the piano. And, I am often reminded how grateful I am to have been given the gift of music as my means of lifting my praise to Him. I had an awesome experience on the OC boardwalk this summer which God no doubt gave me for this lesson tonight/today. Every summer, I, along with eleven other musicians put on a 3-hour concert in front of Manco and Manco at 9th Street and the Boardwalk. With the beautiful Atlantic Ocean as our backdrop and a ton of people on vacation passing in front of us, we shared our talents. This year, a few weeks before the concert, I played at the OC Tabernacle, and the worship team that week consisted of three of the 6

singers who would be singing on the boardwalk. Because we were all practiced, I decided to include the four praise songs from the church service in our boardwalk program. In all the majesty of God's creation behind us and above us, we lifted our voices to God in front of a huge crowd. Hands were raised, bodies were swaying, voices were singing praises along with us to our great God. Totally unexpected, but obviously what this crowd wanted, we had a beautiful opportunity of transforming this vacation wonderland to a praise and worship event. In verse 16, Paul encouraged us to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. I think Paul would agree this was exactly what was happening!!! These believers on the boardwalk were tapping into the power source of the Holy Spirit. Their light was shining for Jesus, and, they became a testimony of their faith to unsaved listeners. The abundant joy we experienced leading this event was beyond awesome. What a privilege it was to be used for His glory!

So, as we conclude, let's look at a few actionable steps to help you walk as Children of Light, and live a righteous life**. First,** use daily discernment in what you do. **Bring glory to God by being tapped into the Holy Spirit. Second,** set boundaries. Avoid social settings or digital space that lead you into temptation. **Be filled with the Holy Spirit and you will have the power to do so**. **Third**, Treat your time as a finite valuable resource. Prioritize activities that build your faith and serve others over aimless habits…**This can be accomplished by asking the HS to fill you**. **Fourth**, instead of seeking temporary escapes, such as alcohol, immerse yourself in the word, listen to uplifting music, serve others. Plan with intention with what matters most: spiritual growth, family, community, rest and thankfulness. **Tap into the power source God has given and be filled with gratitude. Finally**, don't miss out on the ingredient of daily worship. Listen to Christian music in your car, on your walks and join your fellow brothers and sisters in worship on Sundays. Let your light shine. The devil hates everything I have just said. He

can't combat a joyful, grateful attitude, one completely sold out to the Lord. Dispel the darkness in your life and let someone find you so attractive that they can't help but ask what is the reason for your joy!! As Peter said so perfectly in 1 Peter 2:12, "Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God to the day he visits us."

Paul Tripp said in his devotional "Every Day Gospel" that we will never receive a gift sweeter than the gift of God's spirit. It seeks to empower you to do what God has commanded you to do. Tripp continues by saying you **would not** know the Lord, you **would not** have had the power to believe, and you **would not** be following him by faith if it were not for this precious gift of the Holy Spirit. Let's celebrate this gift today.

Before we close, let's do what Paul is exhorting us to do. As we approach next week's celebration of Thanksgiving, let's "Sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Thank-you to Joy/Joyce for leading us tonight/today in the very song we sang on the boardwalk this summer, ***Holy Forever***.