"Turn Off *Lust*. Turn on the *Light*"

November 27, 2005

Ephesians 5:3-14

*3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, **because** these are **improper** for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking,* which are ***out of place**, but rather **thanksgiving**. 5 **For** of this you can be sure: **No immoral**, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—**has any inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, **for because of such things God's wrath comes** on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.*
*8 **For you were once darkness**, **but now you are light** in the Lord. **Live** as children of light 9 (**for** the **fruit of the light** consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and **find out** what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather **expose** them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light **becomes visible**, 14 for it is **light** that **makes everything visible**. This is why it is said:*
"Wake up, O sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

A few weeks in ago when we were in chapter four, we heard Paul's call to abandon the filthy garments of the old life and to put on the new garments of the life we have in Jesus Christ. Paul now continues this emphasis right into chapter five. In verse 3, he begins a series of warnings against behavior that is particularly threatening as well as completely foreign to a Christian way of life. He specifically addresses the problem of ***sexual immorality***.

As Paul writes on this topic, he writes with an evident concern for his audience then—and now. The pressures they were facing are strikingly similar to the moral degeneration occurring in our own culture. Ephesus was a leading commercial cultural city of the Roman Empire. It's biggest claim to fame (literally) was the great pagan temple of Artemis (a.k.a. as Diana). This temple not only was recognized as one of the *seven wonders of the ancient world*, it also served as the hub of sexual perversion in Ephesus helping that city to earn the title of "***sin capitol*** of Asia Minor."

Like most other pagan religions, its rituals and practices were a thinly veiled excuse to carry out illicit sexual desires ands all kinds of moral perversion. Artemis

herself was actually a fertility goddess whose devotees participated in all kinds of wild sexual parties with her priests and priestesses supposedly to honor her and to gain her favor. One can only imagine the impact of such a depraved religion. But as bad as it was, it was increasingly typical of life in the ancient Greco-Roman world as a whole. The famous Greek orator and philosopher, Demosthenes once remarked:

"We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for the day-to-day needs of the body, but we have wives in order to produce children legitimately and to have a trustworthy guardian of our homes."

The Roman philosopher and historian, Seneca, once quipped*: "Chastity is simply a proof of ugliness."* So if you are tempted to ask the question: "Can things in our own culture get any worse than they already are?—the answer is clearly: "Yes!" But I am afraid we are not far behind our ancient counterparts. And whatever gap still exists is quickly closing.

I hardly need to remind you of the increasing moral drift that is going on in our own generation. According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, sexual content is quantitatively and qualitatively increasing on network TV. I won't even bother quoting all the statistics because we already know its there. Just looking at TV shows—simply comparing past and present—begins to illustrate how far we have deteriorated. We have come all the way from "I Love Lucy" where the word "pregnant" was not even mentioned on the air and where Ricky and Lucy slept in separate beds to "Desperate Housewives." We have come all the way from "Leave It To Beaver" to "Sex In The City." Humor has advanced from the slapstick comedy of Red Skelton to the clever sexual entendres of Leno and Letterman. And they are far from the worst of what is on late night talk shows. We don't even want to begin to discuss the content of movies, the innumerable options on cable—and the increasing availability of pornography on the Internet—both solicited and even unsolicited. By the way, did you know that among young boys and girls—there are a growing number of pre-teens and teens who are becoming entangled with pornography whose first encounter with it on the internet was *unintentional!?*

And what is the impact of all this? How do you even calculate it? You can look at the statistics on unwanted pregnancies. You can check out the rate of incidence on sexually transmitted diseases. But they only partiallycalculate the ***outer*** man consequences. They cannot begin to describe what all this does to the soul of a culture—or an individual. For that we need God's Word.

So what is a believer to do about all this? There are several Christian organizations that have formed in recent years to combat this issue. Focus on the Family. The American Family Association and many others. But unless God intervenes and something a whole lot deeper than political action groups begins to challenge the conscience of this country—we are not likely to turn back in the foreseeable future. There is simply too much media access coupled with an overemphasis on personal freedoms *minus* any emphasis on personal responsibility.

But frankly, it's not the world I am concerned with. It's ***the church!*** Particularly when it seems increasingly difficult to distinguish ourselves from the world. John White, in his book, Flirting With The World, has stated: "The sexual behavior of Christians has reached the point of being indistinguishable from that of non-Christians." A recent Barna survey pointed out some disturbing trends among church goers who describe themselves as Christians: George Barna pointed out in a survey taken back in the fall of 2002:

"Survey respondents were asked to react to a half-dozen behaviors related to moral choices. In considering the behavior of churched and unchurched adults, four of the six items showed distinctions. Churched adults were more likely than unchurched individuals to choose not to watch a particular movie or video only because the rating indicated that it contained objectionable material (22% compared to 7%, respectively); to have a discussion with someone about a moral issue (51% versus 41%); and to turn off a television program they were watching because they did not like the values or viewpoint presented in the program (47% compared to 34%). Unchurched adults were more likely to have viewed "adult-only" content on the Internet (19% versus 8% among the churched).

There was no difference in relation to reading a magazine or watching a movie or video that contained explicit sexual images. About one out of every five adults had done so in the past seven days.

There was less of a difference on these matters between born again and non-born again adults***.*** *Born again individuals were twice as likely to not watch a movie because of its rating (27% vs. 14% among the non-born agains) and somewhat more likely to turn off a TV program that presented values or viewpoints they did not like (47% vs. 39%).* ***However, there was no difference evident when it came to the likelihood of viewing adult-only content on the Internet, discussing a specific moral issue, or reading magazines or watching videos with explicit sexual content."***

So what are we to do? As believers. As brothers and sisters. As guardians of the next generation? How do we guard our hearts in a culture that increasingly surrounds us with a message designed to break down inhibitions against moral impurity? For the next two weeks I want us to look at what Paul says in this passage about how to *turn off* lust and *turn on* the Light. Tonight, we need to talk about…

I. How to turn off lust. (vs. 3-7) ***"…there must not be even a hint."***

A. There are *three* levels mentioned in this text that you need to understand and diligently guard. First of all, the Bible calls you to guard …

1. Your actions: "sexual immorality or *any kind* of impurity" (3b)

Paul uses two terms here that are comprehensive. They leave no room for immorality in *any* form. Why does he have to say this? Because we are all born legalists. Everybody has a standard of right and wrong. Everybody has someone to the left of them they can look down on as "worse than me" and someone to the right that they can sneer at as "holier than thou." In the ancient Roman society, for example, adultery was considered wrong—not because it was *immoral*—but because it involved infringing on the rights of another male. So as long as a man did not seek relations with a married woman, relations with a single woman was considered perfectly acceptable—perhaps even to be expected. Paul takes us *back* to God's standard. One man—one woman *in* marriage. And so as not to leave room for any misunderstanding, he adds: *"or **any** kind of impurity."* ***"…there must not be even a hint."***

Illustration: We have had a president stand up and deny allegations of sexual immorality only to find that he was parsing words like a lawyer. Don't think the young people who remember that have not been impacted by it. It is up to us to move the standard back where God put it: Sexual relations within the boundaries of marriage *alone.* But that is not all that concerns God. Paul goes on to talk about…

2. Your <u>speech</u>: "obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking" (4a)

- **Obscenity**-Lewd or vulgar speech. This word comes from a word that is translated in verse 12 as "shameful." ("It is *shameful* even to mention what the disobedient do in secret").
- **Foolish talk**-This word emphasizes less the content of the word and more of the character of the person talking. Just do a study of the fool and his speech in Proverbs and you will get Paul's point. A fool is a self-serving, arrogant rebel. If you really want to get a picture of what this looks like, just tune into a typical TV or radio talk show when they are talking about sex. But I don't really recommend it.
- **Coarse joking**-A very interesting word. It has to do with the ability to make clever plays on words. The sort of stuff you might hear (but won't after this sermon) if you tuned into a late night talk show.

What does Paul have to say about all this? ***"…there must not be even a hint."***

Brothers, this passage not only enjoins us to govern our *tongues*— but our *ears.* And if you are in a situation where you can't help but hear it—don't let yourself get used to the world's spin on sex. Don't let the humor of the remark cause you to miss the devastating implications of the substance of the words. Discipline yourself to put the words into a biblical context of thinking. Memorize verse 3 if you have to: ***"…there must not be even a hint."*** Maybe you need to think again before you listen to that guy at work who is always on the edge with his jokes.

We are talking about *uncleanness* (v. 3) in this context. What does that mean? More than just that somebody has a "potty mouth." Go back to the language of Leviticus. There were three categories in the lawa of cleanneness: Holy—Clean—Unclean. The point is this: To take something that God has made—something that belongs to Him and is therefore considered "holy" and to make it *unclean* means to *desecrate* it. That is a *direct* assault on God. And it is very serious as we shall see in a moment. But there is one more expression of immorality that God wants you to watch out for.

3. Your <u>motives</u>: "*greedy* person— such a man is an *idolater"* (5a).

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said lust begins in the heart. In doing so, He put His finger on the problem in a way that left the most meticulous observers of the Law very uncomfortable—and exposed. Paul is telling us here that *sex* is not the problem. Immoral sexual actions and inappropriate speech only bring to the surface the problem that was there all along! The heart of immorality is described as a ***greedy*** heart. A heart that is bent on pleasing self. In fact, Paul goes a step further and says it is an idolatrous heart. A heart that has abandoned the worship of the True God and has set up a rival god.

Do you know what this means? It means you cannot fight lust on a strictly behavioral level.

Illustration: A fundamentalist school that tried to restrict physical contact between male and female students and yet missed the helping the students face the lust that was going on in their hearts because it didn't fit into any categories of the school's handbook.

You can't just find ways to avoid it—as needful as that may be at first. You have to confront the wickedness of your own idolatrous heart and cry out to the Creator and Redeemer to give you a *new* heart. That is what the Gospel is all about. Your heart is so corrupt that it is beyond salvaging. You need a new heart. You need a Savior to take the punishment you deserve, and give you a

righteousness you cannot earn—and give you a whole new disposition that orients you away from your false worship back to the worship of the One who alone is worthy of your love and devotion.

Application: Only the Gospel can help you deal with immorality at this level (Read **Ezekiel 36:26-27:** *I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws).*

Having helped us to understand the different levels that we must recognize and deal with lust, Paul goes on to give additional help for turning off lust. He challenges you to…

B. Consider two powerful reasons for ***opposing lust***:

1. It doesn't "fit" your identity and calling (3b; 4b)

   Paul is saying to the Ephesians and to you and me: Lust doesn't fit you anymore. It is out of sync with your new identity. You are not a child of darkness—but a child of the Light. No longer a citizen of the kingdom of sin—but of righteousness. Live out who you are in Christ.

2. If you don't fight it, you won't go to heaven (5-7)

   Read verses 5-7. See also Matthew 5:29-30!!

   Fighting means you must…

C. Learn to unmask lust's deceitful lies (See Eph. 4:22)

See the graphic imagery of Proverbs 5-7!!

But that is not all. Must move from defense to offense. Lust is desire gone awry. Our desires were made to be satisfied in our Creator-God alone. One way we do that is as we learn to…

D. Practice *thanksgiving* (4c)

This is a powerful antidote to lust. Gets your focus off the creation and all your problems and frustrations with it—and back on to the Creator. When you are focused on the creation apart from the Creator, you will never be satisfied. You will either be proud or hurt. And either will become an excuse to find relief or reward in sexual immorality. (See Romans 1:21!)

How to do? Try reflecting on the blessings of Psalm 103. Try this out over the holidays. Try it when your desires are starting to give you a hard time. Finally, consider this…God's wrath *is coming*. Yet, someone has already stepped out and absorbed its fury for you. That someone is Jesus!