

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON EIGHTY-TWO)**

### ***“THANKSGIVING: THE ANTIDOTE FOR IMPURITY”***

#### **EPHESIANS 5:1-4**

*1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;*

*2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.*

*3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;*

*4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.*

In **Ephesians** chapter **5**, the Apostle Paul continues the exhortations he had begun in the previous chapter, concerning how believers should live out their faith.

In verses **1** and **2**, Paul encourages believers to imitate God since they are His beloved children. In verse **3**, he transitions to condemn three areas which are sinful for believers. These are grouped together as if they are part of a common theme. This common theme focuses on sexual sins, and includes overt actions, subtle actions, and even one's thoughts and attitudes.

Paul specifically mentions **sexual immorality, uncleanness or impurity, and covetousness or greed**. He says that such vices should not exist among believers. As believers, we are certainly capable of sin and failure, but we should never be passive about it. When we are convicted of sin, we ought to confess it and seek to rid ourselves of it.

In verse **4**, Paul addresses inappropriate speech. He writes, “*Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.*”

The **New Living Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.*”

Commenting on this verse, **Warren Wiersbe** made the following remarks: “In **Ephesians 5:4** [Paul] warned against sins of the tongue, which, of course, are really sins of the heart. It is not difficult to see the relationship between the sins named in **Ephesians 5:3** and those in **Ephesians 5:4**. People who have base appetites usually cultivate a base kind of speech and humor, and often people who want to commit sexual sins, or have committed them, enjoy jesting about them. Two indications of a person’s character are what makes him laugh and what makes him weep. The saint of God sees nothing humorous in obscene language or jests.”

The word “*filthiness*” is a translation of the Greek word **aischrotés**: (**ahee-skhrot’-ace**). The word describes indecency whether in action or word, or even in thought and intent. It refers to that which is totally inappropriate and unsuitable.

Someone has said that **aischrotés**, “is an ‘ugly’ sounding word which describes ugly, shameful conduct of any kind, specifically conduct which is contrary to a person who is inhabited by the Spirit of Christ and is called to follow after his Father in heaven.”

In our previous Lesson we stated that believers are not to be “saints” in **position** only. We are to be “saints” in **practice** as well! We should live like saints. We have been separated **unto God**, and therefore we should be separated **from sin**. Practical, experiential holiness requires conduct and speech of which God is not ashamed, and which would not bring shame to the believer if ever it were brought to light. As has rightly been observed, “The true test of a person’s character is what he or she would do if he or she was certain that no one was watching!”

Someone else commented that, “The secret of living holy is living holy in secret.”

The Greek word translated “*foolish talking*” is **mórologia**: (**mo-rol-og-ee’-ah**), which literally describes, “speech flowing out of a dull, sluggish mind that has lost its grip on reality.” **Mórologia** does not merely refer to idle talk or gossip. It refers to speech that is contemptible and therefore offensive to Christian decency. It is the speech of morons!

According to **Merriam-Webster**, a moron is, “a foolish or stupid person.” In the context of Scripture however, a moron is **not** someone who is **mentally** deficient, but rather someone who is **morally** deficient.

In **Romans 1:18-25**, we are given God’s perspective on such an individual. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness,*

*19 because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.*

*20 For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they*

*are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse.*

*21 For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened.*

*22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became **fools** [The Greek word translated “fools” is **moros**, from which our English word “moron” is derived]*

*23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.*

*24 Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to **impurity**, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.*

*25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

It is important for us to understand that Paul is not forbidding humour. He is instead warning believers not to engage in senseless, godless, profane conversation that is out of character with Christianity. Paul is not condemning small talk, because much conversation falls into that classification. He is condemning foolish talk that accomplishes no good purpose. He is denouncing the talk that is characteristic of the “fool” who “*hath said in his heart, There is no God*” (**Psalm 14:1, K.J.V.**).

The Greek word translated “*jesting, which are not convenient,*” or “*coarse jokes,*” is **eutrapelia**: (**yoo-trap-el-ee’-ah**), which literally means, “to turn easily.” And describes clever jokes or remarks in a vulgar sense. The idea is that of a person who “turns easily,” making quick comebacks with clever words which often have a double meaning.

**Warren Wiersbe**, says that the Greek word **eutrapelia**, “suggests a certain kind of conversationalist who can turn any statement into a

coarse jest. The gift of wit is a blessing, but when it is attached to a filthy mind or a base motive, it becomes a curse. There are quick-witted people who can pollute any conversation with jests that are always inconvenient (out of place). How much better it is for us to be quick to give thanks! This is certainly the best way to give glory to God and keep the conversation pure."

**Wayne Barber** says that "coarse jesting means to be talking to somebody, usually of another sex in this context, and you have a hidden agenda. You are baiting the person with what you are saying. You have a double meaning. You are seeing if they are going to listen to you so you can move to the silly talk and then to the filthiness which leads you to the greed which says, 'I want something. I want to feel good.'"

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to note that the Apostle speaks of filthiness, foolish talk and coarse joking in the context of immorality, so clearly, they all have some relationship to that sin.

Paul reiterates in verse **4** what he wrote in verse **3**. The vices mentioned are to be avoided absolutely, because they are "*not convenient*" or out of character for saints. The Greek word translated "*convenient*," is **anékó**: (**an-ay'-ko**), which means, "that which is fitting or right, what is proper, or what is one's duty, with the implication of possible moral judgment involved."

**Anékó** is used to describe actions that are suitable or proper. In this verse, the verb is modified by "*not*" (Greek "**ou**"), which indicates absolute negation. The word therefore refers to improper speech or behaviour. Filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse joking are part of the "**old man**" which believers have "**put off**." They are therefore, not to be part of the character of believers who have "**put on**" the "**new man**." "*These are not for you!*"

Instead of filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse joking, the speech of a believer should be characterized by “*giving of thanks.*” **Thanksgiving is the antidote for impurity!**

Commenting on this clause, **John Piper** made the following remarks:

“We are to take off the old self of fornication and homosexuality and covetousness and filthiness and silly talk and levity. And what are we to put on? *Thanksgiving!* ...Would you have chosen gratitude or thankfulness as the opposite of all these sexual and verbal sins? Why does Paul? Here’s what I would suggest is the reason.

If fornication and impurity are driven by covetousness, and covetousness is a deep discontented craving that dominates your life and even leads you to go against the will of God, then it is clear that the opposite experience would 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** 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."

Paul's says, "*Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.*"

The words "giving of thanks," are the translation of the Greek word **eucharistia**: (**yoo-khar-is-tee'-ah**), which, in the New Testament, refers to "actively, grateful language as an act of worship to God." It describes grateful speech—a striking contrast to speech characterized by filthiness, foolish talking and coarse joking. Paul is exhorting believers to use their speech as a means of communicating their gratitude to God.

Brothers and sisters, it is vitally important for us to develop an **attitude of gratitude** toward God, instead of an attitude of covetousness for self. This attitude of gratitude requires us to shift our focus from **gifts** to the **Giver** of the gifts. But the only way that we can do so, is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. In **Ephesians 5:18-20**, Paul clearly indicates that one of the results of being "filled," or controlled by the Spirit is an attitude of gratitude to God. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

*18 And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit,*

*19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord,*

*20 always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We must bear in mind that the attitude of gratitude toward God that Paul is calling for, is not **dependent** on circumstances. It is an attitude that is **independent** of circumstances because its source is not natural, but supernatural. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the source of the supernatural response of gratitude to God, notwithstanding our circumstances.

Interestingly, the word **eucharistia** has at its core the words **eu**, meaning “good,” and **charis**, meaning “grace.” These core words reflect the fact that a life characterized by “*giving of thanks*,” is impossible without Holy Spirit empowered grace!

In **Colossians 3:16-17** Paul indicates that there is a connection between the operation of grace in the heart of a believer with an attitude of gratitude. The **New English Translation** renders the verses in the following way:

*16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God.*

*17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In **Colossians 4:6** Paul writes, *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone*” (**New English Translation**).

The word “*gracious*” is a translation of the Greek word **charis**, which is the word translated “grace” in the New Testament.

The **Message** translates the verse as follows: *“Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.”*

Brothers and sisters, if we possess grace in our hearts, we will manifest grace on our lips!

An attitude of gratitude indicates that one is submitted to the will of God, no matter how His will is manifested. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for our good, according to **Romans 8:28**, that we can really give God thanks.

The following story concerning **Johannes Tauler**, the German Roman Catholic priest and theologian, aptly demonstrates the attitude of gratitude that Spirit filled believers should manifest:

“One day Tauler met a beggar. ‘God give you a good day, my friend,’ he said.

The beggar answered, ‘I thank God I never had a bad one.’

Then Tauler said, ‘God give you a happy life, my friend.’

‘I thank God,’ said the beggar, ‘that I am never unhappy.’

In amazement Tauler asked, ‘What do you mean?’

‘Well,’ said the beggar, ‘when it is fine I thank God. When it rains I thank God. When I have plenty I thank God. When I am hungry I thank God. And, since God’s will is my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?’

Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. ‘Who are you?’ he asked.

‘I am a king,’ said the beggar.

‘Where, then, is your kingdom?’ asked Tauler.

The beggar replied quietly, 'In my heart.'

The following Scripture passages, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**, clearly indicate the transforming power of a Holy Spirit enabled attitude of gratitude:

**Philippians 4:6-7**

*6 Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition **with thanksgiving**, tell your requests to God.*

*7 And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

**Philippians 4:10-13**

*10 I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me. (Now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything.)*

*11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance.*

*12 I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing.*

*13 I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.*

**Colossians 2:6-7**

*6 Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,*

*7 rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and **overflowing with thankfulness**.*

## **1 Timothy 6:6-11**

*6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

*7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.*

*8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.*

*9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction.*

*10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

*11 But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.*

## **Hebrews 13:5-6**

*5 Your conduct must be free from the love of money and you must be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you and I will never abandon you.”*

*6 So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can people do to me?”*

It is my prayer and hope for those of us who worship at **The Grace Workshop Ministries** that we will allow the Holy Spirit to so operate in our inner-heart lives, that our speech will be so thoroughly transformed, that we will consistently reflect an attitude of gratitude.