

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (28-7-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 5:3-7

Additional reading: Colossians 3:1-11; 4:2-6

Christian Response to Moral Situation

Introduction

The Apostle is describing how the Christian should live, and now looks at the seamy side of life, unpleasant things, earthly things. This was necessary teaching for the Christians then, and no less so today. Our world is very similar to Paul's.

In the last section he dealt with self-sacrifice, but now the issue is self-indulgence. Love that leads to lust, a virtue turned to a vice. From speaking of Christ's sacrificial love, to speaking of love's perversion in sexual misconduct and abuse. The Gospel has important things to say on every area of our lives, and we need to know how it applies when we are faced with uncleanness and sordidness of every day life and conversation, and the attitude of this world.

Moral Condition of Everyday Life

The Apostle paints a very frank and honest picture of every day life which Christians have to meet, and from which, especially in Paul's readers' case, they were rescued by the Gospel. He gives a list of things which prevailed in people's lives and conversation.

πορνεία και ακαθαρσία πασα Fornication and all uncleanness or sexual immorality and any kind of impurity. Every kind of sexual sin – all sexual activity outside of God-ordained context of loving marriage with its permanence and commitment.

πλεονεξία Covetousness and greed. Either in broadest meaning, or sexually covetous and indulgent at expense of others. C.f. covet neighbour's wife (Exodus 20:17). Also John's words about the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes as description of worldliness (1 John 2:16).

αισχρητης Filthiness, obscenity.

μωρολογία Foolish talking. Senseless talk which cheapens a man. Sort of thing which drunken man or fool utters. Not referring to small talk about the weather or the family, but talk which has no value or profit in it, talking for the sake of it.

ευτραπεία Coarse joking, quick repartee which turns innocent remark into something unclean. Quick to see double meanings.

In summary, uncleanness in act, talk and thinking – which is the source of all. Then Paul underlines the seriousness of it by showing God's reaction – immoral people, unclean people, or covetous people – **such a man is an idolater** (Ephesians 5:5). They put something else in the supreme place which God ought to have, and so they

will not have any inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ. The people were not to be deceived about this – early Gnostics taught that the sins of the body were not important. Today, many preach universalism – that all will be saved. These are the “empty words” Paul warns against in v.6. They may not be spoken with vindictive, selfish passion, but they are spoken with a settled hostility to the holy God who is against any form of sin, in word, thought or deed. Then comes Paul’s emphatic statement **God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient**. Partially displayed in this life, but more fully at day of judgement and eternity.

Lest anyone should become despondent at this point, and think “then there is no hope for any of us”, let us for a moment recall Paul’s teaching elsewhere about God’s salvation, about the possibilities of forgiveness and a new heart and a new life. The Corinthians were guilty of all these sins, and many more, but Paul said to them, **Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? ... And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Someone else may say, “But Christians can fall”. Sadly they can, we only have to cite David’s lapse into adultery. But Paul here is talking about those who deliberately, unashamedly, proudly, boastingly live life like this – it is characteristic of their whole life, and they are comfortable living that way. If the Christian lapses, he will feel ashamed, unhappy, ill at ease, uncomfortable and will turn to the Lord acknowledging his failure.

But to return to the main argument – Paul is underlining the seriousness of sexual sin – in deed, word, intention and thought. Characteristic of paganism, then and now. Ancient world treated sexual immorality so lightly. Relationships before and outside of marriage were not considered sin. In fact, it was expected, for it was unreasonable to expect a young man to be chaste, c.f. Roman and Greek authors. The new temple in Athens to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was built with the profits from prostitution. Paul’s teaching would have seemed so strange. Chastity was one new virtue which Christianity introduced into the world. Christianity wrought a moral miracle in so doing.

Similar situation today with overthrow of Christian faith and now moral standards, the so-called “sexual revolution”.

Taken from Faith Mission magazine 1996: “Descending Definitions”:

What used to be called “disgusting” is now called “adult”.

What used to be called “modest” is now called “sexually hung up”.

What used to be called “chastity” is now called “neurotic inhibition”.

What used to be called “self-indulgence” is now called “self-fulfilment”.

What used to be called “moral irresponsibility” is now called “being freed up”.

What used to be called “Christian discipline” is now called “unhealthy repression”.

What used to be called “ethical anarchy” is now called “liberation”.

What used to be called “living in sin” is now called “meaningful relationship”.

What used to be called “perversion” is now called “alternative life-style”.

What used to be called “depravity” is now called “creative self-expression”.

Wherever we go we are aware of non-Christian standards and life –style. Paraded in newspapers, films, TV, adverts, conversations. So hard to live a Christian life in this day and age.

Christian Response to this Situation

Basically three responses to this situation. (1) Let it not even be named among you. (2) It is not fitting for God's people. (3) Thanksgiving is what should characterize us.

We should not harbour a negative view about sex. We should be able to talk seriously about a very important and beautiful aspect of life. Dealing with one of God's gifts. We should not be afraid or ashamed to give thanks for something which is God's good gift for the right place. It should not be debased or cheapened. To be seen in context decreed by God – life long union of man and woman in the sanctity of marriage bond.

Being unchaste, committing sexual sin, undermines and violates the uniqueness and bonds of marriage, destroys something of the family, and leads to suffering, grief and untold unhappy consequences. And what is funny about that? Is a broken marriage, an unwanted pregnancy, a disease, something to laugh about? Why is this so often the topic of the world's humour? There are two indications of a person's character – what makes them laugh, and what makes them weep. The Christian sees nothing humorous in obscenity, perversion of God's purposes, and the ruin of people's lives, and the cheapening of what is pure and sacred.

And there is no question of the Christian participating in these sins. It is not fitting, not proper, and not consistent with being a Christian. Entirely out of place. The Christian is a saint – God has separated him from the world, saved him, caused him to consecrate his life to Him, summoned him to a life of holiness and Christ-likeness, to fulfil His purposes. Therefore it would be quite inappropriate and out of the question for him to walk contrary to God's declared will about sex, marriage, life-long commitment. Neither can he be casual and unclean in conversation and what he laughs at, and the jokes he makes. Don't let impure thoughts get a foothold in your mind – they can soon overcome.

At all times the Christian's main concern is his relationship with God. Called out of sin and **rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves** (Colossians 1:13). Every aspect of his life is to be controlled by God. The Christian will always strive for what would please and glorify his God. **Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good** (Titus 2:14). God's main concern for us is not that we should be happy, but that we should be holy.

Instead of impurity, which is self-centred, the Christian's life should be marked by the giving of thanks, which is God-centred. If the world is characterized by vulgarity, the Christian is characterized by thanksgiving. The Christian lives life in an atmosphere of gratitude. **Give thanks in all circumstances** (1 Thessalonians 5:18), for all loveliness and beauty of God's gifts – and that includes sex. The Christian life is not to be dull and morbid. The joy and happiness in the life should be seen in our

conversation. Our sense of humour flows naturally from our joy in the Lord, and is never vulgar or ribald or harmful. Always remembering who we are and what God has done for us, our conversation should be thoughtful, helpful, and people should feel better for having spoken to us. Conversation – worthwhile, wholesome, clean, thoughtful, profitable, **full of grace, seasoned with salt** (Colossians 4:6).

Conclusion

Once again we see how up to date and relevant the Bible is. Sex is an everyday matter of speech and humour, and the attitude of the people of Christ towards it should be utterly different from that of the people of the world. How is that possible? Only by consecrating the tongue and lips.

*“Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only for my king;
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.*

*“Wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.
That I may speak...
A word in season, as from thee,
To weary ones in needful hour.
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show.”
Francis Ridley Havergal.*