

The True Colors of Sin

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It's such a joy to gather together Sunday by Sunday with the people of God, isn't it? It's a real pleasure in the most sanctified way is how I mean that. A pleasure to come together as those of like precious faith to sing these hymns of the faith that have been sung for centuries and realize that we are identifying with the people of God, not only in this room, but across the ages of time as people of like precious faith loved the same Lord that we do and we gather together in order to perpetuate that and to do our part in handing the faith to the next generation and so we're very grateful to the Lord for your presence here today and for the fact that we are able to meet together like this, knowing that this is a true blessing from God to us.

I'm preaching out of the book of Ephesians this morning, Ephesians 5. If you're visiting with us, we're going verse-by-verse through the book of Ephesians. We have been at this for several months now and we've come to a very interesting text, Ephesians 5:3-6 and I want to read that at the start here to set the context for what I'm going to say here this morning. Paul says as he writes to Christians, he 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. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

These are sobering words that we're dealing with. Last week we looked at the first two verses of that passage, verses 3 and 4, and this is kind of a concluding message to what we said last week. We saw last time that Paul calls us as Christians out of the realm of sin as it is expressed in sexual sin or greed or inappropriate speech and he laid out for us that those things are not fitting for Christians. They are not proper for those who know the holy Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. And the most important thing that I would have you say as we enter into this passage today is by way of kind of conditioning your mind and looking at this from the right perspective, you've got to understand that Paul is doing much, much more than trying to regulate your external conduct. Oh, he's pointing out that these things have no place in our lives, but it is essential, it is of magnificent importance

for you to understand what he is doing here at a deeper level. What the Apostle Paul is doing here is he is applying the Gospel to our lives. He is applying the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is holy and sanctified and separate from sin and if you belong to him, then that has a lot of implications for you. You see, he's not simply interested in you behaving a particular way, that's simply an outgrowth, it's an outworking; that's the fruit of a deeper and more important root. What he's doing here is he is telling us to consider what is right in light of the death of Christ. He's telling us to remember and to understand that we shape our living in response to the holiness of God. In 1 Peter and in Leviticus, Scripture says, "You be holy for I the Lord your God am holy," and so there are ethical demands, there are ethical imperatives that flow out of the character of God and the very nature of the Gospel itself. So Paul is teaching us what is proper and that which is fitting.

Now, look, you and I, we need that. We need that instruction. Those of us that maybe didn't grow up even aspiring after Christian conduct. Those of you that were saved in your 20s and 30s and 40s and maybe later on, I understand that you cultivated long patterns of sin that you're now ashamed of and I realize that sometimes, and Scripture teaches us this, that sometimes those temptations still grab hold of your heart and what Paul is doing here is he is helping you separate yourself from those sinful remnants of temptation that well up in your heart from time-to-time and giving you strength so that you can live a life that is appropriate to one who belongs to a holy Savior. He's drawing clear lines and he's speaking in stark terms and he's not trying to coddle us as he does so and it's important for us to take these words to heart in the spirit in which they are written. Paul is speaking clearly and definitively. He is unlike a lot of modern pulpits that try to shave the edges off of things in order to make you feel comfortable so that the Gospel doesn't impinge on your life too much. That's the exact opposite of what Scripture is doing here for us.

At the same time, beloved, at the same time as we realize the clarity with which he speaks, you need to understand that Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and Scripture here, for those of you who aspire after a holy life and yet struggle with remnants of sin in your life, understand that Scripture here is speaking to you as your best friend and your best friend in Scripture is speaking to you clearly and directly and is not making room for that which would be a cancer upon your soul. What Paul does as he moves on into verses 5 and 6 which are going to be our consideration for this morning, is he helps you with holiness by helping you understand the eternal consequences of sin which has this effect: it shows you how black and evil sin is with the design for this end, that as you would see these things, as you would understand where sin leads, that you would learn not only to avoid it with your conduct, but that you would learn to hate it with your heart. That you would have an inner revulsion against sin because of what it does and what it means and so you put sin in the context of its eternal consequences.

Those of you that feel the weight and the pull of sin and you feel torn and you go through that tension and you move back and forth and on the one hand desiring righteousness and yet seeing also the affect of the temporary passing pleasures of sin, let me say this to you and what this passage is teaching you, it's addressed to your mind and it is telling you to

develop a mindset in yourself that is like this: you should not respond to temptation merely by whether the sin appeals to you in the moment or not, rather you must learn to think more deeply about sin. You should think about what sin brings with it, that the bait of temptation has a very deadly hook in it and as a fish swimming in water, you learn to avoid the bait because you realize the danger of the hook that is attached to it because clear thinking about sin's consequences will help condition your heart in the direction of holiness and the whole point is that when your desires are aligned more closely with holiness, then the behavior will follow as well.

Look at what Paul says. I want to read verses 5 and 6 with you again to emphasize this text with us. Paul says in verses 5 and 6, "For this you know with certainty." He's talking about matters that are undebatable, that cannot be contested. This is a matter of certain truth clearly revealed in God's word. He says, "This you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Verse 6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." What is Paul doing here? He is detailing for us two eternal costs of sin and he is doing so in a way that is designed to help you pursue godliness in your Christian life. The idea of this is for Christians to pursue godliness and if we follow the flow of Paul's thought, you'll see why this is such a powerful influence toward holiness in your life. He's laying out the consequences of sin. He's laying out what it costs and the first cost is severe. It is unthinkable what comes with sin.

First of all, the first cost that Paul lays out for us is that sin results in exclusion from God's kingdom. Exclusion from God's kingdom. You know, brother and sister in Christ, the most important thing that you have, the most precious thing that you have is your hope of eternal life. The fact that you can go through this life with a long term serenity and confidence because things are well with your soul and you know for certain that when you die you will enter into the presence of God and he will never abandon nor forsake you. That is the most precious possession that you have. It is infinitely more valuable than your closest human relationships or whatever wealth or other things that you enjoy in life. That is the most precious thing that you possess.

Now, what Paul is saying here, what Paul is doing here, is that he is talking about sin as a principle and sin as it exists and he is saying that sin is evil. Sin is wicked. Why is it wicked? Why should you as a Christian view sin as your mortal enemy rather than an occasional friend that you would want to welcome into your life? Paul is saying, "Understand that sin is what keeps people from having and possessing that hope of eternal life." The thing that you most value, the most precious thing that you have, sin keeps other people from having it.

Look at verse 5 with me again. I want to keep the text fresh in your mind here. He says, "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." What he's doing here is he's talking in general terms. He is not saying that, as we'll see in a little bit, he's not saying that anyone who ever commits one of these sins can never go to heaven. That's

not his point and I'll make that clear to you later on. Rather, what he is doing is he is pointing out the consequences of violating God's holiness. He is pointing out the ramifications of sin and he is helping you see it in its broader context because it wasn't much different back then in the first century as it is today. The world knows how to dress up sin so that it looks very attractive and something that appeals to you. It appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. It wouldn't be a temptation if there wasn't something appealing about it but the world never gives you the full story. It never tells you the fullness of it so that you can assess it properly. Only Scripture gives you that blessing and as Scripture does this, it points out that the consequences are unthinkable of pursuing a life that is devoted to sin like that.

It is unthinkable and why Paul is saying this is this: he wants you to sit up and listen. To pay attention here. He is saying things to grab our attention because this is crucial and what does he say? He says, "Those who practice immorality or have a greedy disposition have no part in God's kingdom. They do not belong to the realm over which Christ reigns. They do not belong to him. They do not have the hope of eternal life. They are going to hell," is what he says. They are not saved and they won't go to heaven.

Now, Paul often made this point and I want to show you a couple of passages to acquaint you and to reinforce what we're saying here. 1 Corinthians 6, a passage that we've often looked at here from this pulpit. The whole point that you need to see is that a lifestyle that is enmeshed in sin, a lifestyle that is given over to these sinful things, is the mark of a life that does not belong to Christ. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."

Now, look, we should just stop right here and park it and focus on one particular point because Paul says, it said it in Ephesians, he said it in Galatians which we'll see, and he says it here in 1 Corinthians, he says, "Don't be deceived on this point." Over and over again, when he talks about how a lifestyle of these sins shows that someone does not belong to Christ, he says in that context, "Don't be deceived." Now, there is something really crucial that you have to understand. The fact that Scripture warns you repeatedly about this shows that there is a great danger at stake. Your own natural love for sin and the way that the world presents sin and the fact that false teachers will minimize the consequences of sin are all a great danger to make you think that maybe sin isn't that serious after all. You know, if a man stands up with a title of a pastor tattooed on his forehead and says, "Oh, don't worry. God is a God of love and there is nothing but forgiveness and green grass ahead for you after you die," and that's the message that you hear, you are not going to think sin is something very serious at all.

You will be deluded into thinking that it's not a big deal to God and there are all kinds of forces trying to take your mind and condition it so that you won't take sin seriously ultimately all generated and energized by Satan who tries to blind the minds of the unbelieving. Scripture says, "Don't be deceived." These things are not okay, in fact, not

only are they not okay, they exclude people from the kingdom of God. You can't have it both ways. You cannot love a life of sin unrepentantly and simultaneously belong to the kingdom of God. Those two things are mutually exclusive. That's what Paul is saying.

Look over at Galatians, just the next book to the left from Ephesians, Galatians 5:19. Scripture warns us. Scripture pleads with us. Scripture commands us. Galatians 5:19 says, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Paul says, "I have warned you about this in the past, I'm warning you again, don't be deceived. You're straying away from what you need to be thinking." Understand that God's kingdom and the holiness of God excludes those things from being a simultaneous love of those who are saved.

What are we to make of this? And as we turn back to Ephesians 5, why is Paul saying these things to us here at this point as he pleads for the purity and the unity of the church which we have seen from Ephesians 4:1 up until this point? Why is he emphasizing it here? I'll tell you why: it's because you, brother and sister in Christ, you are vulnerable to sin. You're not yet glorified. You're not yet perfected and Paul wants you to live a holy life and sin still clings to you like it does to me and the world is skilled at making it appealing to our eyes and desires and there is nothing that is going to be presented along with it to caution you, to help you think through it all. It's just a dog whistle designed to make you mindlessly respond.

So we need help to understand. We need help to resist. We need help to turn away and here's how this helps you in that way: this text in Ephesians 5 is showing you a powerful incentive to resist and a powerful incentive to turn away; to not give in again. This text is giving you as a Christian the reason why you can turn away and you can turn away with a desire that is stronger than the temptation that presents itself to you. What is it saying? Sin – this is so important, this is so important – sin is not attractive when you think rightly about it because sin is costly. People who love sin are excluded from Christ and his kingdom and it is crucial to understand what Paul is and is not saying so that you can appropriate this rightly. Paul here is not writing with severity, even though it may seem that way. He is not saying that true Christians will never feel these temptations. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying that, in fact, it's because Christians do feel these temptations that he says it. He is not saying that Christians never sin. 1 John says, "If you say that you are without sin, you lie, you deceive yourselves and the truth is not in you." The whole reason that we claim to be Christians and that we proclaim Christ as Savior is because we're saying we're sinners and we need someone to help us. Someone to deliver us.

So, he's not setting up an impossible standard here that none of us meet and that we would just drive it deeper into the darkness and pretend like it doesn't exist and when we talk with each other and then we just turn into hypocrites. He's not trying to turn you into a hypocrite here. He's not saying that Christians won't feel these temptations. He's not

saying that Christians will never sin and we know this because he is writing to Christians. He is not suddenly in the context of writing about the purity and unity of the church, he's not suddenly injecting a note of terror to undermine everything that is comforting about what he said up to this point. We know that he's writing to Christians because he has made it plain so many times. You need to see this, that he's writing this to those who are saved and he is saying these things about sin's consequences to somehow help Christians in a way that I'll make more obvious in a moment.

Go back to the very beginning of the letter. I want you to see that he's writing to Christians just like you. Ephesians 1:1, Paul says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." He says right from the start, "Let me tell you who my audience is. I'm writing to those who know the Lord Jesus Christ. They are a saint. They are set apart by God. They belong to Christ and I'm writing to build them up and to encourage and help them." That's the framework of what he says. He's writing to Christians.

Look at chapter 2, verses 8, 9 and 10. Stay with me because all of this connects. Paul says in chapter 2, verse 8, he says, "It's by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." He's using the indicative. He says, "You're saved by faith. You're saved by grace through faith. You're his workmanship. You're created in Christ Jesus." So he's writing as an apostle to those who already belong to Christ and if you belong to Christ, you can never be lost.

Look at chapter 4, verse 32. I'm skipping over other passages that would make this point about who his audience is. We come into more of the near context rather than the remote context of the beginning of the letter. Paul says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." "You're a Christian," he says, "God has had grace on you. God in Christ has forgiven you." And yet he tucks in this warning about the eternal consequences of sin.

Look at verse 7 of chapter 5, just after these warnings about exclusion from the kingdom of Christ, Paul says, "Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light."

What's my point? My point is that he's writing before and after you see that he's writing to Christians like you and me and yet, he is describing the severe consequences of sin and says that people like this have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. How are we to connect these things? Well, the fact that he says these things, here's something that I think will encourage you, the fact that Paul feels the need writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he feels the need to say things on sexual immorality and greed and vulgar talk. It's obvious that he's not writing for no purpose; it's obvious that there was something within this body of believers that he was addressing that needed to be corrected but he's not denying their salvation as he does this. He realizes that Christians like you need help in this area. He is being, in other words, he is being realistic.

So as he says these things in verses 5 and 6 and some of you need this sweet, fresh water of encouragement to understand, Paul is not writing this to cause you to question your salvation or to cast you into despair and so do not respond to this text or respond to this message with morbid introspection if you are a Christian because that's not what this text is designed to promote. What is he saying then? What's his point? What Paul is doing here is he is showing the true colors of sin. He is helping you to peel back the superficial veneer to see the reality that lies beneath it. He's helping you look past the flashing lights of casinos that are designed to suck you into that realm of greed and robbery and theft to look past that which would attract you to see through it so that it will not be appealing to you any longer. He is writing in a way that will help you look past the sensuality that is presented right in your face on the tv screen or on your computer screen, to look past that so that you can see it for what it is and it is so crucial for you to do this. It is so crucial for you to understand it.

Paul is writing as an apostolic pastor saying, "I am here to help your soul. To promote holiness in your life and for me to do that, I need to say something very plain to you," he says as he writes. Here's how you should think about those sins. Remember the context: sexual immorality, greed, vulgar talk, vulgar language and those things seem to come in package, you get three for the price of one. But what Paul is saying is, remember he's writing to Christians. Now all of this should pull together in your mind. He is writing to Christians to help them not to drive them into despair. What is he saying? He's saying this, he says, "You need to think about those sins that attract you in this way: sin is alien to the realm of Christ." He is saying that sin is infinitely evil. Let me say it again: sin is infinitely evil. It is wicked. It is spiritually disastrous. It is a cancer. It is not what it seems to be when the pleasant temptation knocks on the door and beckons you to come.

Measure the intrinsic evil of sin by its consequences. Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden over one sin. Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." Those who love sin – watch this, get the adverb here – those who love sin unrepentantly are excluded from the kingdom of Christ. He's not talking here about Christians who are repentant and who are resisting these sins and yet find themselves caught in a struggle. That's not his point here. He is writing to build them up and strengthen them and what he's saying is he's saying, "As you're dealing with these things, realize how black and morbid they are. Learn to hate them and measure the hatred that you should have for them by the effects that they bring on those who love them."

Here's the thing: you will grow in holiness when that general principle, the general truth and reality about sin, that it excludes people from the kingdom of Christ and brings eternal judgment upon them, when that general truth about sin begins to shape your personal affections. You see sin. You think through it when your mind is clear, not when you're under the influence of the image. You think through this when your mind is clear and says, "That is connected with a dark, evil, satanic realm that leads to destruction." And it teaches you not to view the temptation in isolation, but rather you say, "Well, wait a second. What are you hiding behind yourself there, Mr. Temptation?" "Well, it's nothing. Don't look." "No, no, I'm interested. What is behind you? What are you hiding

behind the veneer that you are using to try to appeal to me?" Scripture says, "Let me interject and I'll tell you what's behind, it is utter destruction. It is exclusion from Christ. It is damnation and hell," and that's what it leads to. When you see it that way, then you say, "Do you know what? This isn't so attractive after all." You see the dagger that is hidden in the hand of temptation that is waiting to be plunged into your heart. You say, "This isn't attractive. Not only do I not want to pursue this, I want to get away from it."

So you hate it for what it produces and you learn to hate sin because of the very deceptive nature of its character. Paul says that, "Sin deceived me and therefore slew me," Romans 7. He was deceived by sin before he came to Christ and God's word opened his eyes so that he could turn from it. Beloved, let's kind of summarize this. We're saying that we hate sin. We learn to turn from it because it results in exclusion from Christ's kingdom and we realize that Paul is addressing Christians here as he speaks. Here's kind of a summary of it. You, if you're a Christian and I know that many of you are. I'm not questioning anyone's salvation as I say these things. You as a Christian, you were saved out of sin. The whole reason that anyone truly comes to Christ is they say, "I want to be free from sin." You were saved out of it. You were saved away from it. Well, now that you're a Christian, you don't want to go back and play in that filthy mud again, do you? Why would you do that? Why would you do that knowing that that is voluntarily stepping back into an evil, wicked realm that leads men to destruction and separates them from Christ? When you say that you love Christ as your preeminent affection, why would you engage that which separates other people from him? That's totally irrational. That makes no sense whatsoever and you view these things no longer with a sense of interest, but rather with a sense of revulsion, "Are you kidding me? I know where that leads. I know that people that love this end up outside the kingdom of Christ, knocking on the door, 'Lord, let us in,' and he's going to say, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" This passage is designed to put in you the fear of God and the fear of God, Proverbs says, will keep you from evil. So Paul here, as he is helping us grow in holiness, is showing us the true colors of sin and it's not the pretty neon lights of the Horseshoe Casino. It's the dark black drab of death and when you embrace that and understand it, you're going to have a stronger position to reject it and to live in the holy way that God has called you to live.

Now, there is a related perspective, another eternal perspective that will help you in purity. In purity. We said it excludes you. The nature of these sins is that they exclude people from the kingdom of Christ and to you as a believer, that should just be unthinkable. That should just be unthinkable. Christ, my most precious possession. Christ, my King. Christ, my love. Christ, my light. Christ, my Lord. To be excluded from him is unthinkable. I would rather perish. I would rather never have been born than to think that I wouldn't belong to Christ for all of eternity and you say, "Uh, well, these things do that to people. Well, I don't want anything to do with them then, because I want to belong to Christ," is the spiritual logic of it all.

Well, there is another perspective that Paul gives. It's not just exclusion from Christ's kingdom. Some people who don't care about Christ, that wouldn't even be an attraction. That wouldn't even appeal to them. That argument wouldn't matter to them because they

don't even love Christ to begin with. Well, there is more to it than that. It's not just what you miss out on, it's what you get in on, from a life of loving sin and that brings us to our second point this morning. Paul emphasizes that these sins lead to inclusion in God's wrath. Inclusion in God's wrath. You are separated from the kingdom. You're not allowed in when you're a sin lover and that leaves you with another realm, a realm that is a realm of God's wrath. Jesus said in John 3:36, you don't need to turn there but I just want to read it to you to kind of frame the discussion here. John 3:36. As we speak in these absolute terms, Scripture says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Scripture warns us repeatedly about the wrath of God and teaches us that God is a God who has anger with sinners every single day, Psalm 7. The sugar-coated, grandfatherly type of God that winks at sin and says, "All is forgiven. Just come on in. It's okay, you little knucklehead." That's a God that doesn't exist. God is holy. God is righteous and he, although the whole realm of humanity may not take his law seriously, God takes it seriously and God will vindicate his holiness against the violations of his character and of his law and Scripture teaches us that he will vindicate that by pouring out wrath on those who disobey.

So, you see, it's not just exclusion from heaven, not just exclusion from the kingdom of Christ that's at stake. Someone might not care about that so much, but what they should care about is that there is a certain wrath of God that comes on those who disobey. Look at verse 6 of Ephesians 5 now and remember, we've got to hold these things that Paul is writing to Christians even as he writes severely about these issues, we've got to hold those things in balance. There is a quivering knife's edge that we're on here as Scripture speaks to these things. Paul says in verse 6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words." He said in verse 5, "know these things with certainty." He says now in verse 6, "Know these things and let no one deceive you with empty words. Let no one come and teach you and convince you to diminish or deny the strategic importance of what I'm speaking about right here." There is a personal responsibility that each one of you carry to be discerning and to not diminish the warnings of Scripture about these things. If you deny these things, if you walk out and shrug your shoulders and say, "Hey, no big deal," your blood is on your own head. You're responsible for the consequences of that because Scripture has emphasize, said, "Know this with certainty. Let no one deceive you with empty words." You have no excuse if you walk out of this room today thinking anything differently than what Scripture has impressed upon our minds here today. For those of you that are here with tender hearts, this is written to help you.

Verse 6, Paul says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things," what things? Well, verse 5: the immorality, the impurity, the covetousness. He says, "It's because of these things. Those things that I was just writing about, it's because of those things that the wrath, of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Paul here is repeating himself, in a sense. He is making the same basic point in verse 6 that he made in verse 5, just from a slightly different perspective. He says, "Don't be misled by those who promise forgiveness without calling you simultaneously to forsake your sin." He says, "Don't be deceived by them. Don't be misled. Those who say, 'Just walk down the aisle, sign this card, raise your hand. Everybody's eyes are closed. There is no cost here,

just raise your hand and everything will be great for you for all of eternity," and then never press upon you the fact that you had to forsake sin in order to truly come to Christ. So don't be deceived by people like that. They are all around. But when someone tries to diminish or dismiss the spiritual threat of sin to you, understand that Satan himself is in front of you trying to mislead you.

You know, there are preachers whose names don't need or deserve to be spoken from a pulpit like this who say, "I just like to speak positive things. I don't want to talk on issues about the wrath of God. I just want to build people up and be positive." How can you read the word of God and stand up and in the name of God be silent about the threat of the wrath of God on sinners who are in front of you? How can you do that? I'll tell you why, it's because you're a false teacher. Scripture teaches us the truth even though it's hard to hear. Even though it confronts us and compels us to let go of those cherished sins in your life. Paul says, "Don't be misled. Those words are empty."

Look at verse 6 and put your finger on the text there that's in front of you. Paul says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words." Nothing is more empty than telling someone that they can be forgiven apart from forsaking sin. Those words are empty because they are not true but false. It's a lie so don't take the bait. Don't let yourself be inoculated against fearing God and fearing sin because someone doesn't even tell you about that. I'm telling you: you need to fear God. You need to be afraid of sin because Paul here is showing us this is serious.

Look at verse 6 with me again. Let's read it one more time to keep the text in front of us. Just look at it there with me. Let this sink deep into your heart. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon," whom? "Upon the sons of disobedience." He doesn't say the wrath of God will come on you. He doesn't say it like that because he is writing to Christians and he is writing to strengthen them in sanctification, not to undermine the whole basis of their salvation that he's been affirming throughout the entire letter. He says, "See sin for the serious thing that it is. God will judge it eternally." He says, "The people that he will judge are the sons of disobedience, those who by nature, whose nature flows from the very principle of disobedience to God. Rebellion against him. Sin flows from their nature. They embrace it. They do not mourn or repent." Paul says, "Make no mistake, that kind of character provokes the wrath of God."

Now, as he's writing to these Christians, he is not accusing them of having this kind of character themselves. He said, we saw that earlier, "God has forgiven you for Christ's sake," but that doesn't mean that you don't think through sin and realize the whole thing that it comes with. Remember, he's teaching you to hate sin here. To see its wickedness and to realize that this whole realm of sin brings forth a wrath of God upon those who love it in such a way that it becomes unthinkable for you to say, "That's what I want too as a Christian." It's unthinkable. It's inconceivable that you would love sin. That you would desire sin actively in your heart in light of what Paul says about it here. How could you knowing that people who love that sin never see the kingdom of Christ? That people who love that sin experience the eternal wrath of God on their souls? What is it in that

that appeals to you as a Christian? There's no answer to that question, is there? There is no justification for it. There is no room for it. You see, when you see that, then you've gotten Paul's point here. It is something fully alien to who you are in Christ.

What will help you to live a pure life? Connecting your mind, join these synapses of your brain together: sin with its consequences. Not sin with its immediate allure, sin with its eternal consequences. See through the temptation and realize the realm that it invokes and for the love of Christ, your love for him and his love for you, for that eternal bond of love that Christ gives to his own where he keeps them, make that eternal strong bond that which makes the other passing things unthinkable to you so that you start to retrain and recondition your heart when the temptation is presented to you. You say, "Not only is that not appealing to me, that is hateful to me because I've worked through, I've grown spiritually to see where it leads." And temptation, as we sometimes sing in one of the hymns, temptation loses its power when Christ is near.

Think about it with me, beloved, think about the man of the world who is not with us today. His love for sexual sin, his love for materialism, his filthy, her filthy tongue, is going to usher him into hell forever. It's tragic. It's eternally unthinkable and the point of this passage is: why would you as a Christian when you know that to be true, why would you even be attracted to the sins that they love that lead them to that destination? You see, this totally reorients our heart. We start to realize more of the reality of who we are. We are declared enemies of this world, not those who are trying to dabble in it. It's frightening. The results of sin are profoundly dreadful. Paul is saying, "Think differently about it so that you will turn from it."

You know, one of the questions that I wrestled with as I was preparing this message and I'm glad I had to wrestle with it because it changed the whole tone of this message. There is such a severity in what Paul says here and he's writing to Christians. You have to remind yourself of that. Why speak with such severity about exclusion from Christ's kingdom and inclusion in God's wrath. Why speak with such severity to the people of God? That was not immediately evident to me because we're not used to true pastors speaking to us this way, speaking that clearly, that sharply. Maybe I'm just reflecting on my own pastoral failures as I say that, I don't know. But here's the point: why would he speak that way to true Christians? If this is written to Christians, then why the severity? People like this are excluded from Christ's kingdom. People like this will be included in the manifestation of the wrath of God. Why would he say that? It almost seems, almost, the tension of that is great, at least it was to me, thinking how am I going to bring this to you.

Here's the point: it's not that he's saying that he thinks you're going to hell. That's not the point. He's writing to Christians. That's settled. I don't need to say that again. But it does tell you something about yourself all the same. Do you know why this warning appears right here? Do you know why it is so sharp and severe and he starts talking about the eternal consequences of sin when he's clearly writing to Christians? Do you know why? The severity of the principles is here because it gives you a sense of how much there is still a remnant of loving sin in your own heart. He has to speak clearly and emphatically

and definitively about this so that you will deal seriously with sin in your life. To realize how ugly it is so that you will stop making a little corner in the closet of your life for it. There is no room in your life to love that one pet sin. There is no room in it because that one pet sin is representative of a much greater realm that is in total opposition to being a true Christian. So you, as a Christian, should take these things to heart and let them anchor you in an irreversible commitment against sin in your life. That's why it's so severe. It's because you won't easily surrender sin, those cherished pet sins in your life, unless it's confronted directly. Unless Paul bursts into the closet with the spotlight and says, "That right there, let's shine a lot of light on that right there."

So, what can we say by way of application? Men, young and old, do not even desire that provocative woman. Understand that she is representative of a realm that leads people to hell. Proverbs says the adulterous woman is a woman, following her descends into hell. Step by step by step. If you've been in recent days entertaining the idea of, "You know, maybe I'll check that woman out or I'll check that website out." Stop. Just stop and repent and thank God for the clarity of his word that stopped you before you did that. Don't even desire that provocative woman in your heart. Realize that she is a threat to your soul.

Ladies, young women, you young teenagers that are just starting to set your pattern for the kind of woman you're going to become, don't you be that enticing woman. Don't you be that provocative seductress in your manners and in your appearance. Why would you as a Christian woman want to be a representative of a realm that has cost countless men their souls? Why would you do that if you belong to Christ? It's unthinkable, isn't it?

That woman of the world sends men and women to hell. So does the greed of casinos and the greed of lotteries. The vulgarity of Hollywood. The profane speech that some of you have to deal with at your work place. Just recognize it for what it is and say, "I don't even want that because Christ," this is the way that you think about it, this is the way that you express it and articulate it in your heart, "I don't even want to participate in that realm. I don't want to step into it. Why? Because Christ is too precious to me. To belong to Christ, to have the hope of eternal life is the most precious thing that I have and those things are sworn enemies of the most precious desire of my heart and therefore it's unthinkable."

You see, so instead of playing with sin, instead of being a Christian like this, of seeing, "How close can I get to the edge without falling in?" And the despicable question that some people ask that shows a complete lack of understanding of Scripture, "Well, how much can I sin then?" The answer to that is that sin should be so unthinkable that you don't even want to frame the question that way. No sin is acceptable in your heart. No sin is welcome because it is a symptom of a greater realm that you have fled when you came to Christ and this motivates your heart to holiness.

Christian, aren't you ready to turn away from that pet sin of yours now? Today? Aren't you willing right now to express a commitment to God that says, "God, thank you for bringing a warning to my attention that will help me pursue holiness." Won't you walk out today with that commitment in your heart? There is no other answer, is there? You

see, God is calling you to a verdict on your own life right now and you say, "Yeah, that's got to go." Perhaps in the course of this, God has convicted you that you're not even a Christian at all and you say, "I've never even thought about it this way. I've loved these sins. This is where my life is," and God is convicting you right now that you don't even belong to his kingdom. I'm trusting the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, to separate in your mind which realm you belong to because I can't tell you from here.

But if God has convicted you that for all of your religious, external appearance your heart does not belong to Christ, don't resist that conviction. Don't deny the clear word of God in order to justify yourself and to continue living a rebellious life against him. Don't do that. Would you really exclude yourself from Christ's kingdom and seal yourself under the wrath of God simply so that you can continue loving that cherished sin of yours? Why would you do that? Why would you do that? Why would you call God's word untrue? Why would you lie against God's word in order to preserve your sin when that will lead to your own destruction? Why would you do that? One thing I can tell you for sure, if that's what you do as you walk out of the door today, understand that your blood is on your own head. There is no excuse. You have been warned. You have been told. You have been shown from God's word the consequences of that sin that you love.

Let me instead, let me give you a much better alternative: humble yourself before Christ. Christ said, "I came to seek and to save the lost." He came to save sinners just like you and he convicts you of sin so that you will turn to him for mercy. He says, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Sinners just like you can come to Christ and be forgiven. Come to him today.

Let's humble our hearts before our God as we close.

Father, we thank you for your grace. We thank you that you receive sinners just like us. We pray that we might grow in holiness and that the reality of what sin is would redirect our desires toward Christ, toward holiness, toward obedience, toward love and humility. Father, we have spoken clearly, at least tried to, and we're mindful that some are still in the bondage of sin and the love of iniquity as they sit here today. Have mercy on them, Father, just like you had mercy on so many of us. Teach them to fear you and to turn from evil toward Christ that they would be included in the kingdom of Christ and excluded from the wrath of God. Have mercy on us. And for those of us that know you, Father, reassure our hearts with the wonders of your glorious peace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.