

Sermon Series: The Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships

Sermon Title: The Building Block of Moral Purity

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:1-14

Sermon Summary: This study looks at how the building block of moral purity is essential to healthy relationships and can only be achieved when we follow God's instructions for living in the world and yet not of the world! Paul gives us five basic instructions for having the building block of moral purity in our lives. The first one is for us to *be imitators of God* by following His example and the other four instructions flow from this one. Paul goes on to say we are to *walk in love* by following the example Jesus gave us with His life and His death! He then gives us a fourth instruction for finding moral purity by *refusing the darkness*. There are four categories of darkness we are to refuse to be a part of: Sexual immorality, Impurity, Greed, and Obscenity, Foolish Talk or Coarse Joking. We are then encouraged to walk in the light by never forgetting what it was like to walk in darkness, never forgetting we are now children of light, displaying the fruit of the light, and finding out what God's will is for our lives. It is concluded that if you let Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shine on you, then the building block of moral purity will make every relationship you have stronger, more meaningful, more beautiful, more fulfilling and God glorifying!

Special Resources that may be helpful for portions of this message:

Preparing for Adolescence: How to Survive the Coming Years of Change by Dr. James Dobson

The Struggle by Dr. Steve Geraci

Pure Eyes and Eyes of Integrity by Greg Gross

God on Sex by Daniel Akin

Ministering to Gay Teenagers by Shawn Harrison

Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing

Conviction by Caleb Kaltenbach

The Gift of Sex by Clifford and Joyce Penner (For married couples)

Full Sermon Notes:

"So Mighty, so Holy, so Wonderful, such an Awesome God" And while we will never be as mighty, holy, wonderful and awesome as God, we will see today that we are called by God to be imitators of God! We are to do this by living a morally pure life! Is that even possible? Let's pray and we'll find out! Pray!

Our text today is found in Ephesians 5:1-14. We're going to take it verse by verse and discover God's instructions for placing the building block of moral purity in our lives. The building block of moral purity is essential to healthy relationships and can only be achieved when we follow God's instructions for living in the world and yet not of the world! The dictionary definition of moral is...

Moral - concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character.

So morality has to do with right and wrong in all areas of life. Many times when we talk about moral purity, we focus on the area of our sexuality, and that's certainly a huge part of moral purity. We'll talk about that today, but moral purity is a building block that should be a part of every aspect of our lives! We should also seek to be morally pure in our conversations, our attitudes, our work ethic, our honesty, and how we treat others. So this all begs the question: Where does a person go to find what constitutes moral purity. In our world today people have decided they can just make up their own definition of what moral purity is independent of any objective, inspired, God ordained truth. People have decided they can just decide what they want truth and moral purity to be rather than what it actually is. Rachel Bratton a student in Communications and Christian Studies at Grand Canyon University and writer for The Western Journal put it this way in an article July 4, 2021...

"Thanks to cultural corrosion and a lack of biblical literacy, a new "fake Christianity" has raked the dry ground of the American church. This counterfeit religion is moralistic therapeutic deism, (MTD) a worldview that has quickly gained prominence and given many Americans a theology that looks nothing like historical Christianity, despite what they may claim"

She goes on to quote George Barna, a Christian writer and researcher as to the definition of moralistic therapeutic deism. Barna says...

"MTD is essentially what I would call fake Christianity. Because it has some Christian elements in it, but it's not really biblical, it's not really Christian. The moralistic perspective is we're here to be good people and to try to do good. That's really what life is about. I'll be good to you, you be good to me, it'll all work out. The therapeutic aspect is everything is supposed to be geared to making me feel good about myself, ultimately to make me happy. Deism is the idea that God created the world but has no direct involvement in it. Basically, according to MTD, there is a distant God who just wants everyone to be nice, and the purpose of life is to be happy. American "Christians" who have adopted this philosophy have borrowed heavily from the modern secular world, which elevates personal definitions of right and wrong above any objective standard of truth -- like the Bible."

Folks, if we continue down that road, true moral purity will become increasingly rare and the world will become increasingly wicked and unGodly! What are the things we must do if we are to have true Biblical moral purity as a building block in our lives and relationships? There are five basic things we must do and four of them flow from the very first instruction Paul gives us in our text! We are instructed to...

1. BE IMITATORS OF GOD

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

How are we to do this? The updated NIV translation says...

"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children!"

So it's simple, follow God's example, but that's a mighty tall order because God is perfect! Paul says we are to be imitators of God as dearly loved children! Little children look up to their parents as examples and for guidance on how to live life! In fact most of the time kids want to be like their parents especially when there's a good relationship between them. God wants us to look to Him as our Heavenly Father! He wants us to look to Him for our example and to His Son Jesus for a template for living life in this world! He wants us to have a good relationship with Him so we can be imitators of God! I'll never be Jesus, but I want to be more like Jesus each and every day God allows me to live! I'll never be able to live up to what I preach because I preach a high standard! I preach Jesus and He's perfect, and holy beyond my comprehension! I'll never be able to completely live up to His standard, but hear me on this, the day I quit trying to live what I preach is the day I will stop preaching! It should be the passion and hearts desire of every follower of Jesus Christ to be more like Jesus each and every day and this is certainly true when it comes to the building block of moral purity in our relationships! You may be the only Bible some people ever read! They are looking at your example as a follower of Jesus! They are watching you and are formulating their opinion of God based on what they see in you because you claim to be one of His followers, one of His disciples. What are people seeing? What are they looking at when they look at your life? If you're a parent, what are your children seeing in your life? All of us should ask ourselves this question: I'm I a reflection of the love of God, the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, and the holiness of God?

We talked about being an imitator of God last week in our message on the building block of forgiveness. Just as with the building block of forgiveness we must be imitators of God if we are to have any hope of having the building block of moral purity in our relationships. God's Word says in 1 Peter?

1 Peter 1:15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

1 Peter 1:16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

And here's the beautiful thing about this: Jesus not only died so that we could be forgiven of our past failures, but He also gave His life so we could have His power and His victory to live a new life in Christ! In fact, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We get saved from the eternal penalty of sin and are forgiven when we allow Jesus to be our Savior! We are given power and victory over sin when we allow Jesus to be the Lord of our daily lives and the choices we make. This is the life-long process of sanctification or becoming a little more like Jesus every day! Being willing to discipline ourselves in the area of moral purity will lend great strength to our spiritual resolve to walk in holiness. Holiness is not about "I'm better than you!" It's about "I depend on the goodness of Jesus and His righteousness to

make me a better person!" If we are not living a life of sanctification (becoming more like Christ) then we will default to the sinful nature and the building block of moral purity will not be a part of our relationships! I was talking with Andrew about this and he said...

"When you imitate Christ and walk in moral purity your relationships will be good!"

Amen to that! And if we are going to be imitators of Jesus Christ then it is a given that we must follow Paul's second instruction to...

2. WALK IN LOVE!

Ephesians 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Jesus set the example of walking in love! When we reflect on the life of love Jesus lived and the death He died because of His love for us and His desire to save our souls, this should cause us to live inspired! Our Goal in moral purity is to be like Jesus! He's our inspiration and our motivation! I was thinking back on Jesus' life of love. Just wanted to give you a few examples that should inspire you to walk in love like Jesus. It's natural for us when we see something repulsive, to turn away or to walk the other way. There was a terrible disease called leprosy back in Jesus' day. It still exists today, but is somewhat rare. Only about 100 people a year in the U.S. contract leprosy and around 200,000 worldwide. There are treatments today, but in Jesus day, there were not effective treatments. It would leave people disfigured, crippled, and with open sores on their bodies. They were banished from public places and if they were walking down a country road and someone else were walking by they had to cry out "Leper, unclean!" Can you imagine the emotional and mental trauma they faced on top of their physical pain? Listen to this story from the life of Jesus...

Matthew 8:1 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

Matthew 8:2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Matthew 8:3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

Most people focus on the fact that Jesus healed the man physically. But maybe our focus should be on the fact that Jesus did the unthinkable...He reached out His hand and touched the man! Can you imagine the emotional, mental and spiritual healing that brought to an outcast from society who had been used to yelling out to everyone his condition of being unclean so that no one would accidentally come in contact with him? Jesus had such a walk of love. Another time, Jesus had just been told of the horrible murder of His relative and dear friend John the Baptist, the one who had baptized Jesus. Listen to what happened...

Matthew 14:13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

Matthew 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

There He was, in grief, and yet He had compassion on the large crowd and healed their sick. Jesus lived a life of love. And then, just before He gave His life on the Cross, another act of love, He did some amazing things. Listen to this...

Matthew 26:47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

Matthew 26:48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him."

Matthew 26:49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Matthew 26:50 Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

Jesus called Judas a friend! Jesus still cared for Judas even as he was being betrayed by him. Wow! And here's what happens next...

Luke 22:49 When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?"

Luke 22:50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

Luke 22:51 But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

And of course, you remember from last week's message that Jesus, while on the cross, prays for the very people who had nailed Him to the cross! What a life of love! What an example! What an inspiration! Such moral purity! So imitate God by following the example of Jesus' walk of love! This leads us to another instruction from Paul that we must follow if we want to have moral purity as a part of our relationships...

3. REFUSE THE DARKNESS

Ephesians 5:3 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.

Refuse the Darkness of Sexual Immorality

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality...

You might remember our recent study of the Spiritual Disciplines. Richard Foster's book on disciplines which we used as a resource did not include moral purity, or chastity as one of the spiritual disciplines, however, other Christian authors and theologians have, like Dallas Willard. Chastity involves discipline, control, faithfulness and moral purity in the area of sexuality. To

most it is a big NO. No you can't have fun like everybody else in the world. You're not allowed! However, Chastity is really about saying yes! Yes to sex God's way. Yes to sex without all the guilt. Yes to Sex without the horrible consequences. Yes to sex the way God intended. Beautiful instead of ugly. An act of love as opposed to an act of lust. An act of giving rather than an act of selfish taking. I'm going to list some good resources for you on this topic in my sermon notes.

The discipline of chastity and the building block of moral purity are not just about abstaining from sexual activity, but also with its proper expression as God intended. Today's society has both elevated sexuality and cheapened it at the same time. On the one hand, sexual activity has become the priority for many and is used as a substitute for the true longings of the soul to know God. On the other hand, sex is considered by many to be simply a physical act and is treated with casual attitudes and disrespect. However, sexuality involves our whole being; it is physical, it is mental, it is emotional, and it is spiritual. Though it is a very private matter, you could also say that it is also social because it has consequences that affect society as a whole.

Learning to control sexual urges and drives, and to bring them under the control of the Holy Spirit is one the goals of moral purity. Without conscious discipline in this area a person can quickly slip into sin. O.S. Hawkins reminded us of this truth in his book entitled Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults...

"... the Bible says that all of us have hearts that are "desperately wicked," that are constantly prone to sin, and we are just as likely to embrace perversity at the height of our success as we are in the depths of our despair. One obvious tactic of the devil is to strike when things are going right--when we are riding the crest of some great victory. He knows that at such times we are apt to be vulnerable--because it is then that we are most likely to let our guard down. Satan knows this only too well." Page 271

And talking about letting your guard down. Technology has taken the idea of chastity, and moral purity, to new lows. The internet has been both a blessing and a curse! And with cell phones connected to the internet, even children have access to some of the most vile content ever produced. If your child has unfettered access to the internet on their phone, don't be so naive to think Satan's not going to find a way to draw them into that mind warping content! Children are increasingly involved in sending inappropriate pictures to each other via their cell phones. Some estimates place the numbers of teenagers who have sent or responded to one of these texts at 45%. Parents, if we are to expect our children and grandchildren to live lives of moral purity, then we are going to have to model it! It can't be a "do what I say, not what I do" kind of thing! We must be committed to following God's example and being a Godly example!

Refuse the Darkness of Impurity

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity...

Refuse impurity in your thoughts, attitudes, relationships, and actions. This includes areas of your life like truthfulness, forgiveness, speech, serving, sharing and sexuality!

One of the biggest signs of the great falling away from morality, values, truth, sanity, and God Himself is the way we increasingly treat our fellow human beings. We are quickly coming to a place where people are seen as objects. objects to be used and discarded rather than people to be loved, nurtured and cared for. Whether it's objectifying someone sexually or for some other reason. Many people see their relationships for what they will gain from them rather than what they can bring to them. This happens in the workplace all the time, people using other people to get where they want to get. Walking on others or using others as stepping stones for selfish reasons. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Thessalonian church...

1 Th 4:6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

1 Th 4:7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

1 Th 4:8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Next week we will have a whole message on the building block of Spirit filled relationships because we need The Holy Spirit's power, strength and wisdom, if we are to live morally pure lives! Paul tells us also to...

Refuse the Darkness of Greed

Ephesians 5:3 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.

Greed has to do with a person placing themselves and what they think is best for themselves above all else! Greed comes in many forms and will destroy all of your relationships. So many times we think of greed only in terms of money, and that's certainly a big area of greed in relationships, but greed can also be found in other areas of our relationships when we are greedy by being selfish and always thinking of ourselves and our wants and needs rather than putting the other person first, just after the Lord! The writer of Proverbs says...

Proverbs 28:25 The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the LORD will prosper.

Jesus reminded the teachers of the law and the Pharisees of this issue when He said...

Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Self-indulgence is when everything revolves around me, myself and I! We recently read this verse, but it just needs to be read in this context....

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

Philippians 2:4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

In our text Paul goes on to specify some specific behaviors we should refuse to participate in.

Refuse the Darkness of Obscenity, Foolish Talk or Coarse Joking

Ephesians 5:4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

I realize we recently had a whole message on wholesome words, and talked about things that shouldn't be a part of our speech life, but I want to reiterate that obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking are indicators that someone's heart is not right. Why? Because what's on the inside shows up on the outside with your words, your speech, and coarse joking. Some people think coarse joking is not really a sin, but I can promise you that you are playing with fire and you will get burned. Because if you're willing to joke about immorality then you've left the door open for immorality to walk into your life. If it's something you're willing to take lightly and joke about, Satan has already got his foot in the back door and he's going to sneak in when you least expect it. Paul warns young Timothy of this...

2 Timothy 2:16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

And quickly I want to tell you a truth I learned years ago and it astounded me. The Bible says if the Devil himself comes at you, here's what you are to do...

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

So we can submit ourselves to God and resist the devil and it will send him running scared! But I want you to see what the Bible says about playing around with immorality...

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The King James version says "Flee youthful lust!" So we can resist the devil and he'll flee from us, but we are to flee immorality! In other words, don't flirt with it, don't play around with immorality, don't joke about it, take it very seriously! It can destroy your relationships! Paul said something at the end of this verse and I don't want to skip it. Check this out...

Ephesians 5:4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

It may seem random that Paul would talk about avoiding obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking and all of a sudden say we should rather be thankful. Why? I believe it's because people who are filled with obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking, are unsatisfied, unhappy, ungrateful, unfulfilled, and unthankful for the blessings they have. You'll find that immorality has its roots in allowing darkness to creep in through sexual immorality, greed, selfishness, obscenities, foolish talk and coarse joking

4. AVOID BAD INFLUENCES

Ephesians 5:5 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.

Ephesians 5:6 Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Ephesians 5:7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

You must realize that immorality, impurity and greediness keeps you from experiencing the blessing of living in the Kingdom of God and if you are allowing people who are living immoral, impure and greedy lives to influence you that's a path towards losing the moral purity God wants you to have! They may call you names, make you feel silly or stupid for having moral convictions but don't let them sway you with their empty words! Paul said don't be partners with them. He didn't say don't speak to them, or don't pray for them, or care about them, but we should not partner with them because of their potential negative influence on us and on our witness to others. We're going to have a whole series coming up after our series on the home that will help us know how to build friendships with people in the world without being pulled into a world of immorality! Remember, we are to be in the world, but we are not to be of the world! There's a difference! Paul said this to the Corinthian Church...

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

And please don't forget that it's not just people you hang out with but things you hang out with! Things you read and see and hear! What you are consuming into your mind has an influence on your moral purity or lack thereof!

Okay, the last instruction from Paul brings us full circle back to the very first instruction...

5. LIVE IN THE LIGHT

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

Never forget your life before the Light -

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness,

I was sharing with my Dad the other day how I try not to forget my life before Christ and just how dark it was and how blessed I am to have been rescued from the darkness! When I see someone walking in darkness I don't feel prideful, I feel grateful and I feel sorrowful for them and I want so much to help them see the light! Paul goes on to say...

Never forget you are now children of Light!

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

Children of the light implies living as the family of God in the light! As children of the light we are to...

Display the fruit of the Light!

And what would the fruit of the light be? Paul tells us...

Ephesians 5:9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Are you bearing the fruit of the light of being a child of God? Are goodness, righteousness and truthfulness a part of your life? Are you imitating God, living a life of love, refusing the darkness, avoiding bad influences, and living in the light?

I had a discussion with Andrew Ogea about this the other day and here's some of the takeaways from that discussion. You are light - you can't live what you're not. If you're not light in the Lord you can't live it. We're talking about character, not just actions. Actions indicate what's on the inside. If you try to change behaviors without changing your heart and your character then you will be frustrated, because it can't be done. We need to not only let Jesus be our Savior, but we need Him to be our Lord, our teacher, our mentor, our example, and our inspiration. Live as you are, children of light, if you are children of light. "You live what you are!" Paul then tells us something very important if we are to live as children of the light...

Ephesians 5:10 and find out what pleases the Lord

Find out what pleases the Lord

It should be our goal, our heart cry, and our passion, to find out what pleases the Lord and then do it, live it, implement it, and walk in it! We should pray like Jesus prayed...

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Are you willing to pray for God's will to be done in your life? Are you willing to trust that His will is best for you? Are you willing to follow Paul's instructions for moral purity as he restated them in our text? .

Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Ephesians 5:12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

Ephesians 5:13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible,

Ephesians 5:14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

I can promise you this: If you wake up from your immorality and decide to let Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shine on you, then the building block of moral purity will make every relationship you have stronger, more meaningful, more beautiful, more fulfilling and God glorifying! I promise!

Let's pray!