

If you remember when we started this study in Ephesians, I explained that this letter is written from God's perspective of how He views and deals with us, both as individuals and collectively as His body. The overall idea is that we are spiritual beings who just happen to temporarily exist physically in a material world; nonetheless, we are sons of God and should therefore live according to God's unseen economy and not according to the ways of this world.

In the first 3 chapters, the Spirit framed for us what it actually means to be a son of God—and it sure was glorious. These chapters provided for us a very top/down view of our unseen reality. We actually saw this truth as well in our study in the gospel of John as we discovered that to Jesus the spiritual existence was His reality and that is what He spoke about and the physical was just the field in which the spiritual drama was played out.

As spiritual beings, the Spirit wants us to understand this top/down framework and actually live from this truth; it is to be the framework through which we filter all things in our life. Unfortunately, it is so easy to operate the other way around. After all, we have been living for so long prioritizing the physical over the spiritual that it seems we are constantly striving to “pull down” the spiritual and try and incorporate it into our physical reality and make sense of it. It's no wonder we end up frustrated and seemingly always trying to figure out why we are not experiencing God in the ways we want or the ways that the Bible says we should be experiencing Him. In fact, living from the perspective of the physical first and the spiritual second is quite crippling to a son of God and will always leave you disillusioned.

It is from this framework (the spiritual over the physical) that the Spirit ushered

us into Chapter 4 where He began to teach us how this truth is to be practically meted out in our day-to-day life in all the interactions that we have. Therefore, Paul started with the exhortation: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians **4:1**).

I love that about God and His Word; spiritual truth (or theology) is intended to always be proved out in how we live—the fruit tells it all and over time it will always reveal the truth and it will not lie. Remember, all that matters is faith expressing itself in love (**Galatians 5:6**)—God’s agape love flowing in and through our lives. It is very practical.

That is why everything we study in the Bible is to be understood through an invasion of the spiritual into the physical experienced through relationship: us and Him and Him through us to others. Old Testament, New Testament, it is all the same. It is all about our relationship to God and His relentless desire for us to know Him as intensely as He knows us.

In that vein, tonight, we are going to continue to look at our lives from the framework of the spiritual over the physical as we narrow our understanding of what it means for a son of God to practically live in a physical world.

Ephesians 5:3-16

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 nor foolish talk nor 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 associate with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

You would think that as sons of God this kind of instruction would be absolutely unnecessary. After all, we belong to God, we are sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (meaning we have authority over the darkness), and we are His marvelous workmanship made in His image: righteous, holy and true. You would think that these truths would absolutely dictate and dominate how we live.

But the fact that the Spirit deems it to be necessary to include this instruction just highlights the fact that too often we lose perspective of who we are and again

live life from the perspective of the physical out to the spiritual. We tend to naturally focus on what we think we need in the flesh and then try and deal with the spiritual implications or consequences of our choices. Again, this is all backwards.

The Spirit wants us to understand that the starting place for how we approach this physical life is that we are unique, set apart, and fundamentally different from everyone else who does not know God; in fact, as sons of God we don't even belong to this world. We are aliens and strangers and have been sent here by God as His ambassadors to bring light to those who God has prepared to be awakened from their dark night of sleep (**1 Peter 2:11; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 5:14**). Therefore, we are to live as sons of God, children of the light, and not as slaves to the demands of the physical.

I want you to reemphasize the point I made earlier about fruit. Since faith is always active, "fruit" is always the proof of our faith. We can wax all day long about what we know about God and what we "believe," but if our lives do not produce all that is good and right and true, then we are just deceived and do not presently and actively walk in the light. This does not mean that we do not belong to the light; just that we are not currently abiding in the light (we are still relying on the futility, or worthlessness of our own minds (**4:17**), and do not have the mind of Christ or the wisdom of God).

However, when we walk in the light, we not only do not partake in the deeds of darkness, we prove out what is pleasing and acceptable to the Lord (and again, our lives produce all that is good, right, and true). Now the ESV says that we are to "try and discern what is pleasing to the Lord," and the NASB says "trying to learn

what is pleasing to the Lord.” But I don’t think either of those are the best translation choice in this instance. The verb “*dokimazo*” carries with it the historical notion of testing something as if to demonstrate to others what something is versus trying to discover what something is.

In other words, this verb is based on knowledge rather than on inquisition. For example, if you go into a store to try and sell a gold ring, the jeweler will test the gold to prove its markings. If it says it is 18 ct. they will use a certain type of acid to test it or to prove that its claim is legitimate. In the same manner, when we walk in the light and thereby take no part in the deeds of darkness, our lives will prove out to others what is pleasing and acceptable to the Lord—that which is good, right, and true. We show and prove to them how sons of God can live and are to live in this world. This is the same idea that is communicated in **Romans 12:2** when it says that when our mind is transformed by God we will prove (*dokimazo*) what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God.

Remember, the fruit is the proof. When others see what is good and right and true produced from our lives our claim to be a son of God will be undeniable. But if what they encounter is sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk or crude joking, then it is clear that we have a problem and are not choosing to actively believe that we can live as sons of God.

This leads us to a very important point that we must address. First, let me reiterate that this entire passage has to be understood from the perspective of God’s relentless desire for you to know Him as intensely as He knows you. Thus, I don’t want you to miss the heart beat of this passage. When most of us read this passage, we naturally tend to focus on “not doing” anything that is considered to

be immoral, impure or covetous. We immediately start to draw our boxes to make sure that we do it “right” and do not do it “wrong.” But that is not how we are to understand this passage. The focus is actually on our being imitators of God who walk in agape love (**5:1-2**) and who walk as children of the light (**5:8**). Therefore, it is just another way of expressing how desperate we are to trust ourselves to Jesus (in all things) such that we actually live from our **new self** and do not let our *old sinful nature* control our lives.

This is why a legalistic approach to this passage will just result in religious sensuality or indulgence and will leave you in bondage, but it will not produce the fruit of God’s agape love in your life. In fact, you may be one of those people who are very proud of yourself in that you do not “partake” in the deeds of darkness, but if such behavior does not flow as a result of Jesus actually living His life through you in the **new self**—the **new creation**—(which we studied about in **4:23-24**), then your life will not produce the desired fruit no matter how hard you try and “do it right” for God.

The only fruit that Jesus desires is the fruit He produces—the fruit of light, which exclusively comes from Him. That is why in the realm of Christianity “not sinning” and controlling your flesh has never produced the fruit of agape love. In contrast, when you trust yourself to the Lord with your whole heart and do not lean on your own understanding in any area of your life, He will live through you in the **new creation** and He will produce His beautiful and tasty fruit.

For those of you who are still confused as to what it practically looks like to trust yourself to God with your whole heart, I encourage you to go back and listen to the teachings from Chapter’s 3 and 4 as they go into great detail about this

process; however, Chapters 3 and 4 can't really be understood unless you go back and listen to Chapters 1 and 2, so you might want to start from the beginning.

Let's do a quick rundown of the words in **5:3-4** so we can understand the length, breadth, and depth of this passage.

The word translated "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) is where we get the word pornography. This word is very broad and includes all manner of fornication, whoredom, lewdness (including adultery and incest). The word is also used in a figurative way in reference to the practice of idolatry; which creates for us a powerful word picture that runs all the way throughout the Bible. When God's chosen people do not put their trust in Him but place it anywhere else (including themselves and their own ability to be 'good') they in effect cheat on Him and have an illicit affair comprising their vows to the Lord. We see this in **James 4:4** where James calls believers adulterers for desiring friendship with this world.

The word translated "impurity" (*akatharsia*) is also very broad and refers to physical, moral, ritual, and innate impurity. In a word it captures all that is not God. In the culture of the Ephesians, this would have slapped them in the face. Unlike the Jewish culture which had very strict notions of purity and impurity, the Greek and Roman culture did not have in their worldview such a defined and polar difference between purity and impurity. In their cults and state religions there was a notion of ritual and ceremonial cleansing and even moral cleansing (from lapses in integrity and so on), but there was no understanding that God alone is good and everything else that does not derive from God is impure, sinful, and in a word, evil.

So this truth would have been very hard to swallow for the Ephesians, just like it

is to us. We tend to not want to fully understand the broad implications of this word “impurity” or its antonym that only God is good. But this idea is powerfully captured in a couple of verses. For example, **Romans 14:20** says, “whatever is not of faith is sin” (“whatever” is a pretty all inclusive word) and **Titus 1:15-16** says: “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

The word translated “covetousness” (pleonexia) is pretty straight forward and it means an excessive insatiable desire to have more. It’s like greed on steroids and is the unwillingness to be satisfied with what God, in the intentional working of His wisdom, has desired for your life. It is like raising your fist toward heaven and saying “you are not really good because I don’t like what you have given me. Give me more. I want more; I need more!”

To summarize these 3 words have very dualistic meanings as they are both direct offenses against man and God. With regard to God, immorality is idolatry, impurity is giving oneself to evil as an act of disobedience and a denial of the character and nature of God, and covetousness is the bold proclamation that Jesus is not enough and that there is a way, other than through Him, to be satisfied.

Clearly these are serious relational offenses and are to have no part in the life of a son of God. This is why immorality, impurity, and covetousness are not even to be named among us as they are not just sins against others but they are blatant offenses against our relationship with God. They represent the fruit of wrong

belief and unbelief: the fruit of having decided that we really need someone or something more than we need God; that we can be better satisfied by someone or something other than God; and that what we have is just not enough. As such, these relational offenses grieve the Holy Spirit and, as we will discover, will result in the Spirit turning and waging war against those who practice them (more accurately, waging war against their *old sinful nature*).

Do you understand? This passage is not about “not sinning” in the behavioral sense, as we would traditionally read this passage. Rather, the presence of immorality, impurity and covetousness (just like legalism or religious sensuality—trying to “do it right”) are just the indicators that you have already chosen to present yourself to your *old sinful nature* to once again be enslaved by its desires. You have already chosen to not believe that you can live as a son of God. The true “sin” or “offense” occurred at the point in time when you refused to trust yourself to God in an area of your life. The behavior is just the evidence that you do not actively believe the truth about God or about what He has said about you.

Now, the next 3 offenses are definitely not “fitting” for a son of God, but they are not dealt with in the same overtly hostile way as immorality, impurity, and covetousness. First, there is filthiness which is just shameful obscenities (in which, sadly, we have all indulged). Second, there is foolish talk, which means a weakness of understanding or a weakness in judgment, sometimes through stupidity and sometimes through confusion (it really doesn’t differentiate). It also includes the going on and on about things that you really don’t know anything about but pretend that you do. It’s kind of like when I talk biology and throw around words like endoplasmic reticulum and phycomycetes—it sounds cool but that is about as

far as my depth of knowledge about biology really goes.

Third, is crude joking which is facetiously teasing someone or the kind of witty jesting which leaves a person not really sure if you are being serious or just playing around; but either way it hurts. You know, the kind of jesting that implies superiority and seeks to intimidate but fails to advance any true discussion or relationship. It's the kind of foolish bantering back and forth just to see who can come up with the best cut down or clever humiliation of the other person.

These 3 uses of our tongue, however easy for us to justify, are not fitting and are inappropriate for a son of God. To get a better understanding as to why the Spirit is up in arms about such talk we have to look at the book of James and understand how destructive to others the tongue is when it is not subdued by the Holy Spirit.

James 3:5-12

See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same

opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

What powerful imagery: the tongue is a fire—the very world of iniquity. It defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. Wow, that's intense. If the tongue is not subdued by the Spirit of God (for no man can tame the tongue), its destructive power is unparalleled. It is so trippy to think that the unbridled tongue gets its marching orders from the powers of hell; as such, it is the gateway to all manner of evil. This explains why when our tongue is not subdued by the Spirit others always get hurt.

Again, we have to remember to look at things from the perspective of the spiritual down into the physical and not the other way around. Because we get this turned around and see our reality through the physical, we often think that the things we say and joke about are just fun (even if people do get hurt) and we never seriously consider that perhaps its inspiration was completely demonic. That's a pretty scary thought. Sons of God should have no form of relationship with demonic spirits.

Do you now understand why such talk is not “fitting” and why we are not to justify the use of our tongue in such an unbridled fashion but rather use our tongue for the giving of thanks (**5:4**). This is in akin to our instruction in ***Ephesians 4:29***: “let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” And in **5:1-2** we were also instructed to follow the example of God and give ourselves as

an offering to the Lord, as a fragrant aroma. This was an offering of thanksgiving—which is the sacrifice of praise to God.

Let's now turn to **5:5-6** and focus on the war that the Spirit wages against those who have given themselves over to their old sinful nature and are bearing the fruit of immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, and coarse jesting.

First, in verse 5 it says that anyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. This verse has scared a lot of Christians and plunged them into fear believing that somehow they might have lost their salvation because they have not “done it right.” But that is not what it is saying at all. Remember one of the first rules of Biblical interpretation: never interpret the easy by what's difficult, but always interpret the difficult by what's easy.

As such, what is easy to understand is **1 Peter 1:3-5** which says that your inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God for a salvation to be revealed in the last days. This is easy. God is the one who protects our inheritance so it is not up to our “doing it right.” The other very easy passage to understand is **1 John 5:13** which says that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life. There is no if, and, or but, in this regard; if you are a son of God you can be assured that you have eternal life. Therefore, we know that this passage in Ephesians cannot be talking about losing our salvation.

It is, however, talking about those who are immoral, impure and covetous by nature and are thereby idolaters who have rejected God. Those who have chosen this path will not inherit a part in Christ or His kingdom, for only sons of God

inherit the kingdom. Now sons of God sometimes do not act like sons of God and involve themselves in such things, nevertheless they are sons of God and nothing can change that fact. This is what we learned in Chapters **1-3**.

With that said; I do believe there is a dualistic truth or meaning in verses **5:5-6**. The verb “has” is in the present active tense and can also be understood to mean that a son of God who gives themselves to their *old sinful nature* will once again become its slave and their fellowship with God will be seriously impaired and their understanding of God darkened because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against Him (**Romans 6:15-23; 8:5-8; Ephesians 4:17-19**).

You know how that is. When you do not trust yourself to Jesus it does not matter how hard you try and do things right, and try and pull the spiritual into your physical world, you can't seem to muster up what is needed and you remain empty clouded by darkness. It's a horrible way to live. Thus, the consequences of giving ourselves over to immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthy talk, foolish talk, and crude jesting is that we have no present and active part in experiencing the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:6

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Similar to **5:5**, I believe this verse is also dualistic and is a true statement about the future of unbelievers but is a truth that also applies to the present experience

for sons of God who choose to live like unbelievers. After all, the book of Ephesians is about our relationship with God not the relationship of unbelievers to God. So our first and primary interpretation has to be from that vantage point.

Let no one deceive you with empty words; in other words, do not let others convince you that living to satisfy the demands of your *old sinful nature* is ok because for a son of God it is not. We cannot be found to let our freedom be turned into an opportunity for the flesh. Rather, God freed us from sin so that we can serve one another in love. (***Galatians 5:13, Romans 6:1, 15***).

But everything in our culture tells us that it is ok and that these things are something that is natural and something we can enjoy (and since we are forgiven, we have too often given ourselves that room to indulge our flesh). But the consequences are horrific. Not only does your life remain empty and dark, but the Holy Spirit, in His jealous love, will pour His wrath out on your *old sinful nature* giving you plenty of reasons to know why it is best to trust yourself to Jesus.

Now I don't want you to misunderstand what is being communicated. Just because Paul uses truths as they relate to unbelievers and applies them to us (and uses the word "wrath," the implication is totally different. We have to take into account everything else we have been told. We are sons of God and we are loved.

Therefore, when the Spirit pours forth His wrath upon our *old sinful nature* (who according to ***Romans 8:7; Galatians 5:17; and James 4:4*** is an enemy of God) it is not a form of punishment because we have done it wrong, it is a form of parental discipline so that we will no longer endanger and hurt ourselves or hurt others by being out of fellowship with Jesus. And we know this verse is not talking about some future wrath (as with unbelievers), for the verb is in the present tense

which is why we know He is dealing with sons.

Hebrews 12:7-13 explains that as our loving Father, God corrects us and although it is not enjoyable in the least, it is very effective and will produce a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will experience Him in His holiness; and it reminds us that we are His sons for He does not discipline those who do not belong to Him.

Therefore, we are instructed not to partake with others in immorality, impurity, and so on for it is shameful because we used to be darkness but now we are light; and there is no middle ground of grey. I love the way these words are used as nouns and not adjectives. If you are a son of God you are light; and, get this, anything that is exposed to your life (while you walk as a child of the light) will either become visible or will remain dark. Let me explain.

Do you remember at the beginning of this teaching I said that we are aliens and strangers and have been sent here by God as His ambassadors to bring light to those who God has prepared to be awakened from their dark night of sleep (**1 Peter 2:11; 2 Corinthians 5:20**). Our job here on earth is about bringing the light (in the same way that the acid tests the gold) into people's life to prove out whether or not they belong to God. They might be sleeping now but as they are exposed to the light they will over time wake up and become children of light. That is the meaning behind the phrase:

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

It's all very matrix like. If they take the blue pill they will remain in their dark

deception but if they take the red pill you know they can be unplugged and remain in wonderland but also learn how deep the rabbit hole goes. The imagery is so cool. I love the way God talks.

But calling us light is just is another way of emphasizing the fact that we were chosen in Him before the foundations of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him (**1:4**). And, that in love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself (**1:5**). In other words, the day of our awakening (and presentation as a son) was assured; His light was always going to be our light. In addition, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (**1:11**).

Thus, in the same way that God had just the right people in just the right place for us to wake up to His light, He will have us in just the right place with just the right people in order that they may wake up and arise from the dead. This is why we need to walk as children of the light and not participate in the deeds of darkness. I want you to remember that this passage is not about “not sinning;” rather, it is first and foremost it is about our relationship with Jesus and our need (and ability) to live in ongoing fellowship; and, second, it’s about His life in us shining to others who need His light.

Are you starting to understand yet how we are to view all things from the perspective of the spiritual first and the physical second?

Now, when our life exposes light on those who are darkness (those who will not be awakened) and upon the despicable things they do in secret, we will expose them on a couple of levels. First, it will be clear that because we refuse to join

them that we do not belong to this world—that we have been set apart for God. Second, it will be clear from our relationships that the fruit of our lives is radically different than what they experience. Our lives will produce what is good, right, and true. But their lives, in this regard, will be unfruitful and this reality will be meted out in their relationships. They will always be wanting while we will be satisfied. How cool is that?

Therefore it says, “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” In closing, I want to reiterate that we are spiritual beings who have been intentionally sent to those in this world to bring light. Therefore, wisdom says that we need to be very intentional about what we do and how we live because evil is always trying to overtake us and tempt us to fixate on the physical and not live according to our spiritual reality. Let’s be wise with His wisdom.

Let’s Pray