

At the close of the previous chapter, we saw the warnings regarding the activities of the old nature. Paul is pointing out the behavior of the old self so that we don't justify ungodly action. Some were continuing their previous habit of theft instead of working. (2Thessalonians 3:10) Paul responded by telling them they should work with their hands to provide for those in need. (4:28) That is true godliness. Some were justifying anger and so Paul told them to let go of it before the day is over and to never let it turn into rage or malice. (4:31) Others were justifying slander, something all too common today, and so Paul gave them guidelines for speech. It should be gracious, helpful, and build others up. (4:29)

He continues the examples of contrasting old life and new life in our passage today. In between the last chapter's list and this list, we had the two verses that begin the chapter and are a summary of how we are to live. We are to live in imitation of God, a life of love, as demonstrated by the life of Christ who gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (5:1-2) Our lives are to be an offering to God, a living sacrifice. (Romans 12:1)

People sometimes say, "Christianity isn't like the Old Testament list of dos and don'ts." In some ways that is true. It is relationship with God. The relationship does result in a changed life! We can tell if we are living in that relationship by some of the dos and don'ts that the Apostle lists here. (4:22-24) We can discern if we are justifying our old nature by the clear definitions in his list. It's a checklist with which we can gauge our maturity in Christ.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Ephesians 5:3 (ESV) Not only are these not to be a part of your life, but you should not even be speaking of these things. The Greek world had as many sexual temptations as our world today. False religions practiced immorality as a part of their worship. You could say that the Greeks worshiped the flesh. I suppose you could say that modern culture does as well. But it isn't proper for us to even talk about their deeds. I suppose you have noticed that part of the secularization of our society includes this idea that promiscuity is just natural. They tell us, "Get over it. The antiquated idea that sex should be confined to marriage only puts guilt in people's minds and that does more damage by far than casual sex."

This is a case of ideology trumping reality. I'm amazed that our culture has fallen for it with all the evidence to the contrary. You don't have to go any further than our Young Life leader to ask how this mindset is damaging the psyche of young girls and dominating the minds of young men with lust, while teaching them to look on women

Commented [notes1]: 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)

²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Commented [notes3]: Ephesians 4:31 (ESV)

³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Commented [notes4]: Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Commented [notes5]: Ephesians 5:1-2 (ESV)

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Commented [notes6]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Commented [notes7]: Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)

²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,
²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

as an object merely for personal gratification. It's an idea that exploded in the 1960s. It is destroying our culture because it is destroying our families and handicapping those who would even try to make marriage work. It has been the ruin of some of the world's greatest societies, and we are following the same path. Paul tells us it is improper for God's people. If you are drowning in the flood of our culture's sexual addiction, get help. It will ruin your life. (Psalm 16:4) The world is teaching that you won't be healthy unless you indulge yourself. The Bible teaches what matches with reality. You won't be healthy unless you are freed from the bondage of sexual immorality. (1Corinthians 6:18)

Sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed in the confines of marriage. (Hebrews 13:4) Statistics have confirmed that those in a monogamous relationship with a partner of the opposite sex are much more content with their sexual life than those who are promiscuous. That is just the opposite of what the world is selling, but when were facts ever important to Satan in his zeal to destroy mankind? (John 10:10) We have to convey to those whose minds are open that God's instructions are for our good and result in a more joyful life. (Deuteronomy 10:13)

Paul used two terms for immorality in this verse, *porneia* and *akatharsia*. The first word was used to describe adultery, but includes fornication outside of marriage. The second is the word, uncleanness. In our vernacular we would say, "dirty", meaning spiritually corrupt in sexual way. But then he added a word that seems unrelated, "covetousness". NIV uses the word "greed". There can be a connection, for immorality is often related to the greed of pleasing oneself at others' expense.

Greed goes much further than just the sexual realm. One could say that greed is at the root of the world's problems. If it were not for greed, most wars would never take place. Nations would share with those who were less fortunate. The corporate scandals that lost so many their life savings would never have happened. Greed is all about self regardless of the consequences wrought on others' lives. (Proverbs 29:5) The Great Commands oppose greed. You can't love God with your all and your neighbor as yourself and still have room for greed. Greed, then, is the opposite of the Great Commands. (Mark 12:33)

Greed is also a home wrecker. If money and sex are the two great issues that divide couples, the root of both those issues are greed. We don't like to admit it, but in the vast majority of cases it is simply a matter of greed. "I want what I want."

⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (ESV) Paul continues with an explanation of what he means by not even allowing it to me named among us. I guess some things never change because the heart of man has not changed. Crude joking is out of place for the believer. We are supposed to be sharing the words of life, not

Commented [notes8]: Psalm 16:4 (ESV)

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Commented [notes10]: Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Commented [notes11]: John 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Commented [notes12]: Deuteronomy 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Commented [notes13]: Proverbs 29:5 (ESV)

⁵ A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

Commented [notes14]: Mark 12:33 (NIV)

³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

playing into this fallen world's emphasis on perverting the good things of God. We are supposed to speaking of the glory of God and His goodness in our life, not filthy imagery or foolishness. These are out of place because we are in Christ. If you can't imagine Jesus saying it, then you have no business saying it. Instead, our mouths should be filled with thanksgiving. (5:20)

Commented [notes15]: Ephesians 5:20 (ESV)
²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Have you ever noticed when someone starts talking about how bad things are, whether its politics or finances or physical ailments, the conversation only gets worse? The old nature loves the negative. It is eager to one up the other person on how bad things really are. If you tell me about how evil your neighbor is, I can tell you about someone in my life that was even more inconsiderate, and the conversation spirals downward. Instead, speak thanksgiving for the goodness of God in your life.

I was amazed at how upbeat Connie was when I talked with him. He wasn't talking about the pain, or how hard it was those first days, but rather how much better he was each day. Even when he talked about having a kidney removed in the near future, it wasn't about the woes of a second operation but praise to God that they saw the need to remove it during the first operation.

When I would go to have lunch with Norma, I would always come away more encouraged than when I came. She always had a song to sing and some word of encouragement. (1Thessalonians 5:11) That is the new life in Christ Jesus. That is the new normal for believers, thanksgiving. Paul is telling us that when we fall out of that new normal, recognize it and get right back in to Jesus.

Commented [notes16]: 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)
¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

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. Ephesians 5:5 (ESV) Paul is not propounding works for salvation. He is stating a fact. Those whose lives are habitually immoral or impure or greedy are exhibiting their inner nature which is unredeemed. They may tell you they prayed the prayer of salvation. They may attend church every Sunday. They may be the world's greatest philanthropist, but if their life is continually immoral or impure or covetous, they do not know the Savior. The Savior transforms those who come to Him. (2Corinthians 5:17) He gives them new desires. They begin to hate those old things in their life because they recognize how destructive and deceitful they are. We wonder why the world can't see it. They are deceived. (4:18) Their eyes are not open. You can't expect them to see it.

Commented [notes17]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [notes18]: Ephesians 4:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

When we come to Christ and are born again, we place ourselves under the kingship of Jesus. (Revelation 19:16) We share His heart in regards to these issues. The world is under another kingship, that of the deceiver. (2:2) We will never agree with the world on these issues because we have different kings. Because we have Jesus as our King, we have an inheritance. He rewards us for our service to Him. (Matthew 16:27) He died so that we might inherit eternal life. The best is yet to come. The world is enjoying

Commented [notes19]: Revelation 19:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Commented [notes20]: Ephesians 2:2 (ESV)
² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience

Commented [notes21]: Matthew 16:27 (ESV)
²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

what they think is the best right now, not even realizing how destructive it is to their life. If you don't know what I mean, look into the life of those who have abandoned themselves to these things. It is very sad, and that is the best they can hope for.

Did you notice that Paul points out that greed is idolatry? (Colossians 3:5) It is believing that obtaining some thing will satisfy. It may be an image like a human form, or a pile of money, or a certain house and car, or a dream vacation. Those are all nice things, but when they become the object of life, the pursuit of your soul, the thing in which you hope to find satisfaction, you have set up an idol. Greed is the passion to have that idol at any cost. It's a lie, but for the one that believes it will bring satisfaction, it is all consuming. They serve the image, living to obtain it. By contrast, we serve the living God because He is truly worthy to be served. He is truth. (John 14:6) He does satisfy our deepest longings in a good and holy way. (Psalm 73:25)

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 5:6 (ESV) The world bombards us with empty words. It calls these indulgences healthy, normal, inevitable and numerous other empty words. They are empty because there is no substance behind them. On the one hand they decry the objectifying of women and on the other they turn a blind eye to the enormous pornography industry that fuels it. And then they say Christians lack the ability to reason. Talk about empty words! Don't be deceived by their empty words. There is a judge, and we will all stand before Him! (Romans 14:10)

The tense of this expression has always intrigued me. God's wrath comes on the sons of disobedience. It is in the present tense. The wrath of God is not only something in the future. Oh, there is hell, a place of torment for those who reject the goodness of God and who continually harden themselves to the Holy Spirit. Jesus warned us how important it is to sever from our lives the things that would take us there. (Matthew 5:29) But that is in the future. This wrath is present tense. When you talk to people caught up in these things, they are experiencing the wrath of God in the consequences of their actions. Even when they come to Christ and are freed from the guilt and forgiven, they often still must face consequences. Images of their idols still linger in their minds. It is harder for them to capture their thoughts. Patterns that have been developed over time mean the struggle to be freed from the cycles are even harder.

⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; Ephesians 5:7 (ESV) God's wrath comes upon them when they give themselves to immorality and greed, so keep your distance. It reminds me of what we read in Numbers 16. Korah and Dathan and company challenged Moses and told him they are just as capable of leading and have decided to take over. They weren't satisfied being priests, they wanted to be the High Priest. Moses told them to bring censers to the Tabernacle and let the Lord choose. Dathan refused to come. Then Dathan blamed Moses for not bringing them into the Promised Land, something which he himself had a part in bringing about. God told Moses to warn

Commented [notes22]: Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Commented [notes23]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [notes24]: Psalm 73:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Commented [notes25]: Romans 14:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

Commented [notes26]: Matthew 5:29 (ESV)

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

people to get away from Dathan's tents for the earth would open up and swallow them, because they had despised the Lord. (Numbers 16:30) And that is what happened.

It's the same issue in Paul's letter. Paul is describing those who despise the Lord and His good instructions for our wellbeing. If you stand near their tent, you are going to catch some of the wrath of God upon them. Wrath is to warn others not to do the same. If you have the opportunity to partner in business with people that are greedy and immoral, what should you expect?

Kirk Cameron was recently interviewed about a film he had made on America's Christian heritage. The CNN interviewer decided to ask him about his stand on homosexuality. It had nothing to do with the film, but it was a chance to show the world how bigoted and backward we Bible believing Christians are. Kirk lovingly and gently tried to express his convictions. (Romans 1:26-27) Though interrupted frequently when he was making a good point and the emphasis being forcefully changed by the interviewer a number of times, Kirk was able to keep calm and say what he believed. (2Timothy 2:25) Later, he got death threats for daring to say anything other than what is politically correct. (John 15:18)

Once again, in this issue as well, reality is distorted by the world's perspective on the necessity to sanction homosexuality as normal. The world would have us believe Christians hate homosexuals. How many times do we have to say we hate sin but love the sinner? How many statistics do they need on the damage that lifestyle does to the human body as well as to mental health? Look up the statistics yourself and you'll be amazed. Who is distorting the truth and not using reason? Who refuses to look at the facts?

Genuine Christians are not threatening the life of gay activists, but rather warning them of the physical and spiritual consequences of their lifestyle. It is the gay activists that threaten us when we would speak a word of warning in love.

How do we dare to have a different opinion, especially one based on the unchanging word of God? It is a lack of love that would ignore the consequences of any sinful lifestyle and not tell the truth for the sake of one's popular ideology. (2Peter 2:19) You might honestly disagree on whether or not something is a sin because you have a different barometer for morality, but you can't legitimately deny the effects of what Christians call sin on a life given over to it. This applies to every form of sexual immorality equally. (1Corinthians 6:9-10)

Will we live a life of love that speaks the truth with gentleness, even when our culture calls us barbaric idiots for doing so? It is finally beginning to cost us to stand up for the truth of God's word. Will you pay the price? (Mark 8:38) When Paul tells us to walk in love as Christ did, it includes speaking the truth in love.

Commented [notes27]: Numbers 16:30 (ESV)

³⁰ But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."

Commented [notes28]: Romans 1:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;

²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Commented [notes29]: 2 Timothy 2:25 (ESV)

²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,

Commented [notes30]: John 15:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Commented [notes31]: 2 Peter 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

Commented [notes32]: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Commented [notes33]: Mark 8:38 (ESV)

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Questions

- 1 Why does Paul give us dos and don'ts?
- 2 What is the difference between society and the Bible's teaching on sexuality?
- 3 How does greed destroy marriage?
- 4 What does God expect of our speech?
- 5 What should we do if we find ourselves in the old self?
- 6 Is verse 5 working for salvation?
- 7 What is Paul's warning in this passage?
- 8 What is idolatry? Relate it to greed.
- 9 How is "wrath" present tense?
- 10 Why shouldn't we partner with them?
- 11 What is the Christian attitude toward homosexuality?