

Behaving as Believers

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[0 : 00] I would ask that you turn your Bibles this morning to Ephesians chapter 5, beginning there! in verse 3 and carrying through to verse 7. We have heard it read, but before we take the text! in hand, I want you to join me again and just mark the passage again as it strikes your ear.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness, no foolish talk or crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 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. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Therefore, do not be partners with them. Let's pray together. Father, for us this morning, prayer is not just a habit, something that we do at various times in service, but prayer is really an expression of our confidence in You, our reliance upon You, our admission of our own inability and frailty, understanding that You have bidden us to pray and to pray always. And so this morning, before I take the Word and before we as a congregation listen to the preaching that is to flow from the Word, we ask that Your Spirit would work in us to create good soil in which the Word should fall and the Spirit produce fruit. We pray that we do not leave here like we came, but that as a result of the preaching and the authority of Your Word and that which You intend to say explicitly to our heart, that we grow in our affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, and we grow in the purity and holiness of our walk, that an unbelieving world that is desperate in hope for something of significance and worth would see in our lives and in our testimony that there indeed is power in the gospel. And we ask this in Your precious name. Amen.

Our last lesson in the book of Ephesians actually picked up over there in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 1 and 2, where Paul makes a very interesting statement. He says, he's speaking to believers, and he says, now listen, you are to be imitators or you are to mimic God. That's what his point is. And the expectation, he's writing to people who he has taken three chapters to teach that really salvation is something that is spectacular, is something that can be explained in no other terms than the power and the grace of God. And as we have worked our way through the passage, one of the things that should stand out in your mind is that God intends for the life of the believer to be as significantly different as a result of the power of God as a blind man who was healed or a deaf man who could hear or a lame man who could walk. Remember over there in John when the man who had been born blind was brought to the Pharisees and they said, what happened? What happened? He said, now listen, I don't have all the details down, but I do know this. I was blind and now I can see.

[3 : 44] And we as believers are really to be walking evidence of the power of God. Do you understand that? Hey, I would rather be in heaven. How about you? I'm going to get my microphone fixed before I fire off here. I would rather be, there's nothing wrong with being here, but I'll tell you what, there's a little song that goes, heaven is a wonderful place. You know, I'm in for it. I don't mind the thought of going to heaven, but you know what? The reason I am here is because He intends for me to be a living, walking example of the power of the gospel to change people's lives. Do you understand that? That's why you're here. And so over in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul says, hey, you are to mimic God. You're to be like your dad. You're to be like dad. Then he goes on, and in verse 3, he says, now listen, we've been talking about, all right, you're supposed to be this way, but let me clarify.

Let me kind of color this in a little bit firmer and use the pencil to really make the lines clear. Sexual immorality and impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you.

And if I were to give you a one-sentence summary on the next series of verses that we're going to study, I would put it this way. The believer has no business living as an unbeliever, and apart from the evidence of the gospel's transforming power, no one should have false assurance. How's that for a one-sentence summary? Now, some of you are thinking, I'm in. Okay, here's the truth. This passage makes it clear that those of us who are his children have no business whatever acting like the unbeliever.

And then Paul goes on, and he says, and by the way, let's get this straight. If you do not evidence the transforming power of the gospel, you should not be walking around with false assurance. Well, with that in mind, let's take a look at the passage and understand, and we'll break it down into two different parts. For one, we want to talk this morning about the fact that a believer has a reminder here about being different. There in verse 3, Paul uses that little word, but, to connect what is going to follow to what has already been said. And if you work your way back just a little bit, you will remind yourself that repeatedly in the entire book, the issue of the work of Christ in salvation has been brought forward front and center as the thing that is most significant. Why is it that the believer has any hope in eternity? It's because of Christ. Why is it that the believer has the expectation of being different from his past? It is because of Christ.

[6 : 44] We see that over and over again. And not the least, over there in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 2, it says, and walk in love as Christ loved us. Now, how did he love us? What was the indication of his love? It was the cross, wasn't it? That he was willing to die for your sins on the cross and take away the curse that you had burdened with or had been burdened with and take away the judgment of God.

He saved you by his grace and through his blood. And Paul, before he steps into the six negative behaviors that he wants to be sure we understand have no place, no attraction in our life, he wants us to understand that we are different not simply because we bought in to a new system of moral behavior, but we are different because of the grace of God in our lives. It's not that we just happen to have picked up a little book that says, all right, here are the 21 things to do so you can get to heaven. That's not the deal. We were saved by the grace of God when he and his mercy found us in our despicable and hopeless condition, and he gave to us the complete forgiveness of Christ. And not only did he save us from our sins, but he also is committed to change us to be different than we were.

Do you understand that? I want you to mark this. Perhaps the thing that gives us the greatest confidence in the certainty of our eternal destiny is seeing the evidence of change now.

Does that make sense? I mean, hey, if I can't see any evidence of the transforming power of God playing itself out in my daily life, why in the world should I think that when I die, bada, bada, boom, it's all done, and I'm going to heaven? If he can't change me now, what would make me think that at some day he's going to pull it off and he's going to put it all together? It is the evidence of the transforming power of God in the life of the believer that draws attention to the power of the gospel and also gives assurance to the saint. And so I want you to understand at the very beginning, as we pick up on that little word, but, we recognize that godly Christian behavior is always linked to the power of the cross. I think it's important because we are called to be different and face it. When we think about our own enablement or our own ability, we recognize, I can't pull that off by myself. Well, the Holy Spirit goes out of his way to make it clear that the Christian life must not be separated from the grace of God, and that's what that little word but there tells us.

Behind the commands that we're going to be looking at, we'll note in just a moment that the fact is we've been called by his grace, saved by his power, transformed to be his children, enabled by his spirit. We have the spirit of God within us, and that spirit is actively engaged, helping us to be different. I want you to recognize Christians are not called to be moralizers, but they're called to be illustrators of the transforming power of God.

[10 : 01] I want you to imagine that you are sitting in a doctor's office, okay, and you are sitting out there in just a horrible, miserable, physical condition. And this is a heal-all doctor. I mean, we are highly specialized today. You know, there's a doctor for the right hand, and there's a doctor for the left hand, and yet everything's broken down into micro little parts of, well, I'm sorry, but I'll have to send you to so-and-so. How many of you figured that out? Okay. Well, this is a heal-all doctor, and in the waiting room are just an incredible bunch of really sick people. I mean, some are there, and their limbs are shriveled up, and others are blind, and you can tell that by a cane, and there are others that are just, oh, they're groaning, oh, and they're really hurting.

And the door opens up, and out walks somebody. I am so, you know, you're thinking, well, that's that's exciting. I wonder if that person works here. You know, and you're watching, and one after another, the people walk out of the office, you see them going in groaning, and you see them come out different. Now, would you want to see the doctor? Yeah! You and I are to be tangible evidence of the power of grace. That's the way it's supposed to be. And in order to help us be different, guess what we have? We have the power of the Spirit of God who works in us to help us grow. Now, Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, understood that this church was having trouble with some of their past behaviors. And so, he says, now I want you to understand, you got to be different.

So, let's mark the things that he talks about. The believer has no reason or no business being involved in immorality. Look at that word that is used there, but sexual immorality. And when Paul wrote these words to the church at Ephesus, understand that Ephesus was kind of the, I wouldn't say the epicenter, but it was one of the cities in the ancient world that was well known for its immoral behavior. Everywhere you turn, immorality had its place. And in the past, I've talked about the characteristic of the ancient world. And when I hear people tell me that things are worse today than they've ever been, my thought is this, is that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And guess what? We're probably about as bad as the people were back then, probably not much worse, but right there in the circle, right? And Ephesus was a foul, vile, despicable, immoral city. And Paul recognized that some of the believers living in that culture were being caught up in it. And he says, listen, you who've been saved by the grace of God have no business being involved in immorality. Now, I want you to recognize that when Paul wrote that, he was writing to people that were no less tempted by immorality than we are today. We have the internet, we have entertainment, we have Walmart. You can go to Walmart and what happens? You see people, well, winter's coming, thankfully, but people dress like they do. I mean, it's like, what are you going to Walmart looking like that for? Buy that stuff and take it home for your husband. Don't come here, okay? And Paul says, listen, you who are the believers and have been blessed by Christ have no business at all being involved in immorality. In imitating God and living like Christ, sexual immorality has no place whatever in the saint's life. And the fact, sadly, that immorality is as pervasive as it is in the church today is a testament to several different things that I want you to consider carefully. For one, too many are carrying the name of Christ but don't know Christ. Do you understand that? There are a lot of people who make the profession, pick up the vocabulary, they grow up in a Christian home, blah, blah, blah. But really, when it comes down to it, the power of the gospel has never been exacted or demonstrated in their life, and they haven't been delivered from their past. They're still under bondage to the old habits because they're an old person. I think also, sadly, there are those who are living as believers incredibly conflicted and miserable lives in the shadow of destructive sin. I want you to recognize that sin can get its roots into the life of the believer, but let me tell you something. Whereas the unbeliever can just keep on cranking and doing the things that have always been part of his life, the believer cannot persist in unrepentant, stubborn, persistent sin. How many of you understand what I just said?

If they're your kids, they can't get away with it. Am I right? Yesterday, I had the privilege of babysitting. I said 10 munchkins. And there were a couple instances where a couple of the munchkins, unnamed, decided that they would test my intent. How's that?

[15 : 31] I said, I want you to do this. And they decided that, well, whose pastor to talk to me? And here's what I did. Soft voice. I said, if you don't behave me, slow voice, I will take you to your parent. The child, in fact, both children had epiphanies. You know what an epiphany is? It was like, the idea of me walking them into choir practice and saying, here, this little one needs your attention. What the child knew was that mommy and daddy are the ones who get it done.

Am I right? I mean, a pastor doesn't have to do that kind of thing in the hallway or the lobby. He just says, I'm going to take you to your parent. And if you are God's child, you can't get away with it. I want you to understand as we think about this issue of immorality, and that's a problem. The greatest solution to overcoming this sin is not just moving the computer to a central location in the house or turning off the TV. Those are not bad steps. The greatest solution to sin is having a broken humility before God and others and an incessant pleading that he will do whatever it is to break sin's hold in your life. Do you understand that? God, I don't want to be this way.

I am willing to let you do whatever it takes to break this sin's hold in my life. Second, there in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 3, it says that the believer has no business being a corrupting influence in any way or anything. The Greek word that Paul used is a word that talks about something that is

degrading, that's defiling, that's infecting. The word actually was used to refer to the pus that is in an abscess. That's pretty gross, isn't it? I mean, it's something you know that by virtue of that pussiness, it's going to puss you up. You got it? It's going to make a mess. And so, Paul says, you as believers have no business being a corrupting influence on other people. Now, think with me back over to Matthew chapter 23, verse 27, and just kind of think about it. Remember, Jesus said, you Pharisees, you're like whitewashed sepulchers. On the outside, you're pretty good. You look nice.

You smile in the lobby, but inside, what's going on? Your heart is an absolute pile of corrupting, worm, maggot-filled flesh. You are a stinking mess.

[18 : 13] Jesus was making the point that, you know, what's inside sometimes can be pretty corrupting and pretty harmful. And he wants us to understand that here were the Pharisees, proud. Oh, on the outside, they were dressed up, and they looked pretty good, but inside, their lives were absolutely trashy.

And he pointed out that it was what was inside that was having effect on other people. Their bitter, unforgiving, judgmental, critical spirit actually ended up infecting all who came into contact with them. Now, interestingly, as I was thinking about this, I have to tell you that I think about our culture, and when we talk about things that are corrupting, I think some of the things that we may not recognize as being corrupting is getting caught up in the political culture of our day. How many of you understand that Jesus will not come in here on Air Force One?

Huh? Let me tell you a little story. Years ago, Ronald Reagan was invited to a prayer breakfast that was put on by a large group of evangelicals, and what was his name? Chuck Colson. Yeah, he was the one who choreographed this. No, this happened later. But anyway, he was involved in it, and he noticed, and here's what Ronald Reagan did. Towards the end of the speech, he recited the gold standard for evangelical thinking. He closed off his little speech with John 3, 16. And guess what those evangelical pastors did? They erupted into praise. They burst to their feet. They were clapping and hooting, and they were just, they were ecstatic that Ronald Reagan knew a passage of Scripture and recited it to them. Is our country substantially better today? No. And I can tell you this, and listen to me carefully, Christians need to be more involved in kingdom work than political work. You will never change people's hearts by legislation. And I would encourage you to put much more of your affection and interests onto things that are related to the power of the gospel than to any political party.

I think, frankly, that is a corrupting thing in our day. Look at another statement that Paul makes. He says, listen, the believer has no business being covetous.

As I was praying earlier this week and again this morning and thinking through the list of things that Paul identifies here, I thought to myself, well, why don't you ask people to put their finger on the problem that they have in this list of six things? I remember reading once that Charles Spurgeon, a great pastor from a previous generation, he said that in all his years of ministry, he never once had a person come into his office and say, pastor, pastor, I am struggling. I am burdened. I am overwhelmed by my sinful covetousness. Paul says, listen, covetousness has no place in the life of the believer. And the covetous spirit always wants more. Isn't that right? It replaces the sufficiency and the significance of God with things that ultimately cannot satisfy. Do we need to buy some things? Yes.

[21 : 57] But how many times have you ever picked up a catalog and after you were finished perusing it, you discovered things that you couldn't live without? Or you've watched an advertisement.

There is no accident that the advertising community spends so much money trying to persuade you of things that are desperately important to you. And by the way, I've learned a little something. When you Google something that you are interested in, later on, whatever the little browser is that you happen to use, it will throw up on the right-hand side things exactly related to that.

How many of you figured that out? It's called cookies. Do you follow that? And they're tracking what your interests are. And so go ahead, look over on the right-hand side and ask yourself, so when did MSNBC or Fox News or CNN ever think that Tim Kroyer was interested in Cabela's?

You follow that? Now listen to me carefully. A covetous person is deceived into believing that having something more will provide the satisfaction that only God will provide.

[23 : 17] Listen to what Paul has to say about covetousness. Over there in verse 5, at the very end, he says, be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or pure or who is covetous, that

is an idolater. So what we want to recognize is Paul says that covetousness is actually idolatry.

Any of you here have a little stone Buddha in your house? Is there anybody here that has an idol, Shiva or Ganesh or Kali? I could name a bunch of them from India. None of you have those things, am I right? Okay. I heard a person from Eastern Europe saying America is the only place where \$30,000 cars sit outside in the weather while about \$15 worth of junk fill the garage.

When we struggle with covetousness, listen, we leave behind memories that our children can only solve with roll-off dumpsters.

Go ahead and ask your children. So what would you like me to dispose of before I leave? And you know what they're going to say? What are they going to say? Most everything that's in there.

Okay. When we live with a persistent dissatisfaction with what we have, we end up with more toys than we wouldn't know what to do with. And here's a little test to tell whether or not you're into the toy thing. When you decide to Christmas shop for your children, when you're kind of uncertain about what you could conceivably buy that they don't have yet, guess what it's telling you? Well, you probably have it all already. Or when you decide that it's clothes that you need to shop for and you go into the closet and you think, oh, thank God for Kidney Foundation. You know what? It may not be that you have outgrown all of those things as you have disciplined yourself and lost all that weight, but you're just thinking, you know what? That sweater is about three years old.

[25 : 28] It's time. You know what? You follow me? I don't want to be too convicting here, right?

The believer has no business having a mouth that is filthy, foolish, or crude. Look there at verse four. Let there be no filthiness or foolish talk or crude joking. The ancient world, a lot like ours, they prized a dirty joke, crude innuendos, and comic disrespect that was just prevalent back then is also prevalent today. The believer who has been saved by the grace of Christ and draws breath for the purpose of making God look good has no business watching the filth that's on TV today or snickering when other people in the office tell those jokes. If you're one of the persons who actually when one of those crude jokes gets pulled off, you have to turn away so you don't expose what your heart's really like, the problem is really inside. Isn't that true? Because Paul says these things have nothing to do with who we are by a grace. Mark what Paul has to say about these things, beloved, and I think it's important. Look at what it says there in verse five at the end. It says, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Does the believer struggle and fall into sin? What's the answer? Yes, yes, the believer does. But when sin becomes the characteristic behavior of your life, it's the recurring and normal pattern for where you are. Paul says this, you're deceiving yourself if you think you're really a blood-bought child and these things actually characterize your walk. He says you have no inheritance.

One of the things that would be a qualifier and a caution in relationship to that is this, and I went, I already alluded to it a little bit, but I'll come back to it. Can the believer continue in sin for a season? What's the answer?

Everybody here could nod their head and say, sadly enough, that may happen, but what will I tell you happens when the believer persists in sin? Listen, the Father will not let it go. Aren't you glad? How many of you here are glad that the Father will not let you go? And by the way, listen to me. Listen, this is important. Once you've messed with the Father and you've learned that He won't let you go, guess what the good side of that is?

As you begin kind of drifting over into that attitude or that behavior, He kind of taps you on the shoulder and says, do you want to do this again? How many of you understand that? And what goes through your mind?

[28 : 21] Huh? Oh, no. I've got enough scar tissue at 65 that when my little perverse attitude begins to slip away, the Spirit of God kind of taps me on the shoulder and says, Tim, you want another round?

I said, no, no, no. And I humble myself and let God do whatever needs to be done at the moment. Now, look. We're told what we ought not to be, but let's talk about reasons for being different. You look there in verse 5, the last part, it talks about not having part of the kingdom of God, but look at 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. That's not us. So back up just a little bit and mark what it says over there in verse 3. Why is it that we are to be different? Look at verse 3, because you are saints. The reason that we're to have nothing to do with the sins that Paul has categorized here is because we're saints. Now, what is a saint? Is a saint someone who has reached a state of beatification because the college of cardinals voted him into that position? And the answer is no,

no. A saint is someone who has been declared righteous because he has received the imputed righteousness of Christ attached to his account. And a saint is someone who's been saved. And I would assume that every one of you here who are the children of God know that you're saints. And as a saint, you have no business acting like that. I want you to understand that since being a saint is the work of Christ, it follows that a life dominated by sin is a contradiction of spiritual logic. Does that make sense? Hey, if you are his child, you got no business doing these things. The saint has no business staying in the hog pen. That's where his life used to be. And to keep on wandering back to the hog pen and stepping down into the mud and kind of settling into it and say, oh man, that feels good.

You know, you better be checking what's really going on in your heart. Because the saint and the hog pen don't have the old affinity, don't have the old affection. And when mud gets on the saint, there is a pathological desire to get it off. Right? We have a little dog.

And I hate to say it, but the dog has to go outside on a regular basis. And I had been kind of prizing or priding myself in the fact that now that we've had the dog for almost one year, I have brought none of the outside into the outside. Am I doing this cryptically enough that most people don't understand what I'm saying?

[31 : 20] I was pretty proud of the fact that I hadn't stepped in anything that would cause a problem. But the other day it happened. Walking into the house and, you know, it was on my right shoe. And so, you know, the full pace, every six foot, I'd put down a little marker.

I'm sitting on the couch, threw my right foot up, and suddenly, I knew what the problem was. Do you follow that?

And you know what I did immediately? Number one, I took my shoe off. I mean, I didn't want to do the six foot business anymore. You know, it's like walking to the sink or wherever.

I then threw the shoes outside. I got another pair of shoes. And then I began working on the six foot increments across the floor. You know, I'm cleaning all that stuff up. Why? Because I don't like what that was.

Hey, do believers sometimes step in it? What's the answer? Yes. Yes. But when the believer steps in it, the believer says, Oh, Lord, that's not me anymore.

[32 : 33] I don't want to be that way. The believer is broken by that. The believer hates that sin. And if you're sitting here as a believer, you must love the sweetness of your deliverance.

And there has to be a desire in you not to be there where you used to be. Can I tell you that for a believer to listen to what their past used to be like and not have their soul kind of lifted up to think, that's what I've been delivered from, there's something wrong.

Because for you who know Christ, at every moment when you are reminded of the power of the gospel that has delivered you from sin, there has to be within you a desire to say, That's my Jesus. And he saved me. He's working in me. I'm not who I will be someday, but I'm not who I was. So as you're sitting here this morning, let me recognize with you that as you listen to the preaching of the word of God, he's doing something.

There are some of you who are sitting here this morning and you're reliving the gospel power. Do you understand what I'm saying? As you think about what God has saved you from and what Christ has given you victory over, your heart's like saying, Man, that's good.

[34 : 11] Every time we hear of the power of God to deliver the sinner, the saint has a heart that rises up and says, That's my Jesus.

There are some of you sitting here this morning with lukewarm hearts. You've lost your first love. And that thought of the gospel's power to save and of Christ is not so sweet because you've allowed other things to creep in and rob you of that joy.

I want to tell you something. Mark this to be true. The lover of your soul is jealous. Write that down. The lover of your soul is jealous.

And he will not bide being set aside. Now, is it wise to tempt the holy God and our Savior?

What's the answer? Oh, no. And so if you're sitting here with a cold and indifferent heart, I would plead with you that this morning, you who know Christ, and I've lost my first love, that you cry out to God and say, Listen, please deal with me.

[35 : 22] I don't want to stay here. There are some of you sitting here this morning that are still in the chains and the affliction of your sin. You do not know Christ. You do not know Christ.

Do you know what? Here's the truth. God sent his son into the world to pay the penalty for sin, and he died on the cross in your place.

And what it says in 2 Corinthians 5, that God treated him as a sinner in your place so you can receive the full forgiveness for all of your sins, and you can have complete forgiveness and joy and a sweet relationship, and there is nothing that can compare with that.

And how do you get that? Do you know what it takes? Do you know what it takes? It takes having the humility to say, That's me, and that's what I need.

And I am done with the mess that is my life. Do you know that more time will only make it messier? Can I say that again slowly? More time will only make it messier.

[36 : 38] And if the Spirit of God is convicting you this morning that you desperately need Christ, now is the time to humble yourself and cry out for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's close in prayer.

Without anyone looking around, I want to ask you a couple questions.