

True Love?

Ephesians 5:3-4

Turn with me this morning to the book of Ephesians. I want to continue in our study of the book of Ephesians looking specifically at Ephesians 5:3-4. We have been looking at the idea that God wants us to live differently from the rest of the world. We have seen that we are to continually take off that old sinful nature within all of us – that part of us that is selfish and self-serving – and put on a new God nature – where God is working in our lives, turning us into people who will love him and love others. Paul is talking about a complete turn around from how we once use to live, to a life that serves God and others.

How many of us can remember the time we accepted Christ into our hearts and we began to gain an understanding of God's love and plan for our lives? We go from being people who are only concerned with ourselves, to people who all of the sudden reach out. Helping people didn't seem to be high on our list but something changed within us. When one becomes a new Christian this aspect is fresh, but as time goes on we have a tendency to go back to our old way of doing things. I need to take off the old self and put on the new identity that Christ now gives me.

Our lives are to transform from being all about me to being all about God. In fact, part of that transformation is that instead of being satisfied with who I was, I now want to become more like Jesus. My life is to be marked as one who now lives everyday imitating God in my life, and letting my life be an offering of worship, “a sweet smelling” sacrifice. The kind that God will accept.

My life is all about pleasing God, not because I am trying to gain his acceptance, but because I am grateful and thankful for what he has done for me. So the question for us this morning is “what does an acceptable sacrifice look like?”

How should I live my life so that God is pleased and that he is worshiped appropriately?

We pick up the answers in the next number of verses in our study, and I specifically want to look at two of them this morning. Remember Paul's words in **Ephesians 5:1-2**:

Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.

A life that is acceptable to God is a life that is marked by obedience and love for others. There are the greatest forms of worship. But what tends to happen, in anything, is that man has a way of coming in and distorting this truth. As a fallen man I always challenge the authority of God and the sacrificial giving of myself to others.

So what we do is that we create our own truths. We make excuses or come up with a twisted version of what God originally intends to happen. We do it with everything in life to excuse our responsibility or to suit things to fit our own plan. We do it with money, we do with relationships, and we do it with God. This morning Paul addresses the issue of value on the opposite sex. Jesus said it himself in **Matthew 22:37-39**:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

If we want our lives to be an acceptable sacrifice to God then I need to value people – they are his people, his creation, his love. For me to treat them with disrespect, as an object or with self-serving motives is a slap in the face of God. **People are important and valuable to God and for me to treat them any other way is to deny my love for God.**

How am I to live my life then, so that I can show God that I love him? That is what Paul is addressing for us in our text this morning in **Ephesians 5:3-4**:

3 Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. 4 Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

Paul gives us two things to avoid in order that our lives may be a sweet smelling sacrifice to him – sexual immorality and inappropriate sexual discussion. We know that this was an issue in the Roman Empire during the 1st century. In fact, listen to a description in **Romans 1:26-32**, and compare it to our current culture:

26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. 27 And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. 28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. 29 Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. 30 They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. 31 They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. 32 They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

It doesn’t sound much different than our culture today doesn’t it? The issue of sexual immorality and inappropriate sexual discussion was prevalent in Ephesus as well. There

was a temple to a pagan goddess in that city where people gave up their bodies to others as an act of worship.

Man always has a way of taking something that God created and distorts it into something that suits his desires and passion.

The idea of **sexual immorality** in Ephesians 5 can be defined as “**sexual misconduct, lust, or disgraceful passion.**” **Something that goes against its intended design.** Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 7:2-3**:

Each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.³ The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. ⁴ The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.

We know that according to the scriptures that sex is to take place only within a marriage of a husband and wife. Anything outside of that is considered sexual misconduct. You see, there is nothing wrong with sex – God gives us desires for the opposite sex, he created sex. But when sex happens outside of God's plan and intention it doesn't function that way God intends for it to function.

Marriage is more than just sex – it is also about emotionally connecting with each other, it is about treating each other with respect, it is about working together and serving each other. Sex is just a greater way of taking that relationship to a whole new level of trust and has never been intended to be simply an act or urge.

When sex happens outside of God's instructions, outside of a committed marital relationship between a man and wife, it is a violation of God's law of love. When someone sleeps around with other people, it isn't showing value of others but on themselves (they want what they want, when they want it) When men and women go against the intended design of a husband or wife, they aren't thinking about others, they are thinking about themselves and what they want.

Paul tells us that sexual immorality doesn't belong in a Christian's life. If a Christian truly loves people then they will not treat others like an object, or allow their motives to come before the needs of others. If they truly love people then they will not enter into a sexual relationship with the opposite sex knowing that it is not God's design for them. If a Christian truly loves people then he will function in the fruit of the Spirit – one of them being the fruit of self-control. Paul told the Galatians in **Galatians 5:13-14**:

*13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**

Because we love God and people, we will not allow sexual misconduct to distract us from serving one another in true love. True love doesn't lust, true love doesn't fantasize, true love doesn't look at the opposite sex with impure thoughts, but instead sees people as God's creation, as those he loves.

Paul goes on in verse 4 and deals with inappropriate sexual discussion. He says that it is pointless, and detrimental to our walk. For the guys it is probably more common – guys get together and they talk about women, making jokes, innuendos. If we aren't careful we fall right into the discussion. For the women, I am sure that it still happens. For the guys it's all about the physical aspect and for the woman it is the emotional. Again, we treat people like objects instead as God's creation.

Do you realize that when we fall into discussions like this, we may be opening ourselves up to things that may cause us to not only speak of sexual things, but then begin to act them out? **1 John 2:10** tells us:

10 Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.*

I need to make sure that the things I talk about or say don't cause another brother to stumble or fall into sin. Some of the greatest lies I heard as a child came from inappropriate sexual discussion with friends from school. The next thing you know you start going down roads you never thought you would. **If I love people I will not talk about things that could lead to a life of sin, I will not make inappropriate observations and I will not speak of them as objects.**

Instead, I will treat them with the utmost respect, I will see them through the eyes of God, as his creation, his most prized possession, the apple of his eye.

Paul finishes verse 4 here with the alternative – let there be thankfulness to God. Let there be praise and thanks to God - a redirecting of our focus from ourselves back to God. Going back to the words of Paul in **Ephesians 4:29**:

Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

We really do have to watch our lives – we live in a world where the influences around us are so loud and attractive, calling us to live self-centered lives. When the world is screaming at us how do we respond? Our lives also influence those around us as well, and if we aren't careful we can become the stumbling point for others who will find it difficult to pull themselves out of the mess.

The greatest form of worship to God is seen in how I treat him and how I treat others. Love is the fulfillment of all that God expects of us. My life is no longer about me, but me giving up my life for God and those around me.

Being a sweet smelling sacrifice, one that catches his attention, one that pleases him and that he accepts, means that I need love him and others. Loving him and others means that I don't think of the opposite sex as an object, or as a means of satisfying my wants and desires, but that I live my life as a sacrifice for him and others each day.

Let's pray!