

SELF CENTRED SEX AND GREED DAMNS

Ephesians 5:1-14 - THE EPISTLE FOR THE THIRD

SUNDAY IN LENT

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

## SELF CENTRED SEX AND GREED DAMNS

Today is the third Sunday in Lent. Lent is a time when Christians examine their lives to see whether they are living in accordance with Christian principles. Of course, we should always be examining ourselves but it is a good thing to have a regular reminder of this duty. The scripture portion chosen for reading on this Sunday is Ephesians 5:1-14. It has a direct message for Christians today living as we do in a sex oriented, possession wed society.

The passage contains three contrasts. St. Paul begins by urging his readers to imitate the character of God in their own characters. They are to be good to one another, tender hearted and forgiving one another - just as God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. Our lives are to be oriented by this great central truth of reality that God forgives repentant sinners completely and so restores us to His presence and fellowship. God is a forgiving God and we are to be a forgiving people. St. Paul urges us to be loving to all others, just as Christ has loved us and has given His life on our behalf. God's character becomes clear in the life of Jesus and in what He did for us. Our lives are to be of the same character, in a word, we are to be "other-people" centred. This is the way the world has been made. God's love and concern is centred not in Himself but in us, and we in turn are to find our centre in Him and in other people.

However, human society is in rebellion against God. Its characteristic is self-centred sex. St. Paul singles out two characteristic signs of self-centredness, sexual impurity and greediness. This is as true today as in his time. He says that these sort of things are not even to be named among Christians because the sexually impure, and the greedy covetous person will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. Here is the first contrast, self-centredness in contrast to other-person centredness;

and St. Paul pinpointed the two areas of self-centredness. Self-centredness in sex is a characteristic of the modern world. The other characteristic self-centred activity, is the acquisition of material possessions. Our modern life is mastered by the feverish rush to get more and more, whether this is expressed in raffles, or in poker machines, or in the lottery or in the way our business is conducted. Business ought to be characterised by service, that is to say, it ought to be other-person centred. So too, the professions whether medicine, law or teaching. They should be motivated by service primarily and remuneration only secondarily. But greed as a motivation is making inroads even here.

Gambling is, of course, undisguisedly self-centred and so is much business practice these days. But there is no need for business to have this character and Christians ought to cure their business activity of the feverish, self-centred desire for more.

These self-centred things are not to be mentioned among Christians. Thankfulness is to be the Christian characteristic: because thankfulness is entirely other-person centred.

There is a second contrast. The contrast of the two destinations; inheriting God's kingdom or being overwhelmed by God's wrath. Jesus pointed to the same contrast of destinations when He spoke of the narrow gate that leads to life and the broad gate that leads to destruction. How alert are we these days to the fact of these two very different destinations, one or other of



which will most certainly be ours? St. Paul wrote: "Be sure, for certain, that no sexually impure person nor greedy person will have any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God. Do not let anybody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God's wrath overtakes those who are disobedient to Him. Do not be sharers with them".

Notice what St. Paul says about sexual immorality and the Christian. He says that all fornication, that is, sexual relations outside marriage and all uncleanness in sexual actions and talk is not to find the slightest foothold in the conversation, let alone in the actions of Christian people. There is to be no filthy talking or jesting. Secondly, Christians are to withdraw their company from such type of people and to rebuke their actions. There is no doubt whatever about what St. Paul, the apostle of Christ, enforces on Christians, namely, complete pureness of life.

He gives three reasons. First of all because Christians are saints, that is to say, people who associated with God. You cannot be God's child and compromise with a sex saturated society.

The second reason follows on from this. The Christian is to inherit God's rule. But he will not share in God's future if he identifies with the world. The person who goes in for sexual impurity or makes material gain his objective will be overtaken in the future in the cataclysm of God's wrath. The matter is certain, mere words cannot divert it. God is sovereign, which means that His future is certain - a gracious shaping of His rule with those who respond to His love while those who try to serve God and mammon, in an impossible compromise, will be overtaken with the eternal consequences of their choice, and even though they are regular attenders at church, they will hear those awful words which Christ predicted. "I never knew you; depart from me you who went in for wrongdoing."

There is a third contrast in our passage, the contrast between darkness and light. Christ is light, truth, reality.

The Christians should live in the light. The way of the world is darkness. Indeed, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians, that people who practice sexual sins do so in secret; their own conscience suggests to them that it ought not to be known what they are doing. The Christian, however, is to have no part in these things but should speak up boldly and reprove them, this does not mean, of course, just a negative reproof but a positive statement of true Christian values with regard to possessions and with regard to sex. Above all, the Christian is to live in the light which Christ has brought. His life is to contain the positive fruit of light, which is goodness, fairness and truth. The passage concludes with an exhortation taken from Isaiah 60 "Wake up, you sleeper, and get up from amongst the dead, and the Lord Jesus will give you His light." That light of Christ will shine throughout eternity. Those who follow Him as their Lord will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. God, Himself, will be their light as they live in fellowship with Him.

These three contrasts are real. The first contrast is a choice between a self-centred life or an other-person centred life. Which is yours? The second contrast is a choice between inheriting in the Kingdom of Christ and God or the being overwhelmed with God's wrath and destruction. Which is your destination? The third contrast is the darkness of being far from God or the light of His presence now, and for eternity and so, wake up you who are asleep, leave the dead, and follow the light of Christ.

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