

Don't Be Deceived About Sexual Immorality

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Well, we are once again carrying on with our study in Ephesians. Ephesians 5 is where we're going to be today. Ephesians 5:3-6 I'm going to read that for you as soon as you all find the passage in your Bibles. Ephesians 5:3-6. I'm going to tell you right up front, I am not going to deal with covetousness today. That likely is going to be in a message all by itself. I know it's here in this passage. I know it's mentioned twice. I believe, perhaps, next week the message will deal with that. It's here, but I'm not dealing with that.

Ephesians 5:3, "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper..." or "as is fitting," or "as becometh a saint of God." "Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking which are out of place," or "not suitable," or "out of character," "not comely" for a saint. "But instead, let there be thanksgiving." Verse 5, "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."

Father, I pray that You would help us to navigate these verses in a way that would be pleasing to You and helpful to the people that are here. I ask this in Christ's name, Amen.

What Is Sexual Immorality?

Brethren, we can't get around this fact. That terminology right there is biblical terminology. And we as Christians need to be clear as to what these words mean, what they represent, what they stand for. When you hear them, you need some idea: what is that? They're not extremely difficult words, but let's just move through them quickly.

Sexual immorality. In some translations, it's translated "fornication." It is the Greek word *porneia*. Probably enough said. The Young's Literal Translation uses what the King James Version uses sometimes: whoredom. It's an ugly word. It basically describes unlawful sexual intimacy. Paul said this, "because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Obviously there is an unlawful sexual intimacy and there is a lawful.

The next word we have here is "all impurity." Some translations, "uncleanness." Do you know what this word literally means? It means decayed flesh. So often, words are used figuratively, but if you look at the literal meaning, yeah, that's disgusting. Isn't it interesting that in a moral sense impurity, which is typically sexual impurities, it is seen in a moral sense like rotting flesh? There is an ugliness. You see, we live in a culture where the ugliness has been - really, it's been beautified. It's been accepted. It's not as ugly as God sees it. It's figuratively used of moral impurity, especially that which is sexual.

And then we have this next word: filthiness. Again, if you're talking about a literal meaning, filthiness - that's an ugly word. It means that: ugly, deformed. It's that which is obscene; that which is indecent; that which is shameful or disgraceful. It's actually a defiance of accepted moral standards - even if it's cultural or it's spiritual.

And then we have foolish talk. That's just useless, stupid - yes, children, I know your parents teach you not to say that, but there actually is a way to talk that's stupid. And that's what this is. It's stupid talk. It's empty. It's frivolous. It's thoughtless. And then you have crude joking or some of the translations say course jesting. You know, again, we have this literal meaning that means "to turn." It's actually the idea of having an ability with language where you can turn it to where it's suggestive. It's suggestive of that which is unclean. You know, you get people, especially people with a sense of humor, they can be really witty and they have an ability to take language and put twists and turns on the meaning so that you get something that people laugh at, but it's typically crude. It's coarse. It's unclean. And you know what? The Apostle says this is not fitting for the Christian to be like that. It doesn't mean that we can't have a sense of humor as Christians. But this is the idea. (incomplete thought) You talk in such a way that you put twists in things where it's dirty, it's vulgar, it's indecent.

And then you look at verse 5. You get "sexually immoral" again. King James Version says "whoremonger." You talk about another ugly word: whoremonger. We hardly use that, but it just sounds like a bad thing. An impure - or the KJV says "the unclean person."

Brethren, this is a terrible collection of words. But I can make no apology for explaining them to you. Listen, this is one of the things you have to recognize. Paul is not speaking to the world at large out there. You know who he's speaking to here? He's speaking to Ephesian Christians. He is speaking to the church and he's using these words. And he's saying to the church: you need to hear this. Paul is not interested in cleaning up the world. He is not interested in bringing morality to San Antonio. Because the reality is, it won't be good. It won't be deep. (incomplete thought) And they're incapable of it. The lost world is incapable of this. He is talking about what is not fitting, what is not becoming for the Christian, for the saint of God. He's not concerned with the whole world out there. The world will not respond to this. Christians are saints and this has to do very specifically with what is proper among saints.

What Is Proper among Saints?

Do you know what a saint is? It comes from the same word group as "holy." It's the idea of set apart. Christian, you have to recognize this, one of the most important things that can be said about you is God has taken you from all the mass of mankind and He has set you aside specially and specifically for Himself to be one of His people, to be one of His children - but to be one of His saints. "I am holy," God says. "Be ye therefore holy as I am holy." Set apart. Christian, I think we ought to say that to ourselves. Say that to yourself if you're saved. I am set apart for God. I mean, say it in your head. Think that to yourself. I am set apart for God. So if such a terrible collection of words is being addressed to saints, can we not deduce that God thinks we need this? Do you know what we can deduce from this? There's enough of this in some of us that it takes a word from God to wake us up so that we get rid of it. It would not be brought up this way for any other reason. We can't say, oh, we don't need this. No, we need this. If this is being brought up, we need it. We can't say, oh, this is too graphic for a church service. No, the truth is we must speak of these things.

You know what it said back in chapter 1? You have been chosen. This is very interesting. Even as He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Do you remember that? Holy and blameless before Him. That's the idea. He's there. We are before Him and we stand in His sight holy and blameless. That's the idea. God has set apart for Himself. We're saints. We're children. We're priests... to spend an eternity before Him; an eternity in His presence holy, blameless.

Do you hear the Apostle? If you are a saint, sexual immorality and all impurity - all of it! Every bit of it must never even be named. That means you don't ever do anything or say anything or think anything that if somebody's trying to put a name on what you're doing, what you're thinking, what is there in your midst in your life, if somebody's trying to put a name to it, it's never going to be one of these names. Don't let it be named among you. Don't even let the hint, not a vestige, not a taint, not the least evidence. Every form of it is to be gone. Every bit. You must avoid and renounce and completely avoid it in its entirety. There is no place for this.

Our society is casual here and most of us come from that background. Most of us were not saved when we were five years old. Many, many, many here are first generation Christians. We come out of wicked backgrounds and we know about this stuff. And I'll tell you, you can come in and you can feel like, well, I've been radically transformed, but you know, there's still some vestige here. You know what he's saying here? No! No! Not even a little bit. It is not becoming of you. Total eradication is what he's after here. Not even named. Leave it alone. Stand away. Avoid it. Stay clear. No trace of it. Listen, don't even think it. You know what our Lord Jesus said. Our Lord Jesus said that you have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say unto you... And He says if you look at a woman - and you can switch it around, ladies looking at men; or if you come out of that background that Jeff talked about, even if it's somebody of the same sex, the reality is if there is a look, "whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent" that means to desire her, he's already committed adultery with her in the heart. This is even in the thought. None of it. This is purity. Even in our thinking level. "All impurity." Thought as well as deed. And look, you know this, no little part of this battle is typically fought in the mind. That is the reality. Don't let it be named among you. Don't let it be identified among you. Don't let it be found. Not even in the recesses of your head. Not in your thoughts. Not in your brain. Don't do it. Not even the mention of it. Why? It's not proper for a holy vessel of God.

Filthiness, foolish talk, coarse jesting - it's all out of place. Filthiness. How expressive is that? We're to have nothing to do with anything ever that's obscene or vulgar, foul, revolting. And you know the thing is, Paul even includes here: foolish talking, stupid talking. You know why? You get around friends and you start talking, and you start talking stupid, that kind of talk is careless. It's reckless. It's thoughtless. You know what happens to a reckless driver? Eventually they go over the line. And you know what happens when you start talking that way with each other? You're trying to one-up each other. And you get where you cross the line. It's unguarded talk. These are the facts. This is the filth. Christians, we need to listen. God is speaking. We live in a pornographic society where this stuff is tolerated. It's accepted. Brethren, there is this fearful and terrible warning that we must face.

And I'm going to say this. I'll probably say it again and again. It is amazing to me that when the Apostle says, okay, you need to put off the old man. You need to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. You need to put on the new man. When he starts talking that way and he

goes to specifics in 4:25, he talks about deception, falsehood. And you know he moves through anger and corrupt talk and stealing. You know all that he deals with there.

It is interesting to me that he never introduced the wrath of God until he came to this. Verse 5, "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." You may be sure of this. It doesn't matter what title, what name you give yourself. It doesn't matter what you're called. It doesn't matter if other people call you brother or sister. "You may be sure of this, everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, they have 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." I'll tell you, when the ever-living God, the Judge of Heaven and earth, He stands forth and He gives us a warning concerning life and death, we do well to sit on the edge of our seat and take notice. It does tend to be wise and in our own best interest to listen to this carefully. You may want to notice that word in v. 5: Everyone. It's amazing. People always seem to think they're the exception. We are professionals at thinking we're the exception to the rule. Everyone who is sexually immoral. Everyone who is impure. You trace it out. Sexual immorality describes their life? Trace out the line. Trace the path. Where does it go? It doesn't go to the Kingdom. That's what he's saying here. No inheritance. What does that mean? It means you miss Heaven. It means that which is to be feared more than all else: the wrath of God. That will be your lot forever.

What Happens to the Sexually Immoral?

Your lot. This is hell we're talking about. The wrath of God. You will know it to the full. The thing about hell is I think about people that are there. You know, in this life, even sinners - the deepest stained - they can cry out when they're suffering or when they're in pain, and there's hope of mercy. And we know there is because we read in Scripture that the kindness of God is meant to lead us to repentance. And we know that God allows His sun and His rain to fall on the unjust. The thing is when we cry out here, God often gives a reprieve. But in hell, you can cry forever and ever, and there will be weeping. But there will never be pity or mercy forever. Can you imagine being in a state that no matter how much you cry, God will never hear? That is it because of our sins. Our sins are that bad to require that kind of damnation. Perdition. Eternal destruction. Punishment. Wailing and gnashing of teeth. The Scripture says the lake of fire - this is real. And God is saying to the church - you might expect we'd go out here and all the people that were out carousing and partying last night, we should take these words out there to them. Isn't this amazing? Paul recognizes these kind of words need to be spoken in the church! Take warning! Take heed, he says, to those sitting under the preaching of God's Word. Take heed. This is real.

You know what our Bibles end with? I just told you one thing it ends with. If you're thirsty and you will come, you can have it. But it also ends with this: "As for the sexually immoral..." There's other types of sinners listed, but "as for the sexually immoral, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death." And right at the end, Revelation 22:15, "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral." Outside. This isn't like outside on a bright, sunny morning where the birds are singing and like this - blue sky and a gentle breeze. That's not the outside. This is outside when it's bright and sunny and joyful and

peaceful inside, and out there it's dark, it's black. There is a blackness of darkness and there's a horrifying reality out there. There is something out there that means to do us harm. That's the idea of being outside. There is no place at all for impure people inside. Not at all. All are put outside. Everyone who is sexually immoral. Look at verse 5. Look at how it starts. "You may be sure of this..." The New American Standard: "This you know with certainty..." This you know. Paul says this is beyond doubt. Beyond dispute. It's something that ought to be self-evident, especially to Christians, that there is no place in the eternal Kingdom for sexually immoral people.

You know what? I believe that this generally tends to be the case. We don't have difficulty recognizing the principle. We don't have problems recognizing, you know, some people have been disciplined out of this church for sexual immorality. We don't have great amounts of difficulty recognizing that if those people don't repent, it will not go well with them throughout eternity. I suspect that most of us have no problem knowing and recognizing that such people are going to perish in their sins if they don't repent. I suspect that we know that those people are in grave danger. This is the issue, we see clearly when it comes to other people. Isn't it amazing that we can do things - we justify it. We have explanations for it. We have an answer for it. Somebody else can do exactly the same thing and we're well capable of seeing how wrong it is in somebody else. That's one of the reasons that we need to be told not to be deceived. Because we do have a tendency to see things right in other people, but sometimes we have a tendency to not see it so well in our own selves.

Don't Be Deceived!

Listen to verse 6. "Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things, the wrath of God comes..." Let no one deceive you. You! Me. You. Deceived. Empty words. What empty words? What are the empty words? The empty words that say that you can be sexually immoral or unclean or filthy in the use of the Internet, the use of your mind where nobody else can see. It's the deception that that can be the reality and you're still going to enter glory. And do you know why he would say don't be deceived? Because there are deceivers everywhere who want to spread this message. It's basically this message that you can be saved and you can live however you want. The real important thing is that you believe. By faith, we're saved. By grace through faith. We know that that is a biblical truth.

But brethren, why this warning? For one simple reason: Hell is full of sexually immoral religious people who went there deceived. But I guarantee you this, they're not deceived anymore. Let no one deceive you. That means you better stop and think and be honest. Because when the wrath of God is at stake, this can cost you your life. I think he talks this way, this strongly, because obviously this was a problem in his day. This is a problem in our day. (incomplete thought) Let no one deceive you. This is a point at which Paul desires to undeceive people right here at this point of sexual immorality. And he's talking about it not even being named. It's not just like, well, I quit openly doing some of these things. Not even named. How much is it being named among you? See, we're going to come into this area: where is the line? How close? How far? That's often how we think. How much? What frequency? Don't be deceived. "Let no one deceive you." We need to stop and think. We need to be honest. And deception here can cost you your soul. Remember, we find this in Hebrews, God is a

consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. You don't want to be somebody who came this close to the truth, this close to the saints of God and miss it in the end. Because on that day, we're not going to be judged as a collective group. It's one by one. And our lives are going to be looked at. Paul knows there are empty-worded deceivers. Take warning. Some of you have private lives; some of you do things behind closed doors and some of you do things in the mind where no one else can see, and God sees it. Take warning. Let no one deceive you.

You know what happens? We see this in I'll Be Honest correspondence. People tend to be very subjective. What does subjective and objective mean? What's subjective? (unintelligible) It's personal. Objective is outside of yourself. It's like an object removed from self. People oftentimes when it comes to Christianity, they begin with themselves. Let me give you an example of an email that James sent me from I'll Be Honest. A young man says this, he starts by talking about how he was saved. He starts by telling, "Well, I know I'm saved." "I remember when I got saved." And then he starts talking about how he can't overcome pornography. And he actually asked me to explain to him how it is possible for a real Christian to be such a slave to pornography. That is the deception Paul is warning about.

Don't start with yourselves. That's not what you want to do. "Well, I know I'm a Christian." They start with themselves. "I know. I know where I'm at." And see, we can clearly see that when it has to do with other people. But we're masters oftentimes of doing the same thing. The question of salvation comes up, and we start with ourselves. We can rationalize. We justify. We can explain our own sins, our failures. Is it not true? Brethren, the thing is we're on such good terms with ourselves. And yes, lost people, that's true. Good terms. They love themselves. They like themselves. They're confident. There's a way that seems right to them. They've got that way. They're very happy with where they're at. They feel confident in this whole thing. The scary thing is when we bring that into Christianity, we're not measuring things. We bring it into the church. It can be difficult to think it impossible for God to be on bad terms with us. We're pretty artful at protecting ourselves. We want our own happiness. It's hard for us to imagine God not smiling at us, frowning at us - because we so want His smile. We hesitate. We fight to convince ourselves and others that it's okay no matter what the facts might indicate. That's why we're told not to be deceived.

Here's how the deception works. You can't even hear this. Some people can't even hear this. It's like people are so programmed. My wife tells me how she was before she got saved. She said she could be in a bar, cigarette in hand, beer in hand, and she could be telling somebody how absolutely convinced she was that she was saved. And you can't even hear verses like this. Don't be deceived. The sexually immoral - they don't inherit the Kingdom. The wrath of God is their part. You get people in the church just the same. Well, hey, I remember when I believed! I remember back in the Stockdale days, I was talking with a young man about it. He was like, well, I wrote it in the cover of my Bible. You've got these people: Are you saved? Well, it's not like: "I came under conviction of sin and righteousness and judgment." They'll say at least something that sounds Scriptural. "I became convicted of my sins. I saw how desperately lost I was." I'm asking about being saved and he looked at his mom like, well, the date was written somewhere. And people do that. "Well, I remember when I did so-and-so. I remember when I believed. I remember when I repented." I always get nervous too when we get

these I'll Be Honest things, and these people are like, "well, I know I repented." So often, it's I, I, I, I. I remember when this happened. I remember when I did this and I did that. I remember! Wait, that's not what Paul's asking about. How's your sexual purity? "Wait! I believed! The Bible... What must a man do to be saved? Doesn't Scripture say believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? I believe! Listen, I know I believe. And we're saved by faith, not by works! What's with this works thing? You're talking about what I do. That's not the basis upon which people get saved. So don't go there! Don't talk to me about that!" You see, people, they start here. (incomplete thought)

Diego and I were just down in Ecuador not too long ago, and Diego was telling me after we had this get-together that some of these people that were talking to him - he's asking them about their salvation and they're saying, well, there was this time I quit smoking. That's what people want to do a lot of times. "I used to smoke weed. I don't smoke it..." Wait a second. That's not what's on the table here. This doesn't have to do with whether you smoke weed or not. Yeah, that may come in somewhere. This isn't about whether you're smoking or not. This isn't about whether you think you were born again or not. This isn't about you had some experience. This isn't you think you got changed. This is like right now - right now - where is your life at when it comes to sexual purity? You see, that's what Paul is doing. And it's like people will fight like crazy: "Well, I know I'm saved." I know I'm saved? Irregardless of this text that says don't be deceived, "I know I'm saved." "I know it." You see, that is so subjective. You know what's objective? To stand back and start with God and to start with His truth. That's what's safe. We need to start with God.

God Saves Sinners

Okay, what's the truth with God? God saves sinners. God saves sinners, but He saves them a certain way. The reality is He grants faith. That's right. By that faith, we're justified. Yep. All our sins are pardoned. Absolutely. But you know what the New Covenant teaches us? That if God saves you, He puts His Spirit within you and He causes you to walk in His statutes and to obey His rules. That's what Scripture teaches us. He writes His law on the heart. To say we know Him - if you say, "I know Him! I'm a Christian!" But you don't keep His commandments, oh John says that broadly, but let's focus in right here where Paul is - but you don't keep His commandments, and Jesus did say you better gouge out that eye or cut off that hand, or you will perish. You say, man, that sounds so much like works! No, that is true salvation. That is salvation God's way where faith is real. There's more than just believing here - believing and being justified. I'm not preaching works. I am preaching regeneration and sanctification. Those are realities in the Christian life. And if your life is left unmoved and unchanged in this area of sexual impurity, (incomplete thought), see this is the thing, people just want to fight for something else. Something else. You know what Scripture says. Not everybody that says, "Lord, Lord," is going to inherit the Kingdom, but those that do the will of His Father in Heaven. What we find is that in Romans 6, the power and dominion of sin are broken, and if you're not putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, you don't have life. Now look, I recognize, this isn't perfection. You know that Scripture comes along and says, "Little children, you ought not to sin. I write to you that you don't sin. But if you do, we have an Advocate with the Father." But the truth is what this has to do with is the overall character. Listen to what it says. "You may

be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral..." This is the idea that the habitual nature of the sin that we used to drink like water, it's broken.

How Does the Christian Diagnose Himself?

What you need to ask yourself is this: Are such sins characteristic? Is it frequent? You see what's being said here? This isn't supposed to be named among you. Can it be named among you on a regular basis? Can it be named among you frequently? But it's the pattern. Do you keep going back there? It's this idea, when you have that little word "is," everyone who "is..." - it's what defines you. That's the idea. What's the character of your life? What's the persistence? What do you continue in? "Not even named among you." What does Scripture say? "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?" Who has access? "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Men, do you have clean hands? That's the reality here. This is essential.

Now, hear me. Temptation to sin is not sin. This can be an all-out battle. You remember what Peter said? These desires of the flesh, they wage war against the soul. This can be an all-out battle. And because you're fighting, you're resisting, because thoughts are coming - especially, you're young; your hormones are strong, the battle can be absolutely intense. Sometimes you can't help certain things you dream about. Thoughts can all of a sudden flash in your head. We have an enemy who seems to be quite adept at inserting thoughts. Again, I go back to this Christian walking through the valley of the shadow of death. He had little whisperings in his ear that he actually thought were his own thoughts although they were coming from the outside. I think Bunyan adequately portrayed that. (incomplete thought)

You know you can be sitting there thinking this is the weakest point in my life and I'm exhausted from the battle. And you can feel like what you're hearing right now - I'm just defeated. But here's the thing, what God says is that it won't have dominion. But putting it to death can be all-out battle. But the question is this: is there victory or do you keep going back to it? Do you keep going back over and over and over again? This can be a hellish fight. And there can be seasons where you feel so weak under the force of this. Look, simply thinking that somebody of the opposite sex or even of the same sex is attractive or that they're beautiful or that they're handsome - that in and of itself is not sin anymore than recognizing that the sunset's beautiful... you just have to be careful with where it takes your mind. We have to recognize this for what it is. On the other hand, you don't want to call something a struggle when the reality is there's no victory. People who say, "I'm struggling with that," when there's never any victory, that's not struggle. That's failure. That's wallowing in it. There's a huge difference there. And listen, if you're failing over and over, and you feel filthy, you feel dirty, you feel empty, you feel discouraged, that's not a positive sign if that's what you default to over and over and over and over. People lost, people out in the world, they feel that way all the time because of sin. The proof is in the pudding as my 10th grade geometry teacher used to say. You know how Paul could say it? Such were some of you. We're new creations. And if there isn't a struggle and a battle where there's victory, don't deceive yourself. There's a path to the wrath of God in all of this. We need to be honest. We need to sit up and take note.

"You've heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

And I would just say this, Christian, show me the pile of eyes and hands. I remember going back at one time and looking at all these black and white photos of the Civil War. They couldn't save limbs in that day. This was before they really had antibiotics figured out. The last war before that was figured out. There was a picture of an army hospital and outside the surgeon's tent, a pile of arms and legs. If you got hit by a musket-ball, they amputated and seared it. That was their best possible attempt at saving your life. Because they knew otherwise infection was going to set in and you were a dead man. There was a pile of arms and legs. You say, that's grotesque. That's the imagery being used here. And I would say this, the reality is if you're a genuine Christian, in this area, there's a pile of eyes and hands, because that's what Jesus says. Because people that don't have the pile of eyes and hands - that means you're amputating and gouging out things in your life to protect yourself here and you're fighting this thing and you're taking it serious. You make changes to your life when it comes to phones, when it comes to computers, when it comes to going to malls, when it comes to going to certain places, movies you watch, things you allow into your life - you're amputating things. Show me that pile. Because if you say there really isn't any pile, then you hear Jesus' words for yourself.

Will You Inherit the Kingdom?

This is the question. This is where we're at. Not putting anything else - no other factors at all - just bringing this to the table. Just this. Are you one who is going to inherit the Kingdom? Sometimes we can get casual because we're not there yet. We sometimes give ourselves this hope. Even if we look at ourselves in the mirror and we say, ugh, man, this causes me to be afraid. But we trust we have life tomorrow and if something's not right, we're going to get it right. I'll tell you, don't be deceived. People get casual about these things. They end up deceived and they end up perishing. And they end up coming face-to-face with the wrath of God and it is too late. You don't want to gamble here. You don't want to be careless. You don't want to be negligent. But not bringing any other factors to the table, are you one who is going to inherit the Kingdom of Christ and God? And you know what? Sometimes we could almost wish because the battle can be strong, and there can be failures on the part of a genuine Christian. Sometimes you can get in the heat of that battle and you wonder, I almost wish that the Lord Himself would come and tell me very distinctly what my case is - whether it's well with my soul or not.

But I would say this, we can hear all this and it can raise concerns. If some of us are honest, we know that there are defeats. We can get really nervous about where that line is. How much can I fall and still be real? And there can be uncertainty. And this has to do with our souls and it has to do with the terrible wrath of God. What do we do?

Here's what I would tell you to do. Think. We have to think. If there's anything that Paul wants us to do in the midst of all this, it's renew the mind. The spirit of the mind - we need to think. Think. Think. It's clear to me - think with me here. It is clear to me that God did not look at that church at Ephesus and say it is needless to talk to true Christians about this. Any less than it being necessary to talk to them about possibly dishonesty or stealing or anger or slander or any of these other things. Do we need to grow? Do we need sanctification? See, I would say this to you, recognize this, that God Himself believes it necessary to give us such words. I can come to this conclusion. God does not say in any portion of these verses that He needs to come and declare to us personally what our state is. Do you know what I'm convinced of? He can tell us what He tells us here and then say don't be deceived. He believes that what's written in His Word is sufficient to leave us undeceived. In other words, there's no excuse for deception here if we will just simply consider what God has said in His Word. We need to think. We need to think. And I would just have you think this way, this is not being given to the world. This is being given to the church. Why? You need to ask that. Why do saints need an admonition like this? Why? You don't say this to God's saints if every one of God's saints are perfect in this area already. Right? You don't say don't let this be named among you. And you know, all we have to do is look at 1 Corinthians 6 and you know - you know - the Corinthian church still had sexual immorality going on among them and Paul was dealing with it, he was pointing it out, he was giving them truths to consider. The fact is that God brings these words to us because there are some people sitting in here that very much need this.

Taking God's Warnings Seriously

But then I want to also have you think about the New Covenant. Think with me here. Jeremiah 32:40, "I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them." Now listen to this. "And I will put the fear of Me in their hearts that they may not turn from Me." (incomplete thought) Just think with me. God says this: When I save somebody, I'm going to put My fear in them so that they don't turn from Me. Do you know what happens? Scripture is full of warnings and threatenings. And what God has done is put His fear in us so that when we come face-to-face with the warnings and threatenings, we are afraid and we move back from the edge. And this is given to a church specifically so that that kind of thing might happen.

Brethren, you know the best thing I could liken this to is driving the Mugu Road. Now, those of us that have been on those buses or have driven that road, you're going to have a much better sense of this, but just imagine you're hanging over a cliff and the wheels of the vehicle you're in are right at the edge. And it doesn't look like that edge is too strong, and it's so far down, if you go over that edge, you're not coming back. And you know what, just about every single one of us that have taken that road, have been gripped by some sort of fear along the way. And you start looking out there - this is the best thing I could liken this to - you look over and you see one of those catastrophically destroyed buses or trucks at the bottom of the gorge. This isn't just a figment of your imagination. People go over that edge. And the warning signs - they don't have signs along the way. You know what the warning sign is? The wreckage at the bottom. Just like this. You look down and you see that crashed truck down there. I'll tell you what I felt. You feel this desperation to get back from the edge. That's what God has instilled in

His people. When you hear a warning like this, it's like that. What God has done is He has put that within us which when we are confronted by that warning, by that threatening, what happens is something within us says get back from the edge! Everything in me wanted that bus to get further back towards the wall of the mountain. Away from the edge! Away! That's what God's warnings and threatenings are like. And God's people don't ignore them. They don't take it casual. That God-given fear within us screams: Back! Back! You know what it says? We hear something like this: Oh no! We are already too close to the edge! It doesn't matter where the edge is, I just feel like with this warning, I'm too close to the edge.

This is the question that has to be asked. This is how we test ourselves. How do you respond to this text? Don't be deceived. The sexually immoral do not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and God. Does it concern you? Does it create alarm? Does it create within you a shame that you ever even got as close to the edge as you have at times? That's the thing. Does it make you afraid that you've been too careless? Does it cause a sanctifying fear? You have to recognize this is a section that deals with sanctification. God sanctifies His people through threatenings. That's one of the ways. There are other ways, but that's one of the ways because of this fear that He's put within us. Remember what it says? That they not turn from Me. Do you know what happens when you get a threatening like this? The true Christian? Oh, there may be alarm; there may be an unsettledness. There may be a shame. There may be a recognition I've already gotten too close to the edge. But you know what you do? You don't run away from God. And you don't run out and sin and drink it even more. It causes you to turn to Him. See, He puts that fear that we not run away. What it causes us to do is turn to Him. Lord, I have come too close to the edge and I don't know where the edge actually is, but Lord, I'm ashamed of this and there's been too much of this in my life and there's been named too much even in the thoughts. Lord, please wash me and clean me. When you hear the threatening like this, does it prompt you to cry out to Him? To run to Him? To confess to Him? Is that your response? Wherever the line is, I know I'm already too close to it. You're ashamed that it should be so. You curse yourself for being so weak. Do you look at this and say this is right? This is right. I want to be righteous. This is wrong behavior. It's right that a holy God would want His people pure. You find yourself agreeing with God. Brethren, I'll tell you, if everything I just described is how you respond to this, you are a child of God. And you may be sitting there uncertain, but you can be certain and not deceived. There's a thirst in you for righteousness. "Beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure." You hear a threatening like this and it causes you to take this more serious.

It's much like Christian. Again, I'll allude to the Pilgrim's Progress. He's going up the hill of difficulty and he falls asleep and he loses his scroll, and then he presses on after that, discovers he doesn't have the scroll, and he has to turn around and come all the way back. And then he's cursing himself because he's had to walk the same ground three times that it should have only taken him once. And we can get to that place where we curse ourselves that we ever got as close to that line as possible. But we want to press on and we want to be like the Lord and we know that there's a desire within us.

You see, brethren, this terrible warning is declared to the saints - the saints in Ephesus and the saints in San Antonio in order to awaken the saint; not let us fall asleep. There was also in Pilgrim's Progress a place that was called the Enchanted Ground and they were really feeling like falling asleep. This kind of stuff wakes us up. You remember this again, with all the specific sins that have been named from 4:25 and onward, this is the first time the wrath of God and warnings about not entering the Kingdom come in - with sexual sin. You want to measure yourself, you can look at your life right here.

This is it. This is what's on the table. He wants the Christian to tremble. And you know what happens when a person's in the church and they profess to be a Christian but they're not real? They respond differently. A text like this is an agitation to them. You say what do you mean? For one, the unbelieving - even the unbelieving believer; the unbelieving Christian; the false brother - one thing we know about anybody that's false - we know this - they are antinomians at heart. You say what do you mean? Anti-law. They have a problem with God's laws. You say how do you know that? I know that from Romans 8. It says that very explicitly. "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." It doesn't matter if they're within the walls of the church meeting place. They're still the same. They're antinomian. A fight rises up in the person. "Well, my salvation is assured!" "I know I'm a Christian." "I know I prayed. I know I repented." "My sins are forgiven. You can't tell me different." "Judge not, lest ye be judged." "I'm not saved by works. You're talking works here. I'm saved by grace. I'm secure. I, I, I, I, I..." But I would ask this question. Again, let's be objective. What has God done? You can say, "I, I, I did this, I did that," but what has God done? You see, God assures us: such were some of you if you're saved. God assures us He is going to take this sin by the throat and He's going to squeeze the dominion out of it in the life of His true children.

People like this don't want to hear that. What they signed up for, they signed up for a pass out of hell. But don't expect me to change my life. Don't expect things to change that way. What they're really saying is this: I thought the Gospel said that it didn't matter if I went ahead sinning or not. I thought that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. I thought Paul said, "Oh, wretched man that I am," and he was doing all sorts of stuff that he didn't want to do. I thought that. I thought that Christians, that they just have deceitful and desperately wicked hearts. That's the Gospel is signed up for. And you're adding works to this whole thing. And what happens is that the blood of Christ shed on that cross - it simply becomes a cloak for their evil. You see, that's what happens in the life of the false convert. They want to get defensive. "Well, but I'm saved!" And they want to fight that way. (incomplete thought) Sin doesn't trouble the person. Their sin does not trouble them. Hell troubles them. They want a pass out of hell. And I'm not teaching salvation by works any more than the Lord Jesus Christ was when He said that you need to deal with this. Because "if your right eye causes you to sin, you tear it out and throw it away. It's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

And look, we live in a new day. We're beyond Paul's day. The sins are the same, but the avenues of expression, we have filth at our fingertips. It can happen so fast. It's so available. And I'm telling you, we are in the first generation. Twenty years ago, we didn't have these. Computers. Computers and phones. I'll tell you the people that are going to make it to Heaven

in this area, there's going to be a pile of eyeballs and a pile of hands. And those eyeballs and hands may look like phones. They may look like computers. You've got to be amputating things if you're going to make it to the end here. And we are in a day when this stuff is so available. It's there. It's everywhere. Computers and TV's and movies and phones and all the immodesty. There must be a pile of eyes and hands.

Let There Be Thanksgiving

Now, I'm just going to end by saying this. I love Paul. He's exciting to me because he constantly surprises me. He surprises us. We get the unexpected. Okay, put off sexual immorality and put on, of course, purity. No... And sometimes I think that that is a mistake. You get people who have a fight in this area and all they think about is: okay, they're being impure. They think about being pure. The more they're impure and have impure thoughts, the more they strive to be pure in their thinking. And it's just a battle they can't win. Isn't it amazing that he doesn't say put off this and put on purity. He says put this off. It shouldn't even be named among you. And what's the one thing amidst all this filth that he says to put on? Oh, you want to arm yourself for the battle? Be wise. Listen to God's remedy. Listen to how you fight the warfare here. "Instead, let there be thanksgiving." You know how you fight sexual immorality? You cultivate a sense of gratitude to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Holy Spirit of God for what They have done for you. That's how you fight. Now I'm not talking cliches. Have you ever got around that sickening person who says "Praise God" every five words? I'm not talking about that. That's a fake. That's so ugly. Thanksgiving is not just something - this doesn't mean you just walk out and you start mouthing "Praise the Lord." That praise needs to come from a mind who is thinking about all the reasons that he has to praise the Lord. We sing: Count your blessings, name them one by one... that's exactly right. What needs to happen to the mind is: it never works just to say: Stop thinking about her! Stop thinking about that girl that I saw in the checkout line. Stop stop stop stop! That's not how you fight the battle. What you start doing is you start thinking, it's like Psalm 103. I was just studying that. "Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits." You start thinking about every single thing that the Lord has done for you, that's how you channel the mind and the thoughts in a way that you win this battle. What a glorious truth! Would you do combat with lust and arm yourself properly? Don't try simply not to think about the opposite sex. Don't simply think about not clicking the button on the mouse. Thanksgiving. Arm yourself with that.

Isn't that amazing? Because that isn't the way that most people think. And yet it's the way Paul thinks. Arm yourself that way. Put that on. And like I say, thanksgiving from the tongue is only genuine when it comes from a mind that is actually feeling gratitude because it's thinking. Renew your minds by thinking. That's what happens in the mind, the spirit of the mind. It gets renewed by thinking right thoughts. And so you start thinking: Wow, I could be in hell right now, but I'm not in hell right now. And I have this, this... you start thinking about all the things that you have (incomplete thought). See, John the Baptist put it right, we don't have a single thing that hasn't been given to us from Heaven. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights. You don't have a single blessing that you don't have specifically by God's own intentional giving it to you. Even the smallest things.

I often think of that man in Luke 16. When I come in from outside and I feel really thirsty, or even sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, like last night, I just had this unquenchable thirst. And I wake up and I'm guzzling a glass or a bottle of water. And I think about that man. Not even one drop. And I just thank the Lord I can have a whole glass. Everything is from Him. And you start thinking about all those things. And if you're a Christian, how much more do you have! That's the battle. Right there.

Prayer

Father, I pray that You'd help the brethren. We don't want anybody deceived and I hope that I didn't muddy the waters in any way. Lord, I don't want the people deceived. Undeceive the deceived. Give great assurance to those who are Yours. Give us great victory, the power of God. Help us. Sanctify us. Cleanse us, wash us. Help us, Lord, to store up Your Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Thee. We ask in Christ's name, Amen. You're dismissed.