Opening Words

I love the word, "but!" Paul gives a graphic description of the state of the world without Christ – the darkness, the misery, the sin. And then he says, "but, Christ!"

164 Eph The Right Attitude for a Life of Purity

My wife and I love to walk. It affords us an opportunity to visit with each other in less distracted ways, and when we walk in beautiful places in our city or other parts of the country, we enjoy the marvels of God's creation.

Hello everyone! It is so good to be with you today and to continue searching through the book of Ephesians. We find ourselves in Chapter 4 and we have described the last half of the book of Ephesians, chapters 4-6, as a collection of walking tours. We have seen that the word walk is a prominent vocabulary choice of Paul's in these last chapters. He uses it five times beginning in 4:1 where he says – Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, and ending in 5:15 where he says – Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise.

And we have identified the four walking tours as a walk of unity, a walk of purity, a walk of household harmony, and a walk of victory. We have seen that the walk of unity involved godly character, an understanding of the oneness of God, an appreciation for the diversity within the Body of Christ seen in various spiritual gifts, and a focus toward maturity. That was our walk of unity. Today we begin our walking tour of purity which is the theme of 4:17-5:17.

Let me read just the first few verses of this section.

> So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,

I love the word, "but!" Paul gives a graphic description of the state of the world without Christ and then he says, "but, Christ!" And we can be grateful for the work of Christ that delivers us, and yet, purity and holiness can be a major challenge for us.

Can there be anything more urgent for our Church in western culture today than walking in purity? I think not. I was recently reviewing a book by Josh McDowell in which he reported the findings of a years-long survey of the beliefs of young people, and the discovery was that being a follower of Christ made little difference in many areas of life. Those who identified themselves as Christians were just as likely to retaliate physically when they were angered, just as likely to lie to a parent or teacher, and just as likely to cheat on an exam.

I have read other surveys, professionally executed and tabulated that showed that the sexual morals of those who identify themselves as Christians was little different than the morals of those who did not claim Christ.

But let's not wring our hands and say, "it must be a sign of the times." Let's not lock ourselves up in our homes and lament at how corrupt the world and some churches are. And, especially, let's not pick up stones to cast at those who fail. Jesus' words in John 8 are so important for us here – "let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone."

In the church, we frown upon the major sins of fornication and adultery. But what about the sin of anger? What about the sin of envy? What about the sin of strife? In Galatians 5 when Paul talks about the works of the flesh he lists these more acceptable sins of the heart with the less acceptable ones of sexual immorality! They are all in the same list!

No, we cannot afford to pick up stones to throw at others for if we do, we will find those same stones being justly hurled back. We must not wring our hands and say how bad things are and try to cut ourselves off from others. God wants us to be a light to this world. God wants us to show the world there is a better way. God wants us to help struggling Christians with an attitude of care and concern. One of my favorite verses for a long time has been Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

Oh, how I love that verse. Even if we catch someone in the act of sinning, our response should be one of restoration, not judgment. Notice how the restoration is to be done – with gentleness and with humility for Paul says, "when you do this, you better do it in the right way because if you don't, you are going to be tempted in the very same area."

Honestly, I've had enough temptation without bringing extra temptation into my life because I have a judgmental spirit towards others. I have tried to avoid extra temptation by having a humble, gentle, restoring attitude towards others.

I have come to realize that every Christian is flawed and deals with temptation in some way. I knew that early in my Christian life as a young man. The fact that every Christian has something they are dealing with was a **theological** certainty. But now, after decades of service in the Church, I know it experientially. I know that every Christian is flawed in some way. Every Christian needs grace. And I realize that Christ died for every Christian. When others aren't doing too well, or even if they are offending me or hurting me, I remember that they are people in need of the Savior just as I need a Savior.

I felt like I had to say these things before we dig into these verses in Ephesians. I want us to dig into them with humility knowing that we are frail like others. I want us to dig in them with an attitude of, "I am going to help my brothers and sisters who may be struggling. I'll talk to them if I need to and I will especially pray for them. I will intercede for them just as Christ intercedes for them right now." I want us to dig into these verses, that describe unbelievers, with an attitude of mercy and hope for them. I don't want us to lift our noses and have the old "holier than thou" attitude. I want us to read these verses and remember that we are the light of the world and if we are delivered from corruption it is only by the grace of Christ that we are delivered.

Perhaps, this is why Peter said in 2 Peter 1:5-8, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and

in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love."

Notice how it ends – with brotherly kindness and love. The list starts with the Christ-like moral virtue, self-control, and perseverance but moves towards a sweet Christ-like spirit of kindness and love and then Peter says that if these qualities are not in us, then we are blind or shortsighted and we have forgotten **our** purification from **our** sins.

Brothers and sisters, the closer I get to Christ, the more I see my need for him because he keeps revealing to me deeper levels of sin in my life. He does not do this in a judgmental way. No, he is my Savior. He does this in a saving way – showing me my frailty and showing me his smile of grace and his extended hand that he might help me to step up even higher with him and away from damaging and harmful things.

Years ago, I remember a brother who pointed out to me a progression in the life of Paul. Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 15:9, "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." A few years later when he was in prison and writing letters to churches including this one to the church in Ephesus he called himself the least of the saints. Listen to 3:8, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." He has gone from the least of the apostles to the least of all of God's people. That's quite a bit of progress in humility, but God wasn't finished with Paul yet and a few years later he wrote, "I am the foremost of sinners." Listen to 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

From the least of the apostles, to the least of God's people, to the chief of sinners. That was a progression of about ten years. And notice that I call it a progression. Paul was not spiraling downward into depression. He was spiraling upward into greater grace and love for the Savior and change in his life while he learned more about himself and all that Christ did to save him.

I think this would be a good time to pray as we close this message today and prepare for our in-depth analysis of what Paul said in Ephesians 4:17ff in the coming broadcasts. Would you pray with me, "Father, we come before you now in humility and gratitude – humility because without you we are nothing. Without you we would die in our sins. We come with gratitude because you have bidden us to come to you and to find forgiveness and life change.

We thank you for the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. We thank you for the justification that is ours in him and that we stand before you as righteous ones in Jesus Christ. Father, we pray that our behavior might match our status. We pray that you would bring life change deep into our hearts. We pray that we would not be conformed to this world in any way but that we would be conformed to Jesus Christ in his righteousness, truth, and love toward all mankind.

As we prepare to take this walking tour of purity, we ask you to do a work in our hearts and that you would equip us to help our brothers and sisters in areas where they struggle, and we pray that we would be a bright and encouraging light to a world in darkness and without hope. And we ask this in Jesus name – Amen."