

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

What drives godly living

Presented by Warwick de Jersey

Too often Christians are seen to be kill joys... as the fun police who want to stop people enjoying themselves. Too often we don't do our Heavenly Father any favours because we come at godly living as getting to know a list of rules, and mindlessly applying them, rather than understanding what lies behind our godliness.

Too often we hear the logic of others about why such and such is fine to do whether it is the "try before you buy" mentality that surrounds marriage, or the greed is good that drives our financial markets, or the latest blockbuster comedy from Hollywood that has people rolling in aisles... laughing about something that in the cold hard light of day is sickening and twisted too often we see it "working" and can't see the problem ourselves ... and so we meekly keep quiet when the issues are debated.

Too often we have nothing to say coz we don't know what to say ... something feels like it must be wrong ... but we can't for the life of us work out why it's are wrong ... and the bible saying it's sin somehow just doesn't seem enough.

So today we're going to be thinking about what drives godly living in a Christian.

Part I

I don't know if you have this experience when you read the Bible... sometimes I find myself reading away and the words just seem to float in one ear and out the other. I read the things that I expect to see ... and I nod ... and think ... yeah ... that is right ... and then all of a sudden I feel like I've been given a massive wack on the back of the head, as the passage ... that I'd just read forces me back... forces me to look again at incredibly familiar words: words that all or a sudden seem to come to life from off the page.

That happened as I read Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2. The words were just flowing over me ... be imitators of God ... Blah And walk in love ... Blah Christ loved us ... Blah ... sacrifice to God ... blah... and then without seeing it coming ... Wack!

And the wack was when I realised that I become immunised against Love that I was so used to hearing about God's Love that I'd forgotten how much of a big deal it was.

Listen with fresh ears to Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2: "Therefore be imitators of God, *as beloved children*. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

In these two short verses we have every encouragement and reason for pursuing Godliness with every fibre of our being.

Let me unpack it...

To do that we've got to remember that most of the first 3 chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians were spent helping us to understand God's love for us. Therefore be imitators of God, *as beloved children*. But, can you remember what we were *before* God chose us to be his beloved children. Chapter 2 tells us we were: his enemies; servants of Satan; and objects of his wrath.

And now we are not just children *But beloved children ... deeply loved ...* and our Father's call is that we are to imitate him ... *the one who has loved us lavishly ...*

Remember chapter 1 verses 3 to 10: We've been adopted, blessed, redeemed, forgiven, had grace lavished on us. Remember chapter 2 verse 4 ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ

How great is God's love for us? So great that Paul prays that God would strengthen them through his Spirit so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that they may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul knows that when we get this love everything else falls into place. It is the love verse 2 of chapter 5 that we are to walk in. It is the love that drove Jesus to love us and give himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. That is the love that we are to walk in.

Everything that follows spells out what it means to walk in that love ... to love as we've been loved. What follows defines love for us.

So when Paul calls us to behave in one way. or to avoid behaving in another, he's defining love for us; he's defining what it means to love; he's showing us what love looks like. And the chief defining characteristic of love is that involves Sacrifice. Jesus gave himself up for us. He sacrificed his life. He spilled his blood. The Father gave up the Son.

To love is to serve at great personal cost. That is how God loves. That is how we are to walk. That is how we are to live

Part II

Which brings us to the big three: the three behaviours or attitudes that keep getting caned in the New Testament. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

What are these three? Basically they are unloving behaviour. Love serves others. Sexual immorality *uses* others for our own pleasure, for our own security, for the fulfilment of our own desires. Impurity is the same. It is taking something that is by definition defiled and revelling in it for my sake rather than withdrawing from it for the sake of others. And Greed is easy: it always involves taking from others, and never giving. Greed involves keeping for myself those things that would benefit others. At its very core Greed is selfishness: it is anti love. The big three really do promote self indulgence rather than self sacrifice for the sake of others.

Have a look at the way that Paul helps us to see how this works in verse 4 with one example of impurity, this time impurity of speech: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."

What do we do with foolish talk and crude joking is making light of something that isn't at its heart humorous. We then domesticate it. It loses its horror/shock value and becomes the norm.

Just look at what has happened in Movies in over the past 40 years. Comedies used to be about being clever, now they celebrate smut. They used to play with words and ideas, now they need to out gross each other in order to be funny. There is no place for filthiness or foolish talk. Rather we ought to focus on thanksgiving ... which is simply giving thanks to God for all we have, rather than striving for more.

I don't know if you've ever noticed but thanksgiving is one of the great antidotes for sin. Giving thanks to God for the people in our lives rather than using them ... using them for our own sexual pleasure ... using them for our own financial gain ... using them for our own ends. Thanksgiving uses our tongues to express our love for God for all he's given us – and that's the opposite of sin.

Part III

It is interesting that Paul has several reasons why there is to be none of the big three. Look at verse: 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 the words sink in. If you are sexually immoral ... impure or covetous ... there is no inheritance for you in the Kingdom.

There is no place in heaven for you if you continue... if you refuse to come back to God in repentance and faith. Full Stop. No arguments. No discussion. No qualifications.

In the context of loving as we've been loved let me ask you this: Is it loving to encourage someone to do something that will see them excluded from Heaven?

Are you caring for your friends when you encourage them to go to the latest gross out comedy with you? I can't see how it can be. How can putting someone in a situation where they will be confronted by impurity and entertained by it, rather than revolted by it, how can that be loving?

Especially when the inevitable will happen and those who fill their heads with such junk will end up having their ability to see it as junk eroded as their consciences are immunized against sin. People will come to us and they'll say to us "You're over reacting. You're being too strict." Listen to verse 6: Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

People will say you're being unreasonable. You just don't understand. It isn't that bad. You're making a mountain out of a molehill ... Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Part IV

When we flick down to verse 11 Paul calls us to do a very loving thing. He says ... Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. Which makes good sense because as we've seen they are completely anti love. Take no part in them he says but instead expose them.

Now it is important to notice that Paul is calling on us to expose sin ... *and not sinners*. He's not calling on Christians to point the finger at others. He's not calling on Christians to mount their high horses and look down on those who sin. Christians still sin. They too need to be forgiven. Paul's command isn't about people comparing themselves with others. His command is to expose sin for what it is. He's calling on those who understand how much God has loved us. He's calling on those who understand that love serves other sacrificially, who understand that sin by its very definition takes, destroys, leaves us and others worse off. He's calling on us to expose sin as utterly sinful.

He continues... 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...

In other words: bring sin out into the light and let others have a good look at it. Expose it for what it is and then people will see it clearly.

Good Journalism exposes. It investigates. It digs around. It examines an issue, and shows the world what is really going on. Good journalism exposes spin as lies. Good journalism isn't fooled by those who tell only part of the story, and want to distort the truth. Good journalism is fearless because it pursues the truth, it exposes, and then it tells the world.

That is what we're to do with sin: expose it.

Hollywood is very good at dressing sexual immortality up as desirable, fun, edgy, cool. Romantic Comedies are the modern spin doctors who promote sexual immorality. They introduce us the characters who we get to know and love. They show us their attraction for each other. We feel their hunger. We know how right it is that they ought to be together... now... that waiting would be wrong ... that the commitment for life that is at the heart of a loving relationship isn't necessary.

And then we watch as they take from each other as they fulfill their own needs. We don't see the fallout. We don't real people five years down the track! We aren't shown the impact of their self serving. We're told that it is all happy endings, but we know life isn't like that. Sex without commitment is about taking. Every sexual partner takes something from us that leaves us less than we were before.

It isn't love, it's selfishness dressed up.