

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON EIGHTY-THREE)

“DO NOT BE DECEIVED”

EPHESIANS 5:1-7

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

We have been saying that in **Ephesians** chapter **5**, the Apostle Paul continues the exhortations he had begun in chapter **4**, concerning how believers should live out their faith.

In verses **1** and **2**, he encourages the believers in Ephesus to imitate God since they are His beloved children. In verse **3** and **4**, he transitions to condemn sexually immoral action and speech, as being totally inappropriate for persons who have “**put off**” the “**old man**” and “**put on**” the “**new man.**”

In verse **5** Paul writes, “*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*”

The **New American Standard Bible** furnishes the following translation: “*For this you know with certainty, that no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*”

In this verse, Paul makes it clear that persons who **deliberately and persistently** live in sin, have no share in the kingdom of God. He reminds the believers in Ephesus that they themselves are absolutely convinced of the truth of this solemn conclusion. He says, “*For this ye know.*” The translation of the phrase by the **New American Standard Bible** is a more faithful rendering of the Greek: “*For this you know with certainty.*”

The phrase “*know with certainty,*” is actually two verbs in the Greek. The first is **oida**, which refers to absolute, positive knowledge, knowledge beyond a shadow of doubt.

The second verb is **ginóskó**: (**ghin-occe’ko**), which refers to knowledge gained by experience.

Paul uses two verbs, both of which speak of knowing, to remind the believers in Ephesus of what they already knew beyond a shadow of doubt, based on their own experience that, “*no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*”

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that Paul is saying here in no uncertain terms that a person's eternal destiny is directly related to his or her life-style! **He is not arguing that a person's sins cause him or her to lose his or her salvation. He is saying rather, that a lifestyle of unrighteous, unholy behaviour is a reflection that one was never regenerated or saved!** His exhortation deals with the habitual practice of sin, and not the occasional act of sin.

Brothers and sisters, are we persuaded beyond a shadow of doubt based on our own experience, that *“no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God?”* We, like the Ephesian believers, need to be absolutely sure that this is indeed the case! We must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

In **Galatians 6:7-8** Paul writes,

7 Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows,

8 because the person who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

(The New English Translation)

Here me my beloved brothers and sisters, if there has not been a significant change in our life-style, if there is no desire for God, or for the things of God, then there is reason for us to seriously consider whether we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, whether we have truly been born again, whether we are indeed a new creation in Christ! **We are not speaking here of perfection, but rather of the general direction of our lives.**

In respect of this verse, **Ray Stedman** made the following comments:

"Notice that he takes up the same three categories he refers to in Verse 3—immorality, impurity, and covetousness. As we have seen, [covetousness] here is not greed for money, as it is frequently in the Scriptures, but is 'passion, greed for another's body, desire to possess another for exploitative use.' Any man, he says, who practices immorality, impurity or body-greed—and he puts it flatly and bluntly—has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God! In other words, sexual looseness is incompatible with Christian faith because continuance in it reveals an unregenerate heart. Notice how he reinforces this. 'Be sure of this,' he says, and he goes on in the next verse, 'Do not let anyone deceive you about this.' You cannot be a Christian and knowingly, deliberately practice sex outside of marriage, for the one cancels out the other.

Oh, I know a Christian can do these things. God knows, the record is all too clear in this regard. Even in the Scriptures we have the account of David who, after years as a believer, as a man after God's own heart, fell into the sin of adultery and took another man's wife. We have other accounts of it in Scripture, and there are plenty of modern examples. How often the Christian world is startled and shocked by some prominent pastor or Christian leader who succumbs in this area and stumbles and falls into sexual immorality. I know this can happen. **But the point the apostle is making is that no professed Christian can do this repeatedly, certainly not defiantly, or shamelessly, and really be a Christian.** The true Christian, if he does fall into this kind of folly, will abhor himself and loathe his sin and will repent and turn back and forsake it. The man who defends it, and who justifies and excuses this kind of activity, or even glories in it, as some do as a mark of their personal liberty or freedom is, in the light of this statement of the Apostle Paul's, not a Christian despite all his profession, and he never has been a Christian."

Paul says, that “*no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*” Brothers and sisters, these sins describe who we **were**, before we were regenerated. They should not be descriptive of who we **are now!** We have come out the lifestyle characterized by these sins, and we must not forget where that lifestyle is headed in regard to our eternal destiny!

Let us consider the following related passages of Scripture, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

*9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived!** The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals,*

10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

11 Some of you once lived this way. 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.

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And although you were dead in your offenses and sins,

2 in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience,

3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest...

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us,

5 even though we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved!—

6 and he raised us up together with him and seated us together with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

4 We know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you,

5 in that our gospel did not come to you merely in words, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (surely you recall the character we displayed when we came among you to help you).

6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, when you received the message with joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, despite great affliction.

7 As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

8 For from you the message of the Lord has echoed forth not just in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place reports of your faith in God have spread, so that we do not need to say anything.

9 For people everywhere report how you welcomed us and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath.

1 Peter 4:1-4

1 So, since Christ suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same attitude, because the one who has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin,

2 in that he spends the rest of his time on earth concerned about the will of God and not human desires.

3 For the time that has passed was sufficient for you to do what the non-Christians desire. You lived then in debauchery, evil desires, drunkenness, carousing, drinking bouts, and wanton idolatries.

4 So they are astonished when you do not rush with them into the same flood of wickedness, and they vilify you.

5 They will face a reckoning before Jesus Christ who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.

Brothers and sisters, if we were to take an inventory of our spiritual lives in respect of the last few months, what would we discover? Could we describe our life as one which is trending “upward,” or headed in a Godward direction? Are we diligently pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ? Are we consistently living above sin? Is our love for God and for each other increasing? Is our love for sin decreasing? In other words, are we generally making progress, notwithstanding occasional sinful lapses? How is it with us? When last have we taken our spiritual temperature?

Paul encourages believers to periodically examine themselves. In **2 Corinthians 13:5** he writes, *“Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless, indeed, you fail the test!”* (New English Translation)

Commenting on **Ephesians 5:5**, the American theologian, and radio minister, **J. Vernon McGee**, made the following remarks: "It is clearly understood that the unregenerate man who practices these sins has no portion in the kingdom of Christ and God. If a professing Christian practices these sins, he immediately classifies himself. No matter what his testimony may be on Sunday or what position he may have in the church, such a person is saying to the lost world that he is not a child of God."

In verse **6** Paul writes, "*Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*"

The **New American Standard Bible** translates the verse as follows: "*See that no one deceives you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*"

The sense of this negative command is very well expressed in the **Amplified Bible**: "*Let no one deceive you with empty arguments [that encourage you to sin], for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience [those who habitually sin].*"

Regarding this verse **John MacArthur** writes the following: "No Christian will be sinless in this present life, but it is dangerously deceptive for Christians to offer assurance of salvation to a professing believer whose life is characterized by persistent sin and who shows no shame for that sin or hunger for the holy and pure things of God."

The word "*deceive*" is the translation of the Greek word **apataó**: (**ap-at-ah'-o**), which means "to lead astray, mislead, cheat, delude, beguile, seduce into error." The idea is to cause someone to have misleading or erroneous views concerning the truth.

The word is in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuation of an action already taking place. It is apparent that some of

the Ephesian believers were justifying their continuance in a sinful, immoral lifestyle by allowing themselves to be deceived into thinking that they could do so and still profess to be saved! Paul is warning them, “Stop allowing yourselves to be deceived!”

John Piper comments as follows:

“What does the deceiver say? Who do you think it is today that does what the deceiver does in verse 6: *‘Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience?’*”

I would answer that the deceiver is the person today who says that gospel obedience can’t be motivated by these words in verses 5 and 6. The deceiver is the person who says that the preaching of wrath belongs only to the law, and produces only legalistic fear.

This is not true. If it were true, Paul wouldn’t warn his readers — professing Christians — about the danger of falling short of the kingdom and falling under the final wrath of God. The point of introducing the wrath of God and the danger of missing out on the kingdom of Christ is not to enslave people to unwilling and burdensome obedience. The point is this: **evangelical obedience from a renewed mind and a heart brimming with joy and thanksgiving is not optional.**

Jesus said the same thing in **John 3:3**: *‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’* This kind of warning is not a summons to legalistic fear and slavish, cowering obedience. Just the opposite! Both Jesus and Paul are warning us that getting rid of our legalistic fear, and getting rid of our slavish efforts to obey God, is infinitely serious. **They are saying that it is a matter of eternal importance whether you are really renewed in the spirit of your mind, and whether you are really born again, and really full of gratitude and joy and freedom in your obedience.**

When God reveals his wrath, his intention is not to contradict or hinder the gospel motives of faith and freedom and joy. Just the opposite: the revelation of his wrath is the intensification of his demand that we trust in his mercy and delight in his grace."

"*Vain*" or "*empty*" words refer to arguments that are devoid of truth and which are therefore worthless. They may sound plausible and even wise, but they are without any genuine spiritual content. In the context of this verse, these arguments represent false excuses for sins.

In **Jude 3** and **4**, Jude writes about the persons who are satanically inspired to deceive others with empty arguments. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

3 Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

*4 For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men **who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil** and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

The vast majority of persons in modern society are adopting an increasingly lenient and tolerant attitude toward sexual immorality. They argue that the gratification of sexual appetites is needful and beneficial, and that to repress these appetites is harmful. They say that morals are entirely a matter of the culture in which we live, and that since pre-marital, extra-marital, homosexual and lesbian sex are increasingly accepted in our culture, they ought not to be denounced. Unfortunately, some of the leading "empty argument" spokespersons are persons who claim to be Christians some of whom hold prominent positions in their church.

My brothers and sisters, I appeal to you, do not be deceived, because the Word of God informs us that *“because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”*

It is because of immorality, impurity, covetousness and idolatry that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

The renowned Princeton theologian of the nineteenth century, **Charles Hodge** explains that the wrath of God is a fearful expression “because the wrath of **man** is the disposition to inflict evil, **limited by man’s feebleness**; whereas the wrath of **God** is the determination to punish in a being **without limit** either as to His presence or power.”

This wrath, Paul says, comes upon the children of disobedience. The wrath of God against these sins is **now** manifested in His dealings with those who commit them. He withdraws His restraining influence from them, and finally He gives them over to a reprobate mind.

We will conclude our Lesson with comments from **Ligonier Ministries**, on the verses we have considered this evening:

“John Calvin, in his commentary on **Ephesians 5:3-5**, offers the church a helpful reminder of the difference between repentant sinners and those who obstinately continue in their transgressions. He writes: ‘When men have repented, and thus give evidence that they are reconciled to God, they are no longer the same persons that they formerly were. But let all fornicators, or unclean or covetous persons, so long as they continue such, be assured that they have no friendship with God, and are deprived of all hope of salvation.’ There is a difference between those who profess Christ, seek to mortify the flesh, and occasionally sin, and those who profess Christ but celebrate their sin. The latter group — the impenitent — has no share in the Lord’s kingdom. On the other hand, Jesus receives with open arms those who hate their evildoing, even if they sometimes fall (**1 John 1:8-9**).

Let us always remember this when we consider Scripture's teaching on the fate of the sexually immoral. **Only 'the sons of disobedience' receive the wrath of God (Ephesians 5:6)**. Sons typically bear many of the physical and personality traits of their parents; thus, the sons of disobedience have their father's nature. They reflect their lineage consistently, relishing their sin, even demanding that others approve of it. These individuals show no desire for repentance, and they have no place in Christ's body. Converted people, however, have '*become children of God*' (**John 1:12**). They are '*partakers of the divine nature*' (**2 Peter 1:4**) and are being slowly conformed to it over their lifetimes. Such individuals resist temptation, hate it when they sin, and never seek approval of their transgressions. We gladly welcome these men and women in our churches, for they are recovering sinners just like us.

Today, many churches look the other way when there are cohabitating unmarried couples in the congregation. Entire denominations consecrate impenitent homosexuals as pastors. These are examples of those who attempt to deceive the church 'with empty words' — words devoid of gospel truth (**Ephesians 5:6**). They are engaged in a deadly business, providing false assurance to many and rejecting Jesus' demand for faith and repentance (**Mark 1:14-15**). If these leaders continue in their lies, they have a dreadful judgment awaiting them (**James 3:1**)."