

## "Live in the Light" Ephesians 5:3-14

### Introduction

- Flannery O’Conner’s *A Temple of the Holy Ghost* is a short story about a twelve-year-old girl from the Deep South. One particular weekend, this young girl and her mother take care of two fourteen-year-old girls on leave from their Catholic school. Listen to what O’Conner writes.
- “All weekend the two girls were calling each other Temple One and Temple Two, shaking with laughter and getting so red and hot that they were positively ugly, particularly Joanne who had spots on her face anyway. They came in the brown convent uniforms they had to wear at Mount St. Scholastica but as soon as they opened their suitcases, they took off the uniforms and put on red skirts and loud blouses. They put on lipstick and their Sunday shoes and walked around in the high heels all over the house, always passing the long mirror in the hall slowly to get a look at their legs. None of their ways were lost on the child.”<sup>1</sup>
- “She asked them why they called each other Temple One and Temple Two and this sent them off into gales of giggles. Finally, they managed to explain. Sister Perpetua, the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy in Mayville, had given them a lecture on what to do if a young man should---here thy laughed so hard they were not able to go on without going back to the beginning---on what to do if a young man should---they put their heads in their laps---on what to do if---they finally managed to shout it out---if he should ‘behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile.’ Sister Perpetua said they were to say, ‘Stop sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!’ and that would put an end to it. The child sat up off the floor with a blank face. She didn’t see anything so funny in this. I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost, she said to herself, and was pleased with the phrase. It made her feel as if somebody had given her a present.”<sup>2</sup>

### Transition

- As Christians, I believe something has happened to our thinking about sex and sexual purity so that it’s easier for us to relate to the two older girls in O’Conner’s story than to the young child. The reality is God’s truth rarely restrains us. Like the two girls, Temple One and Temple Two, we laugh at God’s truth which should motivate us to holiness. What’s worse is that we have lost our sense of wonder and awe for all things pure, especially sexual purity. We crave the base, the crass, and the crude. The way we behave is often no different than the person without Christ. And yet, as Christians, one of the ways we will have the greatest impact on the world is our sexual purity. This morning, my prayer is that we would let God’s word have unhindered access to the most secret, hidden parts of our consciences. Why? God’s witness in this world is at stake. This morning, as we examine Ephesians 5:3-14, I want to suggest to you that...

### Proposition

- **Sexual purity is one of the best ways for the church to maintain its effectiveness**

---

<sup>1</sup> Flannery O’Conner, *Collected Works*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Flannery O’Conner, *Collected Works*, p. 199.

### Transition

- You see, in the words of Peter O'Brien "it's all too easy for believers to be influenced by the surrounding world and to succumb to its way of thinking and behaving. The result is that what is acceptable to the culture of the day becomes acceptable in the church."<sup>3</sup> And if we cave in on our purity we not only compromise our relationship with God we compromise his witness in this world. The hard part is that opportunities to sacrifice our sexual purity abound. N2H2, an Internet content filtering company, reports that internet sites dealing with pornographic material are multiplying exponentially. In 1998---71,831 sites. In 2001---311,652. In 2003---1.3 million.<sup>4</sup> It's imperative that we wash ourselves clean with the word of God. Our text for the morning,

### Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 5:3-14, sets forth two objectives regarding sexual purity.**

### Transition

- With God's help we can meet these objectives and preserve our effectiveness individually and as a church.
- Most of us in this room can vividly remember the day when our parents sat us down to talk about sex. Not an easy thing for parent or child. Miriam tells the story that when her parents talked about sex with her youngest sister, she flopped on the bed and covered her ears with her blanket to drown out the embarrassing words. This morning, you and I are going to have a similar conversation. Please, pay attention. No covering your ears. We preach this message in our youth groups, we drag them to conferences, but do we model for our children what it means to be sexually pure? When was the last time, as adult Christians, someone talked to you about what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior sexual behavior? One of God's great purposes for his church is that each of us remains pure. We are going to look at two objectives toward that end this morning.

### Transition

If you haven't already done so, open your bibles and let's examine the **first objective** found in **verses 3-7** of Ephesians chapter 5. What's at stake when it comes to sexual purity? More than we realize. Our **first objective** is this, and this is the first point on your outline, **we must preserve our sexual purity at all cost.**

### Main Points

#### **I. Preserve your sexual purity at all cost (5:3-7)**

##### A) Validation

- i) Sensuality and Christianity, like oil and water, simply do not mix. We live by faith not by our senses. The sensual Christian is an oxymoron. And yet, in spite of what we are called to, sensuality can and does creep into our lives. We lust after the girl walking in front of us or for the next pornographic image on our computer screen.

---

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, p. 364.

<sup>4</sup> Citation: "IT Figures," www.pe.ag.org (6-27-04)

Our appetite for romance novels may be insatiable or our speech peppered with innuendos. We don't even bat an eye at episodes of *Friends* or *Sex and the City*. Don't be deceived into thinking that these intensely private endeavors are without consequence. What's at stake when it comes to sexual purity? Everything. **The Christian's objective is to preserve sexual purity at all cost.**

B) Explanation

- i) In some sense, Paul's discussion of sexual purity beginning in verse 3 is a continuation of the long list of things we talked about last week. So as Paul lists off commands from the previous section---speak truthfully, avoid sinful anger, don't steal, speak wholesome words---it's not surprising sexual purity comes next. However, the reason an entire message is dedicated to the subject is because Paul gives it special attention in the text. Whereas almost one verse each is given to the topics of anger, and stealing, and speech, 12 verses are given to the discussion of sexual purity. It's the most intimate and private of the ethical issues Paul discusses but it is also the one in which the stakes are the highest.
- ii) Look at [verse 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.* In this verse, Paul describes three types of behavior that are completely incompatible with Christianity. Not only should we not do them, there must not even be a hint or a flavoring of things in our lives. A little seasoning, a little spice in our lives, at least in these areas, is outright deadly. What does he warn against? Sexual immorality, impurity and greed. Let me say a brief word about each.
  - (a) The word for sexual immorality in the Greek sounds like this: *porneiva*. Do you hear the similarity to our English word pornography? What Paul commands against with this word is "any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse, especially adultery and sexual relations with prostitutes."<sup>5</sup> Any sex outside the one place where sex is safe, marriage, is prohibited.
  - (b) Next Paul says that impurity, or uncleanness, or filth of any kind, is not to be tolerated. One who has given themselves over to impurity is controlled by their natural lusts, their basest desires. We know from the Old Testament sacrificial system that impurity, same word, was what separated one from God and from his people. It had to be purged out as an abomination and Paul calls for a purging here.
  - (c) Finally, greed. This word is not simply a lust for more stuff. In this context, it is a lust for more flesh. In the words of one commentator, "the insatiable...coveting of someone else's body for selfish gratification."<sup>6</sup>
- iii) As if that weren't enough, there's more we need to be on guard against. We shouldn't even talk about these things, let alone do them. [Verse 4](#). *Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.* Again, let me say a brief word about each.
  - (a) Obscenity is any kind of indecent, disgraceful speech. There's an ugliness to obscene talk. It's speech that brings shame and disgrace and embarrassment.
  - (b) Foolish talk, on the other hand, refers to any kind of silly talk about sex.

---

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, p. 360.

- (c) And the third word, coarse jesting, refers to risqué humor<sup>7</sup> or suggestive overtones or double entendre. “All three [words] refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in vulgar conversation.”<sup>8</sup>
- iv) Instead, *but rather* as Paul says, the kind of speech that should characterize our life is thankful speech. Don’t you find it odd that the opposite attitude of all these things is gratitude? As [John Stott](#) aptly puts it, “the reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God’s good gift, which we do not want to see cheapened. All God’s gifts, including sex are subject for thanksgiving, rather than joking.”<sup>9</sup> I would venture that very few of us have this attitude; we are more likely to fall into the other types of behavior and speech that Paul describes.
- v) Now, having quickly established the parameters of Christian conduct relating to sex, Paul turns in [verses 5-7](#) to several warnings that serve to motivate us to preserve our sexual purity at all cost. Listen. *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.* What’s at stake when it comes to sexual purity? Everything. **That’s why we must preserve our sexual purity at all cost!** Using cognates, relatives of the same three words he used in verse 3, Paul says with great certainty that you can be sure of, bank on it, count on it, that those who given themselves over to habitual immorality, impurity, or greedy behavior have no place in God’s kingdom, either now or in the future, not now or ever. In other words, as [Peter O’Brien](#) says, “Those who have given themselves over to immorality, impurity, and greed, even if they call themselves Christian, show that they are excluded from eternal life. The apostle is not asserting that the believer who ever falls into these sins is automatically excluded from God’s kingdom. Rather, what is envisaged here is the person who has given himself or herself up without shame or repentance to this way of life.”<sup>10</sup>
- (a) This verse explains the one simple theological reason why the behavior Paul has described in this passage is absolutely intolerable. It’s idolatry. One of the great truths Paul proclaimed in the first three chapters is that when we become Christians we become united to Christ and become part of his body. Things are very black and white from God’s perspective. We can only be united to one thing at a time. Either to God or something else. That’s why 1 CORINTHIANS 6:16-17 says, *Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.* That’s why sexual immorality, impurity, and greed are intolerable. They place our union with an image or another person ahead of our union with God. They’re idolatrous behaviors.
- (b) What’s so convicting about this passage is that we know from the rest of scripture that God is concerned not only with the idolatry expressed by our bodies but with the idolatry we commit in our minds. The ethic Jesus expects of us by is not limited to the physical; the physical act of having sex with another person. Jesus’

<sup>7</sup> Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 401.

<sup>8</sup> O’Brien, p. 361.

<sup>9</sup> Stott, p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> O’Brien, p. 363.

ethic extends to our thought life. We can be a people of porneia in our minds. In MATHEW 5:28 Jesus says, *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* And so what we are to guard against at all cost is not simply the illicit extramarital affair or premarital sex but all forms of sensual thinking itself!

- vi) Again, why? Because the consequences of idolatrous behavior are great. That's why Paul says in [verse 6](#) to not be deceived. *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.* Don't buy into the empty logic, the words that have no kernel of truth in them, the hollow sophistries that suggest that these types of behaviors are okay.<sup>11</sup> They're not. God will judge them. He will pour out his wrath, his intense anger and hatred of sin, on those who live this way.
- vii) *Therefore*, as [verse 7](#) says, *do not be partners with them.* As God's holy people, this doesn't mean we avoid others who live this way. Instead, we are to not participate, don't be partners, don't do what they do.

#### C) Illustration

- i) In June of this year, the *Chicago Tribune* reported the story of Jason Grisham; a man who really shouldn't be alive. The story reported that during his attempt to scale an electrical tower, 69,000 volts coursed through the 22-year-old man's body knocking him to the ground. Despite suffering burns to his chest and having his pants explode, the Grisham was admitted to the hospital in good condition. How did Grisham get into such a predicament? It was no accident. A seven-foot-tall fence, topped with razor wire surrounded the electrical tower. The Electric company spokeswoman said the spot where Grisham climbed over the fence was bracketed by signs saying "Danger/High Voltage."<sup>12</sup>
- ii) In this passage, Paul has marked off certain territory, certain behaviors and marked them "Danger/High Voltages." It's not okay to dabble and experiment with these things. It's not okay to think about them and play with these thoughts in our minds. We do so at the risk of our salvation.

#### D) Application

- i) We must not ignore God's word. You see, the best arguments for sexual purity are, in fact, not pragmatic. Yes it's effective to talk about the consequences of premarital sex with our teens. They need to hear that two-thirds of all STDs occur in people under the age of 25.<sup>13</sup> We need to remind others that it's incredibly difficult to raise a child out of wedlock because of pre-marital sex. We need to hear that extramarital affairs cause great emotional pain. People need to be reminded that internet pornography is incredibly addictive and destructive. Those who live with their boyfriend or girlfriend before getting married significantly increase their risk of divorce later on. But the best arguments for sexual purity are still theological. The certainty of judgment against sexual immorality should be an inspiration to holy living.

---

<sup>11</sup> Reinecker, p. 536.

<sup>12</sup> Citation: John Beukema, Western Springs, Illinois; source: "Indiana Man Survives 69,000-Volt Shock," *Chicagotribune.com* (6-2-04)

<sup>13</sup> Citation: *The Wheaton Sun*, (3-30-01), p. 32; source: American Social Health Association, Research Triangle Park, N.C.

- ii) What bothers me greatly about the climate in which we live is that most people will say that the type of behavior God talks about in this passage is okay as long as its done in private. In the words of French biologist Jean Rostand, “We are not naïve enough to ask for pure men; we ask merely for men whose impurity does not conflict with the obligations of their job.”<sup>14</sup> As Christians we know that our job, irrespective of our vocation, is to be pure. We cannot separate the private from the public. If we lose our purity, we’ve lost our credibility, we’ve lost everything.
- iii) So what do you do if you’ve sold out in this area? If you’ve sacrificed your purity for a fleeting moment of pleasure? All hope is not lost. Don’t harden your heart. Don’t run away from God. Humble yourself before Him and ask for forgiveness. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* Be broken by your sin, give up your way of life, ask God’s spirit to empower you to live right, and don’t ever, for a second, believe that God can’t forgive what you’ve done or who you’ve become. Grace, second and third and fourth and fifth chances are what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about.

### Transition

How you doing? Come up for air. Catch your breath. Okay, we’ve made it through the first half of our talk about sex. Remember, **sexual purity is one of the best ways for the church to maintain its effectiveness.** We must preserve it at all cost. With that in mind we’re ready for the second point on your outline and our second objective. By remaining sexually pure we actually **transform others in our sphere of influence.**

## II. Transform others in our sphere of influence by remaining sexually pure

### A) Validation

- i) The goal this morning is to encourage each of us to lead pure lives. We’ve been called to be people of light, pure people. But we don’t live in a vacuum. We live in and around people at work, in our families, in the gym, at the grocery store who don’t know Christ and who may be enslaved to some of the things we’ve talked about. We’ve must wake up and realize the effect our purity has on others. Our goal is not simply to attract attention to ourselves by being different. We are called to transform our world by being pure people. It’s impossible for light to be snuffed out by darkness. Wherever there is light darkness will dissipate. That’s the great encouragement of this section. By leading pure lives we can transform others. It’s one of the best ways we remain effective as God’s people. **Transform others in your sphere of influence by remaining sexually pure.**

### B) Explanation

- i) Verses 8-14 are a study of lives in contrast. Already in Ephesians Paul has contrasted the before and after of the Christian life. In Ephesians 2 we were once dead, but now we are alive in Christ. In Ephesians 4 we were once darkened in our minds and corrupted by our old selves but now we have renewed minds and have clothed ourselves with Christ. Now, Paul describes the difference using the images of light and dark. **Verse 8.** *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.*

---

<sup>14</sup> Jean Rostand (1894–1977), French biologist, writer. *Pensées d’un Biologiste* (1939; repr. in *The Substance of Man*, ch. 10, “A Biologist’s Thoughts,” 1962).

- Live as children of light.* Why must we remain pure sexually? Because of the incredible change that took place in our lives when we were converted. “It’s not simply that Christians now reside in the sphere of light. Literally, you were once darkness but now are light.”<sup>15</sup> Our surroundings didn’t change, our lives did. And so as light Paul commands us to live like light lives.
- ii) The rest of this section simply explains how light must live. Look at [verses 9](#). (*for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth*). If we live as light something will happen. Our lives will produce virtue. Literally the fruit produced by light consists of goodness, righteousness and truth. “These things, goodness, righteousness, and truth are the ethical outcomes of light.”<sup>16</sup>
- iii) Not only will light produce virtue, but light also examines and evaluates issues in order to determine the right course of action; it discerns what best pleases the Lord.<sup>17</sup> [Verse 10](#). *And find out what pleases the Lord.* We have a responsibility as light to grow in our understanding of God so that we please him. Otherwise our light may not be as pure, as effective as it could be. This past Wednesday night I helped Lem and Tim Cornett track a deer that Lem shot. Standing in woods as black as coal trying to spot miniscule drops of blood on brown and red leaves is an exercise in futility. Light is critical, but not all lights are the same. My huge MagLight that was at least 4 times bigger than Lem’s light was not as bright. It simply was not as effective. You see, the better we know God the better quality our light will be. Listen to the connection between knowledge and discernment and purity in [Philippians 1:9-10](#). *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*
- iv) What else does light do? Look at [verses 11](#). *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.* Another characteristic of light is that it knows that darkness is fruitless, futile. And so light never tries to become something it’s not. It has nothing to do with the things we’ve mentioned already. Instead, it works to expose what it shines upon. What does it mean to expose? Does it mean we go around confronting people and exposing their sexual sins? No. It means that “the conduct of the children of light will shine as a beacon to others, revealing evil deeds for what they are.”<sup>18</sup> When ungodly people are exposed to a godly lifestyle they will feel exposed. And the reason we, as light must expose the darkness, is because, as [verse 12](#) says, *it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.*
- v) Now as we live as light, as we expose evil deeds by living pure lives, Paul makes the case that light not only illuminates and exposes but it actually transforms what it shines upon. **Sexual purity is one of the best ways for the church to maintain its effectiveness.** [Verses 13-14a](#) describe this transformational process. Listen. *But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible.* What is Paul talking about here? What he seems to be saying, and I believe the rest of scripture supports this idea, is that Christians who lead righteous

---

<sup>15</sup> O’Brien, p. 367.

<sup>16</sup> O’Brien, p. 368.

<sup>17</sup> O’Brien, p. 369.

<sup>18</sup> O’Brien, p. 371.

lives not only restrain and reform evildoers, they even convert them.<sup>19</sup> I want to suggest to you a better translation than the NIV for this verse. Listen to how the Phillips translation puts it. *“It is even possible (after all, it happened to you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also.”*<sup>20</sup> There is an incredible evangelistic power to light. As we illuminate how life should be lived, as we shine our lives on others some we shine upon will want to come into the light. We can actually **transform others by remaining sexually pure**. It’s no wonder Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 5:14 *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

#### C) Illustration

- i) Check this out. Have you seen these Crayola’s GelFx markers? They aren’t normal markers. These are special markers. What’s unusual is that they write on dark paper. Here. Watch.
- ii) This is what our lives are supposed to be like. Every one of you are called to be just like this Crayola marker. Writing, shining upon the lives of others in such a way that the darkness, the blackness is changed, transformed into light.

#### D) Application

- i) Why then, when you have this wonderful calling, do you leave your caps on? Turn you’re your light on. Remove the cap, write, shine. As [verse 14](#) says, *“Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* There is no such thing as a privatized, isolated Christianity. Your purpose is to exercise your influence on the world around you, transforming your sphere of influence. This is your calling, wake up. Are you being influenced, are you being dragged down to become something you were not called to be? Or, are you influencing those around you. Think of your acquaintances at work, at school, think of your family members. Who’s doing most of the influencing?
- ii) The call for us this morning is to recapture the sense of wonder and awe for all things pure, especially sexual purity. Instead of craving the base, the crass, and the crude, my prayer is that God would make us pure.

### Conclusion

- This message hits especially close to home for me because there was a time in my life, in high school and part of college, when I wasn’t pure. Even though I was a Christian, I was addicted to pornography. Those days, were without a doubt, the darkest, saddest days of my life. But I also stand before you as one who has been delivered from this beast by God’s power and who is pure today; a testament to God’s grace and mercy. The light of Christ shone upon my heart and he offered me forgiveness of sins by the shedding of his precious blood. He’s brought healing and wholeness in ways I never dreamed. So, if you’ve been defeated in this area of sexual purity, if you continue to struggle with something, if you’ve lost your witness, there’s hope. There’s a way out. There’s forgiveness and love and acceptance at the foot of the cross. Turn to Christ, the light of the world to find the way out

---

<sup>19</sup> Stott, p. 200.

<sup>20</sup> O’Brien, p. 373.

of the darkness. *This is the verdict: The light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished. But those who do what is right come to the light gladly.* Come into the light. Come into the light. Will you pray with me?