

## Controlling Human Lusts

In Paul's day, as in ours, the Christians were surrounded by a graphically sexualized culture. The Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was a place of worshipping a fertility goddess through temple prostitution and other sexual immorality. In our day, we are told that 96% of couples dating as 18-23 year olds are sexually active and that more than half of the senior adult U.S. population condones such behavior. We, like the Ephesians, are in desperate need of reformation.

In the text before us, the Apostle Paul makes very clear what the sexual standard for believers is.

### Ephesians 5: 3-6

**3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **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. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

The church often makes one of two mistakes: we either treat sex as inherently evil, or we treat sex as an entitlement to every human being by virtue of our being created as sexual beings. Neither of these approaches is Christian. To begin with, the Bible teaches us that we are created as sexual beings with the gift of sexuality (see Gen. 2; Song of Solomon; etc.). The Bible also teaches us that our sexual freedom comes through ethical restraint, and thus the Apostle teaches us:

#### I. God forbids all forms of sexual immorality (vs. 3-4).

Ernest Hemingway said, "Only that which makes you feel bad after doing is immoral." The biblical standard of morality is quite different. We are taught in the Scriptures that there are two primary purposes of our sexuality: 1) to glorify God through imitating in covenant marriage His covenant relationship with His people; 2) by serving our neighbor for their spiritual edification. Paul, therefore, instructs us to practice sexual morality in our behavior, our thoughts, and our speech.

Concerning our behavior, we are to abstain from all forms of sexual immorality. This would include the way that we dress, the way that we date, the habits that we develop.

The Apostle also encourages us to guard our thoughts: he uses the word in verse 3, "covetousness," which speaks even of our lustful thoughts about wanting to have someone or something that God has not chosen to give us.

He, in verse 4, speaks of the need for sexually moral speech. As G. B. Caird once said, "Where vice is regarded as amusing, the practice of it comes easy." We must replace all of our coarse joking and our complaints with thanksgiving for the way in which God has made us and sustained us, including in our sexual lives.

#### II. God warns us of the consequences of sexual immorality (vs. 5-6).

Paul says very strongly in verse 5 that if we choose the lifestyle of sexual immorality, we are excluded from Christ's kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev. 21:27; 22:14-15). Andrew Lincoln says about this verse, "Those in bondage to their sexual appetites are not those over whom Christ and God rule." What a tragedy to lose the power, membership, and inheritance in the kingdom of God; on the other hand, what a privilege to be assured ultimate bliss and satisfaction under the merciful reign of Jesus Christ.

In verse 6, the Apostle Paul warns us of our exposure to God's wrath, if we choose the sexually immoral lifestyle. Notice that the Apostle does not say we shall experience God's wrath for any particular sin, but rather that we will be under His wrath if we choose a sexually immoral lifestyle, which is the same as choosing another religion and another god. The wrath of God is a very real attribute of the living God (cf. Jn 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:7b-10; Ephesians 2:1-3). We are saved from the wrath of God by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, as we put our faith in Him, we can be assured that we are delivered from the condemnation of all of our sexual sins, past, present, and future. Having received the gift of forgiveness and eternal life, we now enter into the life of Jesus Christ, which is one of sexual morality, praising and glorifying God, and serving our neighbor.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why are so many in this world determined to violate biblical sexual morality and then to propagate it among others?
2. What are the benefits in this life of practicing biblical sexual morality?
3. What can we do in our churches to better promote the Christian sexual ethic?
4. Why does Paul give such severe warnings in verses 5 and 6?
5. How does one recover from sexual sin?

### Going Deeper

1. In your sexual life, how do you need to change your conduct? Your thoughts? Your speech?
2. If you are married, how can you better love your spouse sexually? If you are single, how can you better take your sexual energy and use it for others' good?