

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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Tough Mindedness joined to Tenderheartedness

The Text" Ephesians 5:1-14

Walk in Love

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

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. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

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

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A middle-aged woman has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she has a near death experience. During that experience she sees God and asks if this is it. God says no and explains that she has another 30 years to live.

Upon her recovery she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction, tummy tuck, etc. She even has someone come in and change her hair color. She figures since she's got another 30 years she might as well make the most of it.

She walks out of the hospital after the last operation and is killed by an ambulance speeding by. She arrives in front of God and complains, "I thought you said I had another 30 years." God replies, "I didn't recognize you"

St. Paul says that those who are disciples of Jesus Christ are to be recognized by the way we live our lives. Our actions are to be an expression of our belief. Paul is very clear in this whole section of Ephesians where he goes to great length to show us that what we believe is to influence the way we live. This is true not only for the Christian but for those who are walking in the futility of their thinking as they are obedient to the prince of the ruler of the air. This is how the Devil is described in chapter 2.

As we continue through Ephesians four and five it cannot be any clearer than Paul has made it here. Belief influences behaviour. It is his intention to convey to those who are disciples of Jesus that we are people who are to be known by how we live in relation to other people. "By their fruit you will know them" said Jesus. By this he meant that what the tree of our lives produces says something very telling about the root at the heart of our soul. The heart is shaped and influenced by what is most deeply believed and held dear.

This is where the title for today's sermon comes into play. Tough mindedness is to be joined to tenderheartedness in the life of the Christian. We are to be tough minded in our theology. What we believe and know to be true about the Trinity should never be compromised. Like the Apostle Paul our minds are to be caught up with a sense of wonder and delight as we contemplate the true doctrines of our faith. We see Paul doing this in the opening three chapters of this letter. What flows from a theology that rejoices in true doctrine and sound teaching is a life marked by tenderheartedness. Every attribute of Christian character and behaviour that Paul describes throughout chapters four and five can be described as tender hearted. The person

with a tender heart is the man or woman who is open to the movement of God's Spirit. There is no stubbornness there because it is a heart that is learning the way of honesty and transparency. It is a heart that is without guile and deceit as it learns to respond to the overtures of grace.

Chapter 5, verses 1 and 2 express succinctly what it means to be a tender hearted person.

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

To have tender hearts finds expression in our desire to be imitators of God as we learn to walk in love. The practical applications of what such a walk looks like are laid out for us by Paul in Ephesians 4:17 – 6:9. It is a life that finds expression in relationships open to the overtures of grace because to live in the way Paul describes in these two chapters is to walk in love. When we do this we are being like Jesus, whose whole life, and especially his death, was offered to God the Father. What a way to think of our own lives. As we are able to more fully cultivate theologically through minds joined to tenderheartedness we will be imitating Christ, as we walk in love.

According to Ephesians 5:3 -14 a tender hearted person is described as someone who walks:

1. Chastely
2. Contemplatively
3. Confidently

Let us look at each of these in turn.

1. Chastely

A tender hearted person is someone who walks chastely. Chastity is an old fashion word that is no longer in vogue. Yet for the Christian it is a word that is to be part of our vocabulary. Another word for chastity is purity, especially as it pertains to the areas of human sexuality.

Last week you will remember that Paul wrote to us about how our speech is to be characteristic of someone who is learning to imitate God. This week he picks up on this as it pertains to our actions and words as they relate to sexuality.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul tells us:

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.

Here Paul is showing what is characteristic of a person who is hard hearted. Much of this kind of heart is pre-occupied with words and actions pertaining to sexuality in ways that degrade it. Paul mentions six things here:

1. Immorality

First he mentions "immorality." This is a broad term for sexual sin, but in the New Testament it seems to focus on fornication, that is, the fulfillment of sexual cravings before marriage. So what I want to stress this morning is that this word and this text clearly teach that premarital sexual intercourse is wrong; it is contrary to the revealed will of God.

Let me try to show you why I am persuaded that this word refers to premarital sexual intercourse and not just to (or even mainly to) adultery or marital unfaithfulness. There are at least three other texts where the word porneia (the Greek word for immortality) clearly refers to premarital sexual intercourse. For now I am going to show you one of the three. In Matthew 15:19 Jesus says,

"Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication [porneia]."

Notice how adultery is listed along side this word porneia and so is different from it. Jesus goes on to say that it is these things that defile. In other words our Lord himself was crystal clear on this matter of premarital sexual intercourse: it comes from an evil heart and is a blatant contradiction of God's will that sexuality be preserved for the lifelong union of one man and one woman in marriage.¹

Therefore this is the natural meaning to give to the word here in Ephesians 5:3. Fornication should be eliminated from your life if you are a Christian. It should be shunned like a dangerous disease.

¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9 where Paul uses fornicators, pornoi, and adulterers, moichoï, the same way Jesus uses porneia and moicheia in Matthew 15:19. Moicheia is the Greek word for adultery.

2. Impurity

The next thing to eliminate is "impurity" or "uncleanness" (v. 3). This is a word Paul uses a half-dozen times in relation to sexual sin (Romans 1:24; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; Colossians 3:5). The word is probably added to fornication to emphasize the kind of degradation common in Ephesus and Calvary. When Paul uses this word he is talking about the kinds of things that come into a culture when it exchanges God for the creature. He says that people start exchanging the natural for the unnatural. Verse 24 of Romans 1 says:

"God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their own bodies among themselves,"

We see something of this type of sexual distortion in Leviticus 20 where we are told that sex with a father's wife, sex with a daughter-in-law, sex between men, sex with animal are all forms of sexual impurity that we are to avoid.

So even though our own culture may be returning to the debauchery and license of the first century near-Eastern paganism, those who have been called by Jesus Christ into his kingdom and glory will stand firm and pure against fornication and sexual impurity.

3. Covetousness

The third thing Paul mentions in verse 3 is covetousness. This must be eliminated too from the Christian life. It generally refers to greed for money but is really much broader than that. It means strong, inordinate craving; an inability to be content and satisfied with the necessities of life.² It may be a craving for money, or it may be a craving for sex, as it seems to be here.

The same word was used back in 4:19 in this same sense. Paul refers to unbelievers in that culture as people

"who have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness."

Literally: "they gave themselves up to licentiousness to do every kind of uncleanness in covetousness." Covetousness is what drives the

² Cf. Hebrews 13:5; 1 Timothy 6:8

pursuit of unclean behavior. It is the craving that ought to be conquered by a new and more powerful affection for Jesus and his will.

If you are a Christian, these things must go: fornication; sexual impurity and the dominating power of all the cravings in your life that are not cravings for God.

4. Filthiness, foolish talk and Flippancy (crude joking)

The next three things to eliminate we can take all together for the sake of brevity. Verse 4 says, "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place." Paul seems to be concerned mainly about two related errors: treating things as gross or treating things as trivial; filthiness and flippancy.

There are people who are so dirty inside that they can hardly refer to a tree or a cloud or a fish hook or a brake pedal without treating it as filthy: they may do it with some gross language or simply with a despising attitude and demeanor. And there are people whose vision of the world is so superficial that they trivialize everything.

Joining together filthiness and crude joking is the phrase "foolish talk". From the Greek word used here we get the English word "moron". A moron is someone whose language exhibits the character of a foolish man. So the NIV translates this as

"Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

Therefore the person who revels in obscene and coarse joking is a moron and so Paul condemns both of these and says, "Get rid of all filthiness and coarseness on the one hand, and all foolishness and levity on the other."

It is good for us to be warned not to make light of God's creation. You don't have to trivialize the world in order to enjoy it. The nineteenth century preacher Charles Spurgeon has some wise words on the difference between humor and coarse joking.

We must conquer our tendency to coarse joking. A great distinction exists between holy cheerfulness, which is a virtue, and general levity, which is a vice. There is a levity which has not enough heart to laugh, but trifles with everything; it is flippant, hollow, unreal. A hearty laugh is no more levity than a hearty cry. (Lectures to My Students, p. 212)

In sum, then, there are six things that this text of Scripture eliminates from the Christian life. The first three are fornication (premarital sexual relations); uncleanness (gross sexual distortions; covetousness (not merely the simple urge for sexual experience which is normal and good, but the dominion of this desire that controls the behavior and elevates the pursued pleasure above the revealed will of God). The last three are filthiness, silly talk, and coarse joking, and together they show that the good gifts of God should not be treated as filthy or as flippant.

Those who are tough minded, joined to a tender heart will walk chastely because they know that what we believe is to affect how we live and there are behaviours, when practiced by a Christian, make him or her unrecognizable as a follower of Jesus.

2. Contemplation

The second quality that is to characterize the tender hearted is a contemplative spirit. To be contemplative means that we choose to live our lives attentive to the movement of the Spirit of God as we live in the world where discernment is needed to see the hand of God at work in this world.

At the core of the contemplative life will be that quality referred to here as "thanksgiving" Rather than filthiness and crude joking shaping our lives we are people who displace this kind of talk with the expression of thanksgiving. This is why Paul says "but instead let there be thanksgiving".

If you are overflowing with thanksgiving to God, then you are not dominated and driven by discontentment at what you have been denied. Gratitude is what you feel when you believe God is for you and not against you. It's what you feel when you believe that he gives you only what is good for you and withholds no good thing (single or married!). It's what you feel when you trust him, that the tragedies of your life are not evidences of his meanness or his incompetence; but rather that they are the discipline of a loving Father who values your holiness above your fleeting worldly happiness. That's why verse 20 of chapter five goes so far as to say,

"Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."

So you can see how thanksgiving is the alternative to a life driven by cravings for what you don't have (whether sex or money). Thanksgiving says, in God I have all that is good for me, and I will not be driven to dishonor the worth of his name just to get a few sexual sensations or a few new toys.

And you can see easily how thanksgiving is also the opposite of treating God's gifts as filthy or as trivial. When you are truly grateful for something, you don't despise it and you don't trivialize it. Just test yourself: when your heart is overflowing with gratitude to God, do you use filthy language or make light of things? No. Gratitude is what you feel when you have been given eyes to see that all of life is the work of a sovereign and gracious God. It is not for trifling and it's not for defiling.

So we should strip off the old garment of fornication and impurity and covetousness and filthiness and silly talk and levity and in its place put on the garment of gratitude.

This is so helpful for us to consider because when our hearts are filled with thanksgiving we will have an increasing appreciation that God is to be at the very centre of our lives. When we choose to live disregarding God and pre-occupied with ourselves we enthrone desire within our hearts and thus live idolatrous lives. Idolatry is when we give pride of place to that which is other than God. However as we are learning to enthrone God within our hearts, we become more fulfilled because gratitude is that which governs how we live. From this perspective we can be a contemplative people who understand what God has done and is doing in our lives through the work of Jesus.

When we live this way we have the wisdom to distinguish between empty words and seek to discern the will of the Lord. Such discernment is not easy because of the kind of world in which we live, where the principalities and powers that oppose God, want to undermine us. However what we want to affirm is that as we are learning to live together in a relational community where tough mindedness is joined to tenderheartedness we will mature as a people who are seeking the will.

How important this is for us at the present time as we try to understand our place as a community within the larger Anglican world. I find it encouraging that in verse ten Paul says that we are to try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. As we live caringly and contemplatively with each other we are, through trying and testing, to

live in ways that are pleasing to God. The verb "try" is an important one to consider. It can be defined as:

to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals; to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy.

Such is the life of those who are seeking to live in a contemplative community. When thanksgiving is couple with discernment such a gathering will indeed be recognizable as a community of Christ followers, disciples of Jesus.

3 Confidently

Those who are walking chastely and contemplatively will also be able to walk confidently. Such people know that they are to walk as children of light because they perceive the difference between a life lived enthroning desire compared with a live lived enthroning God.

Notice in the text how the language of confidence is so clearly expressed by the apostle in the following phrases:

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

Walk as children of light 9(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Here is the tough mindedness I spoke of earlier expressed in an attitude of confidence whereby we know how we are to live in this world. It is telling that at this time in our society there is such confusion and distorted views about human sexuality because people put so much stalk in empty and deceiving words. To live in ways that run against the grain of such cultural norms will be one of the distinguishing marks of the Christian.

Conclusion

Paul ends the passage appointed for today with a quote. This is not taken from the Old Testament but is rather a saying that might have been current among the first generation Christian community.

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

To live as touch minded tender hearted Christians will allow us to wake up to what is going on in this world where there are clear choices to be made in how we live. For those who are choosing to live chastely, contemplatively and confidently we are indeed awaking to the values of God and will be able to more fully imitate our Father in heaven as dearly loved Children. Such is the way to walk in love and to be alive to the Spirit so that like Jesus our lives become a fragrant offering pleasing to our Father. When we live like this Christ will shine upon us because our daily behaviour will more fully express that we are men and woman of grace.

Of such people God will say: Oh yes, you I do recognize as one of my own.

Amen.