

# The Pure Life

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:3-4  
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For our Scripture text this morning that we're going to study from God's word together is found in Ephesians 5:3-4 and I invite you to turn there as we begin this morning. Ephesians 5:3-4 reads this way, it says,

3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians to people who were Christians. This was intended for a Christian audience, people that had been born again, who had turned from sin in repentance and turned in faith to Christ for their salvation and that's at a human level that that human response is made, but more fundamentally, Christians are people upon whom God has done a supernatural work. He moves upon people who are dead in sin and makes them alive in Christ and he changes them. He brings them into his family. He gives them a new nature that is based on the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ and Scripture tells us, the book of Ephesians tells us, that this was something that he planned before the beginning of time. In the great holiness of his character and great love for his Son, he purposed to have a people that would act as a bride to his Son throughout all of eternity; who would love his Son and adore him and belong to him forever. To be a Christian, is to be part of a great eternal purpose of God then and for those of you who are here today and you are in Christ, let me say this and encourage you with it: you are a new man in Christ. God owns you. God redeemed you, adopted you into his family. He wanted and included you in his eternal purposes and we have a great and glorious future ahead of us as those who belong to Christ. That's who we are. We are new people in Christ by the will of God.

Now, beloved, there are a lot of ramifications to that and Paul spends chapters 4, 5 and 6 helping us understand what those ramifications are, working them out, helping us see what they are designed to do in our lives and in our thinking, but I want to impress something very fundamental and basic on your mind that would be easy to miss. Who you are affects the way that you think and what you think affects the way that you act and this is woven into everything that Paul says in the book of Ephesians. He has gone to great lengths to show us that we are new men in Christ; that we have been chosen by God and raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places. We are no longer

people who belong to this world. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and we do not belong to this world. We are separate from it. We have a separate origin, a new origin, a new destiny, a new purpose. We belong to something that is completely unrelated to this world. We belong to that which God has purposed from the beginning of time. Well, when you understand that that's who you are, that you are someone new in Christ, then that changes the whole way that you think about everything that's in the world. It changes what you think about your purpose in living. It changes what you want your own desires to be and it changes your perspective on everything in life.

Now, that's really fundamental to what we're about to see as Paul writes to us here in these 2 verses about the nature of the purity of life that a Christian is supposed to pursue. You see, the fact that you're someone new and that you have been bought out of the world, means that you fundamentally think differently about the attractions and the temptations and the sins of this world. It's not simply that God tells us to do things differently than what the world does, we are to root our understanding and our behavior in proper thinking about who we are. The fact that you are someone new means that you act in a completely different way and it redefines your desires, your priorities and what you seek out of life. And beloved, what we're going to see here today is that it also does something else for you, it makes what superficially would seem the allure of sin to suddenly become something that is very distasteful and something that is not desirable at all because of who you are is; because God has purchased you; because God has set his love and grace upon you. Because Christ shed his blood for you, you view everything differently.

Scripture says elsewhere that you were bought with a price. You who are Christians, Christ purchased you at the cost of his own sinless life blood. Well, when you understand that that's what you belong to and the price that was paid for you, all of a sudden you think differently about that which formerly separated you from him. You think differently about that which he died to wash away and it becomes a distasteful thing to think about entering back into a world of desire and lust that Christ died to bring you out of. So what we're seeing here as we consider the pure life, the Christian life here today, is something far more than a list of do's and don'ts. We're saying and what we're seeing is that which should shape the fundamental desires of your heart and give you impulse and power and direction and the ability to overcome sin in your life because of who you are in Christ.

We're going to see 2 key priorities in this text to help you live a pure life in this wicked world and, first of all, I want to show you this from verse 3, is that Paul calls us to live in purity. To live in purity and it will be helpful to set a context as we enter into it. Look at chapter 5:2, we looked at this last week. Paul says and calls us to "walk in love," and then he lays out the sacrifice of Christ for us. He says, "just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." What you do at this point is you step back and you think on that for a moment. You remember who Christ is, the eternal Son of God. You remember what he did, he offered his life as a sacrifice to God on the cross. Why? Because you were doomed to suffer wrath. Because you were guilty. Because you were a rebel and you were headed for hell and Christ said, "No, no, I will intercede on that one's behalf. I will lay down my life. I will bring him to myself so

that I can spare him the consequences that his sins deserve." That's what it says, he loved you and he loved you not with empty, vapid sentiment but with an active self-sacrifice that secured your eternal good.

Now, as you move on in the text, what follows in verses 3 and following is a call to respond to that act of self-sacrifice and what you see in the face of the self-sacrifice of Christ is that a selfish life of self-indulgence is unthinkable. It is something that you cannot tolerate in your own mind because you realize how utterly inconsistent that continued sin and rebellion is with the self-sacrifice of Christ that was made in order to secure your redemption and that he did that in love for you. And so a life of purity, a life of sincerity, a life of godliness, is the only thing that would be a proper life response to such an act like that, is the way that you should think through it. And Christ's self-sacrifice teaches you to exchange sin for purity in 3 areas of your life and so these are going to be sub points of our first point. There is a broad call to live in purity that unites these things together and what we're going to see is that Paul identifies 3 specific areas of life in which you are to think through these things and apply them: to pursue holiness, to pursue sanctification, to leave behind the old way of life in order to reflect back to Christ a semblance of the purity which he in perfection pursued in order to offer his life on your behalf. What you're seeing here is something really fundamental. What you're seeing here is what worship looks like, what worship looks like Monday through Saturday. What worship looks like with a life response that says, "The totality of my life, the totality of my heart, the totality of my desires are given over to this Christ," and to stop thinking about worship in a superficial way as if it's only the music that is done from a platform for half an hour on a Sunday morning and then everything else is something different. No, your response of life is your reasonable service of worship in response to this great sacrifice of Christ. You see, beloved, here's the thing and one of the ways that you can test yourself to see if you're a true Christian or not is whether that's even appealing to you because to a true Christian, one who understands what Christ has done for you, you gladly say, "Well, of course, Christ gave his all for me. The only fitting response would be for me to give my all back to him," and not to carve out pockets of sin and acceptable disobedience because you still want to have at least some things your way. No, for a Christian, our way is Christ's way and Christ's way is what is revealed here in Scripture.

So he's going to teach us through the Apostle Paul what purity he calls us to and, beloved, what I want to remind you of is that as we open the word of God here, here in the context of the congregation of the people of God, is that this is how Christ instructs us. This is how Christ leads us. This is how Christ exercises his rightful Lordship over us, is that he does it through his word. You're meant as a Christian to come to his word to see and to understand it and to respond to it. Not a one of you should walk out of here the same as what you walked in because the call and the searchlight of these things goes to comprehensive areas of life. So, once again, we come to God's word with an expectation to have it instruct us, convict us, and to change us, and we welcome that in advance.

Well, where does Paul call us to live in purity? I said there are 3 ways and just let me preface it by: this goes places where you might not expect. When we think of purity in the context of the church, we tend to think about it in sexual ways and Paul, indeed,

addresses that but he goes beyond that. The call is more than just in those realms of physical desires. It goes too much more than that and so we're going to see something that is very comprehensive over all of life.

Live in purity. Where, Paul? In what sections of life should I apply this? Well, first of all, it is in the realm of sexuality. Live in purity, first sub point here, in sexuality. Scripture calls Christians to a sexual purity that is foreign to the ways of the world and the debased nature of our culture today is really not that much different from the circumstances in which Paul wrote this back in the first century. There was the same public display of detestable, public sexuality in a way that they would understand that Christians were called out of then and we are called out of here today and that's important for us to realize is that what Paul gave to the first century Christians were things that apply to us here today as well. Their environment may have been a little bit different in the externals but fundamentally the sexual insanity that we know today was the same back then.

Look at what Paul says in verse 3 here, he says, "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." This word for "immorality" comes from a Greek word that we can easily understand, it's the same Greek word that gives us the English word "pornography." And joined with the phrase "any impurity," look at verse 3 with me there, but immorality" could be translated "and any impurity." Here we have it immorality or any impurity. When you put those terms together in the same phrase, it's a comprehensive reference to sexual sin and what it says is that sexual sin is so diametrically opposed to the reality of what it means to be a Christian that it should be unthinkable in your mind to allow for it in your life. That's what he's saying. "Don't even let it be named among you."

What would this include, this immorality of which he speaks? Sex before marriage. Adultery after marriage. All manner of homosexual activity. Pornography. All of that, Paul says, is to be put away. Don't even let it be named among you and when he says, "Don't let it be named among you," the idea that he's communicating here is that there should be a separation in your mind that divides you from that realm and you say, "That realm is foreign to me. That realm is unwelcome in my life because it's contrary to the purity that Christ calls me to." The call is brought, it should not even be named among you.

So when we think about it and just kind of work out what that is saying, "Don't even let it be named among you," well, what is he saying? He's saying, "Don't do this." He's saying, "Don't talk about this and don't joke about it." That racy humor, even if you are not engaging in it physically, is inappropriate. That that which fills the entertainment venue of our culture and our society is something that we should reject in totality and not find our minds rolling around in the filth that is done in the name of humor and engages in these immoralities and these impurities that Paul says shouldn't even be named among you. You see, it's pretty comprehensive. The goal here, the purpose of what Paul is saying, is that you would think through these things in light of who you are. Think through who you are, "I belong to a Christ who is holy. That's who I am." And now you think through that and say, "Okay, what does that mean in light of the debased culture in

which I live? Uh-oh, I'm on foreign ground. I'm declaring war against the very thing that is of the environment in which I'm walking." You say, "This has no part in my life. There is no realm of welcome in my heart for this," is what he's saying.

And our Lord Jesus, he went even further. Turn to Matthew 5:27, I'll give you a moment to turn there. Matthew 5:27-28 for you in the audience and watching at home. Matthew 5:27 says, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." What's the Lord doing here through his word? The Lord is asserting his dominion, his righteous and rightful Lordship over even the inner realm of your heart and saying, "Your desires for adultery and sexual sin are banished. They are not allowed. They are sinful whether you act on them physically or not." And we see that the searching and pervasive nature of the law of God is such that God commands even what you are to desire and what you are not to desire. That's how thorough his authority is over the world, over the unsaved, and certainly over us as his people.

Those lusts are contrary to who you are. Let me say that again to those of you who belong to Christ and I say this to strengthen you and help you in what is being said: those lusts are contrary to your nature. When we say the lusts, the sexual desire expressed in marriage, God ordained that. God blesses that. He appointed that. It's the illicit seeking it outside of realms that he has blessed and provided for us that is condemned and forbidden. So because you are a new creation in Christ, you align yourself with what God commands and what God desires and what he calls to be holiness and say, "That has no part in my life." A pretty high standard, isn't it? We all feel condemned by this. We all realize that we all fall short of this. Well, there are 2 things that I would say about it at that point: welcome to the fact that you need a Savior and praise God that he gave you one because we all fall short here and that Christ's shed blood covers even that sin.

So if the question is asked, "Can these sins even be forgiven, given how contrary they are to the nature of God? Can they be forgiven?" Yes. That's why Christ came. He came for you, to save you, and in mercy have kindness upon you even in what you have swum in in the past. So can it be forgiven? Yes, but beloved, let me show you something really important: that's not Paul's point here. Paul is talking about something different here. He's not addressing whether it can be forgiven in the life of a Christian. He had just said in verse 2 that Christ gave himself up as a sacrifice and offering. There is your hope in the midst of your sinfulness that there is forgiveness available for you in Christ Jesus. You rest in verse 2, but now as we move on in verse 3, understand that he's saying something different and to say that it can be forgiven, to say that Christ died even for those shameful sins that you would not want anyone to know about, that's not his point here. His point here is what you think about them now as a Christian and what you think about these sins now as a Christian is that those are now my sworn enemies, those sins. It's that I set myself against them and while the temptation that might assail me, while the struggle may still be there, it's a struggle that comes from an enemy, not from someone that I'm wanting to embrace is a friend. That's the difference. These sexual sins are your sworn enemy as a Christian and whether you stumble in them or not is not the point here, it's

that you settle in your opposition against them. Paul says, "You should not think for a moment that they are acceptable in a Christian life."

Look at it with me again. We'll tie it together here. He says, "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." You see, you think through your life. You think through who you are in Christ and you realize when you put the holiness and the pristine sacrifice of Christ up against the debased lusts of this world, you realize those 2 can't meet together and be reconciled as friends and you say, "Well, I'm on Christ's side now. Christ bought me. He brought me into his family and therefore I am settled against those things and when they present themselves to me and when they attack me and when they allure me, they will find me resisting and fighting them rather than running after them to enjoy and to plunge in with them." It's a matter of a heart mindset that Paul is after that you settle this.

You see, beloved, here's the thing: it's at a time like this where you really have to think through these things because God's word is strong enough and is powerful enough to help you in these realms, these realms that you have struggled with for a long time. God's word is strong enough and powerful enough to equip you to resist these temptations. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. But the key to it is for you to think through things now in times like this when the temptation is removed from you far and to think through these things and to settle the convictions in your heart that will steel you, that will undergird you, that you can draw upon when the temptation comes upon you. You must think about these things deeply and you must commit yourself to them wholeheartedly rather than waiting until the temptation comes and say, "Well, I'll figure it out then." No wonder people stumble when that's their approach. Then when the temptation is on you, it's really too late to start thinking about these things. You need the convictions cultivated in your own heart and mind beforehand under the clarity of God's word, under the clarity of the influence of his Holy Spirit and say, "Yes Lord, that's where I want to go and, Lord, whatever stumbling steps I may make in the direction of holiness going forward, Lord, I'm telling you right here, right now," this should be your prayer, young men, older men alike, this should be your prayer, "However I've stumbled in the past, however I may stumble, my past has taught me not to trust in my strength and ability to overcome these things in my own power but, Lord, I just humbly settle in my heart before you that what your word says is what I embrace. There is no room in my heart that thinks that this is acceptable." And you develop that conviction to strengthen you and to guide you going forward. Paul says, "Don't even let it be named about you."

So you stop engaging the risqué things on the internet. You stop engaging the risqué humor of the entertainment industry and you separate yourself and you turn it off and you walk away. "That's not even named in my life." That's how severely you must treat these things. It takes effort. Don't expect God to do it for you. This is written as a command to you to act upon and to develop convictions and to live in response to. When we fall into sin, it's not God's fault, it's ours and we have to take responsibility for it. Scripture says the way that you can avoid falling is to settle in your mind and to live from a strong perspective that says, "There's no room in my life for that."

Now, secondly, Paul goes on, having spoken about sexual sin. It's very interesting what he goes on and does here. You know, if we were going to list out a list of sin, I won't do this but if I were to ask you, "Write out a list of 5 major sins. What are the 5 worst sins that you could think of?" Maybe it's sexual sin, anger, murder, that kind of stuff and you'd write those things out. It's unlikely that very many of you, if any, would go in that list of self prepared listing of sin where the Spirit of God goes here in verse 3. It's very interesting and we don't see this one coming and so it kind of hits us offguard and we realize, "Oh, there's a whole realm here that I never even thought about."

Look at what he says in verse 3, he says, "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." Paul injects something different here when he uses the word "greed," and just to make sure that I don't lose you here in the notes, Paul has called us to a life of purity in sexuality and now, secondly here, we're moving in and he's calling us to a life of purity in satisfaction. In satisfaction because Scripture tells you to be satisfied with what you have rather than adopting a worldly mindset of always wanting something more. It is said of J. Nelson Rockefeller, the wealthy businessman, that he was asked one time, "How much is enough money?" and he was reported to have said, "Just a little bit more." Always just a little bit more. I want just a little bit more than what I have and Scripture tells us to reject that mindset.

Look at verse 3 with me again, "immorality or any impurity." Notice the word "or" there. He's talking about something different here. I disagree with those commentators who think it's just talking about greedy sexual desire. It's a disjunctive; it's "or." He's adding something new to the list here distinct from the immorality and impurity that went before it and so he separates out greed as something that likewise is not "to be named among you, as is proper among the saints." Why would that be so important? You and I are conditioned through lots of church involvement and things we read to have our antenna up about sexual sin but why greed? Would that have been in your top 5 list? Probably not. For Paul, it was right there on an equal plane with sexual sin.

This is unsettling. Why is that so important? What is so bad about greed and unrestrained earthly ambition? What does greed say? Oh, this is painful but we need to get to the heart of it. Do you know what greed says? Do you know what that insatiable longing for more in your heart is saying? It is saying that you are dissatisfied with the present provision of God. "God, I have all of this but I want more." Are you kidding me? Really? That would be your attitude toward God? That would be your attitude toward Christ who, go back to verse 2, look at verse 2 with me, Christ, who in a complete self-emptying, a complete self-denial, "loved you and gave Himself up for you, an offering and a sacrifice to God for your sins as a fragrant aroma." He did that eternal work on your behalf to secure your eternal well-being and even by worldly standards, almost every one of us here are living in the upper echelon of what the rest of the world enjoys, and from that position of material blessing, that position of inestimable, incomparable, eternal blessing, would we really walk about in life with an attitude in our heart that says, "I want more. I don't have enough." What is that saying to God? "God, you haven't given me enough." Well, what are you saying? "I gave you my eternal Son. I gave you the Lord Jesus Christ. You have food and covering. You're not content with that? What's the matter with you?"

You see, this helps us to see that Paul is talking about more than a physical purity when he writes here. He's talking about a spiritual purity. He's talking about a heart attitude that recognizes the goodness and the blessing of God and in response says, "Thank you," not, "Where is the rest?" Those of you that are parents, you know what it's like either from experience or from your friends' experience. You pour out all of these gifts on Christmas morning and the little kid opens it all up and it takes forever to get through them all and then he starts looking around, "Where's the rest? Why isn't there more?" Well, what we need to see as Christians is that the purity that God calls us to says that, "No, the fundamental cornerstone of my heart reaction to my circumstances is going to be, God, thank you. You have given me all I need. You have blessed me, Lord, and I recognize that and I'm grateful for what you have done." Greed then opposes the purity of life to which you are called. Scripture says that God has given you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. By what measure of ingratitude, of inexcusable ingratitude, do we say in essence, "It's not enough. It's not enough for me to be content. I need more." Where does that come from and what does that say in response to our God who has blessed us far beyond what we deserve?

Look over at Hebrews 13. It's interesting that the writer of Hebrews joins sexual sin and greed together also. Somehow these are linked in the mind of God in a way that we don't link them until now but Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Then it goes on and says, verse 5, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,' so that we confidently say, 'THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?'" Scripture beams a laser into your heart and asks about your contentment and tells you, not simply asking the question but commanding you, commanding me, "Be content with what you have." Why? Why? The reason that the writer of Hebrews gives is for you to remember the sufficiency of Christ. Why can you be content? It's because Christ has said, "I will never desert you nor will I ever, ever forsake you." It's a triple negative in Greek. "I will never, no never, no ever forsake you." And your Christian heart, your redeemed heart, that new heart inside you should say, "Ah-ha, then that's all I need. Christ, the Son of God, is with me? Then I have all that I want, all that I need."

That is why, beloved, it is so convicting to us when we go to areas of poverty in other parts of the world and we see Christians there and we see them joyful. I remember back in the mid-80s being in Moscow before the fall of the Berlin wall and walking into a Baptist church and just seeing the joy and the exuberant singing of these people who probably couldn't even get decent jobs because they were identified as Christians. Joyful, glad to see me, welcoming me, even though I couldn't speak their language. Nothing to their names but there it is. Dane has seen the same thing in Mexico. We saw the video. You see that joyful exuberance of people living in poverty and sitting on plastic chairs in an outdoor seating area and they are joyful. Why? Because they've got the Lord, not because they've got a fraction of what we have.



What's the common thread in sexual sin and greed? There is a common thread to them that joins them together. The common thread is this: it's a lusting for more than what God has given. Now, I think balance is very important and I want to make this point and hear me carefully on this: this is not a question about what you actually have. That's not the issue here at all. Christians can be wealthy without being greedy. Poor people can be among the greediest people on earth. It is not a matter of what you have at all, it's a matter of contentment with what you do have that Scripture is calling us to. Stated differently, you could say it this way: this warning against greed, it's not about what you have, that's not the point at all, the question is what is it that you love? And Christ says, "Don't love money to such an extent that you're always wanting more than what you have. Be content. Be satisfied." And leave it there.

Paul shines a spotlight on one more area of purity. Go back to Ephesians 5 now with me. Ephesians 5. He has addressed sexuality; he has addressed the area of greed. He says, "Don't let that be named among you, as is proper among the saints." That word for "saints," incidentally, it's just a reference to Christians. Those of you from a Catholic background maybe who have thought that saints were these exalted people that had the extra ring of halo around their head. That has nothing to do with the biblical term "saints." A saint is simply someone who has been set apart for God. That's true of every Christian. It's just another word for saying "these things are not proper among Christians."

Paul goes on and he says and it's not just sexuality and satisfaction that I'm addressing in your life, he also addresses the realm of speech. Of your speech, and he calls us to watch our tongues as well as a proper, fitting response to the things of God. Look at verse 4, he says, "and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." There are 3 individual Greek words there that are translated with more than 3 words in English: filthiness, silly talk, coarse jesting. Each of those words only appears here in the New Testament. What Paul is saying here is he is making a comprehensive reference to any manner of vulgar talk. Crude conversation. Double entendre where at one level it sounds innocent but there is a hidden current underneath it where you mean something different but you can defend yourself by saying, "Oh, I only said the first part. I didn't mean the second part." Right. Profanity. Paul says, "All of those things are not fitting for Christians." Joking about sexual matters. It's just not right. It doesn't fit with the Christian life and whether you're giving it out and defiling people with your words or whether you're letting someone else defile your own mind by receiving it and not resisting it or walking away, Paul says, this is not fitting for the Christian life. This vulgar talk, this filthiness, this coarse jesting, done in the presence of Christ is unthinkable. We live as those who are living in the presence of Christ Jesus, our Lord. We live as those who have the Holy Spirit indwelling within us. Can you imagine taking the Lord Jesus by the elbow and pulling him into some of the conversations that you have enjoyed in the past and sully him, so to speak? Not honoring his holiness with the presence and entering into those realms of cynicism and coarseness?

It doesn't fit. It's like putting on a shirt that is 4 sizes too small. You can't make that work. It's not right because it doesn't fit. Why does it not fit? It goes back to who you are. You

were bought with a price. You belong to Christ. He sacrificed himself to bring you into God's family. You belong to a Father who is holy, a Christ who is holy, a Spirit who is holy, and that is meant to permeate what you think and therefore what you say. Sometimes you just need to turn your back on the people who are talking that way and walk away. Don't even say a word. Just walk away. Get out of it. And certainly don't contribute to it. Watch out for anything that finds humor in sin or delights in degrading the holy things of Christ in Scripture. "Well, I'm just engaging the culture." No, you're not engaging the culture, you're dishonoring Christ when you do that and that should be unthinkable to you.

And even thinking about the profanity aspect of it, you never know where the conviction of these things might lead. The truth of the matter is that I know that you agree with everything that has been said here in Scripture. I know that none of you are going to step up and argue, "No, sexual sin is okay in the life of a Christian." No, you wouldn't make that argument. Greed? You wouldn't make that argument anymore. You might not have recognized it before but you wouldn't argue now that it's okay for a Christian to be dissatisfied with the love and provision of God. You wouldn't argue that. Profanity, sexual joking and all kinds of coarseness and vulgarity, you all agree with me. You all agree that those things are inappropriate, are sinful, are inconsistent.

Well, you know, other people recognize it too and you never know where the conviction that these things bring might lead. You never know what might happen as you're faithful to honor these things like a friend of mine was many, many years ago, long before I was a Christian, long before I met Nancy. When I was in college, I went to a ballgame with a friend and that friend thought that I was a Christian. I kind of thought that I was Christian. I said that I was a Christian but I wasn't. And as it so happens, at this ballgame I remember exactly where I was sitting in the old Busch Stadium in St. Louis. As it happened, my team was not playing well that night and I'm with this friend and I expressed my dissatisfaction with my team's performance with profane words which should not be repeated anywhere, let alone in this church from this pulpit. My friend looked at me and gently said, "You don't have to talk that way." The conviction that that simple rebuke brought to me was enormous. She was exactly right. You shouldn't be talking this way if you're a Christian.

I didn't show anything. I didn't respond in any way. I outwardly blew it off. Inside it convicted me even though I didn't know Ephesians 5. I knew that my profane speech in that moment was inconsistent with my claim to be a Christian. I knew that my profane speech was what was really speaking the truth about who I was and I was not a Christian because profane, vulgar speech is not fitting for one who belongs to Christ and a few simple words, a little 10 or 15 second exchange, was like a surgical scalpel on my soul and exposed the reality of it all. I was a fraud. It was still a couple of years before I came to Christ after that but here we are 35 years later and the pain of that is still fresh on my mind.

Well, beloved, look, if the pain of conviction on an unbeliever would be that great, shouldn't it pain you to think that your mouth has expressed things like that when you are

claiming to be a Christian? Do you see how unthinkable this is? Do you see why Paul says, "That's not proper." It's not proper and it should convict you if you have given room in your life and in your mouth and with your tongue to say these kinds of things. It's time to repent. It's time for you to fall on your knees and to confess, "Oh God, I know I belong to you but what I have done with my tongue in recent days and weeks and months, Father, I am ashamed. I repent. I beg you to shower me with the cleansing mercy of Christ that he shed his blood and I want my mouth to change and, Father, I'm renewing my repentance on this point right now because I see how improper and unfitting this is." In the words of James that, "I would bless you with my tongue on Sunday and curse on Tuesday."

So Paul has shown us a life of purity and kind of giving us negative tests in sexuality and satisfaction and in speech. I just wonder, my friend, are these tests exposing your heart? Is it possible that you're a fraud like I was back then and that you are realizing that your manner of life shows that you're not a Christian at all? You see, Christ Jesus was unmarred by sexual sin. He was unmarred by greed. He was unmarred by profanity and coarse jesting. You who are born in his image must resolve to be like him in response. And beloved, here's the thing, I'm having trouble controlling myself with what I'm about to say here. The temptation in our profane, degraded society, what certain voices from Christianity would say, what some prominent pastors have done with their filthy mouth in recent years, has basically said, "Look, we live in a profane, degraded society and therefore we should accommodate that. It's okay for us to enter into that as long as we don't compromise the truths of the Gospel." Pffittt, that's what I think about that.

That's wrong. That's the exact opposite of what we should do. What we should do especially in this profane and degraded society is to see the standard of Scripture and hold it all the more high and say, "That's what I want to aspire after, not to look like this degraded world around me." Oh beloved, settle this in your heart. Be convicted in your heart and say, "I want to aspire after that which is holy, not to get as close as I can to the filthiness of the world around me." Don't you love Christ that much? I know you do. I know you love Christ that much, well, let that filter into your convictions in a way that changes your life into greater purity on his behalf. We don't want to be like the world. We see how bad it is and we realize that letting their stuff trickle in isn't going to win them to Christ, it's going to win us to them. So we say, "That's not proper. That's not fitting. God, give us purity of speech. Give us purity in satisfaction. Give us purity in sexuality that is reflective of the Christ that we love." That's what we want. That's what Scripture calls us to. Those sins are alien to us and therefore we put them aside.

Now, that's the life of purity to which we are called. Paul briefly, almost in passing, shows us the Christian contrast that stands out in our second point here. Before I say this second point, I just want to say this: if all that Christian purity was simply to say, "I'm not going to do those things. I'm not going to do the sexual stuff. I'm committed to purity in my heart and being content and I'm content and I want to watch my mouth," and all of that, if that's all it was, understand that Christian purity would simply be something purely negative by which I mean it would just be marked by that which we don't do. Well, Christian purity is something much higher than that. Oh, that's part of it but what's

the positive nature of it? It's not just that we're known by what we are against and our heart isn't simply set against certain sins. What is it that we are supposed to be set on? Paul lays it out for us in our second point when he says, "live in gratitude." Live in gratitude. If all of those common sins are inappropriate for Christians, what should fill our minds and hearts?

Look at verse 4. He mentions it just in passing. It's just a little nugget buried in the ground here. He says, "All of that stuff is not fitting." What is fitting, Paul? "But rather," contrast, "but rather giving of thanks." Giving of thanks. Instead of indulging sin, Scripture says you be a grateful person. You let your heart remember the countless blessings that God has bestowed upon you and you return praise and thanks and gratitude to him as a lifestyle pattern that you're marked as someone who is cheerful and joyful. Why? Because you are thankful to God for all that he has done. I know it's easy to lose sight of these things. I'm just like you are. You forget so quickly, but think with me for a moment: did God not bless you when he chose you for salvation before the beginning of time? Did God not bless you and have your eternal good in mind when Christ offered himself on a cross 2,000 years before you were born? Has he not kept you thus far through life? Yeah, you've had sorrows, so have I. We've had difficulties that we have walked through. Weren't their blessings embedded in those? Didn't you see the comfort of Scripture at times in that and at other times find that the people of God rose and blessed you with their kindness and encouraged you in that? Don't you have an eternal blessing still ahead? The best part of being a Christian is still ahead. When we see Christ face-to-face, when we are with him in perfection for all of glory and all of the evil and wickedness of this world is banished and we're just there around his throne in glory, isn't that a lot to be thankful for? Promised eternal blessings that you are sure to receive Brothers and sisters, we should be people who are thankful always and the sour, complaining spirit should be set aside and replaced with a conscious pursuit of gratitude that is in keeping with the goodness of God that he has shown on our lives. That thankfulness is what distinguishes us. That positive attitude, that constructive demeanor that says, "I'm grateful to God today," is the mark of a true Christian.

Turn over to Colossians 3. There are so many passages. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, "This is God's will for you, the giving of thanks is the will of God for you." But we're just going to look at this one parallel passage in Colossians 3 as we close. Colossians, written at the same time as Ephesians and bearing many of the same themes throughout the 2 letters. The Bible says to you as a Christian, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Three times in those 3 verses Paul says, "Be thankful. Singing with thankfulness. Giving thanks through Christ to God, the Father." Do you know why he had to say it 3 times? It's because apparently they were just like us, we forget. We stray away and so Scripture repeatedly emphasizes this and says, "What's going to mark you in purity is an attitude of gratitude, of thanksgiving, of rejoicing and praising God for all that he has given to you." You see, purity is more than the absence of

sin. Christian purity is found in a joyful gratitude to God that flavors your every word and deed.

Let me ask you: who are you? The way you live reflects who you are. Who are you? Are you grateful? You should be.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we do thank you for your boundless grace and mercy in our lives. Father, we realize that the concept of purity has convicted probably every one of us in one area or another as we have gone through it here today. Father, I pray and ask for 2 things in response to that: for those who are truly Christians, I pray that by the power of your Spirit you would reassure them of your love and your forgiveness toward them even though they have fallen. Father, may you be gracious to them in their sin where they have struggled and, Father, bring to mind the sacrifice of Christ which covers us for all of our sins and renew in them a pure heart. Renew in them a steadfast spirit and help them, Father, as they seek to respond to what Paul has said to us here in Ephesians. Father, for others, self-deceived and not really caring, not really caring whether these things are true in their lives or not and content to wear the label of Christian when they have no desire or repentant spirit about them, Father, I pray that you would bring the same kind of burning conviction upon them that you brought upon me 35 years ago with my own filthy mouth. Father, I pray that that conviction would teach them, first of all, to fear God and then fearing God, Father, to turn to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Give us grace, O God, that we might be what you would have us to be. Give us grace to appreciate the boundless sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*