

Free From the Slavery of Sexual Sin

Ephesians 5:3-14

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It was in 1859 that Charles Darwin wrote his revolutionary book *On the Origin of Species*. It took some time for the ideas of that book to sort of filter out and filter down to have far-reaching influence. Wikipedia writes that,

... because of Darwin's book, the fact that evolution occurs became accepted by the scientific community and much of the general public in Darwin's lifetime. But it was not until the emergence of the modern evolutionary synthesis from the 1930's to the 1950's that a broad consensus developed that natural selection was the basic mechanism of evolution. It goes on to say that in modified form, Darwin's scientific discovery is the unifying theory of the life sciences explaining the diversity of life.

Last century as Darwin's evolutionary theory developed, as Wikipedia says, "into a unified theory," there were many Christian voices warning that there would be huge ethical ramifications of the theory. I mean, after all, if man is only an animal, then why should there be any ethical imperatives at all? And those of you who are old enough to remember will remember that Christians were assured by the Darwinists that man did not need God to be good, that he could be good without a God, that he could stay in line with the traditional moral code (really a reflection of the moral character of God established in the Ten Commandments and in the heart of every man) without God. There aren't any Darwinian naturalists still saying that.

You see, the situation has radically changed since the middle of the last century. Morality has been completely redefined. There was a time when ethics and morality referred to the issues commented on by the Ten Commandments. You were moral or not moral based on whether or not you remained faithful to your partner in marriage; whether or not you stole from others; whether or not you coveted what didn't belong to others; whether you told the truth. But that's not the same anymore.

Now, morality is defined in a much different way. The new morality, and all you have to do is read the newspaper or pick up a magazine, watch television and you'll learn that the new morality isn't about those issues at all. The new morality is about environmentalism, world poverty and animal rights. You can lie as much as you want. You can take from others. You can live like an alley cat in your morals, but as long as you put your recyclables in the trash where they can be recycled, then you are moral.

So, if those issues – environmentalism, world poverty, animal rights – constitute the new morality, what exactly does today's cultural elite think about the traditional issues of morality, those things commented on by the Ten Commandments? Several years ago, I read an article, a frightening article, in *World Magazine* about Peter Singer. Perhaps you've read about Peter Singer, or you've heard about him. Peter Singer is an Australian who was placed in the chair role as a professor in bioethics at *Princeton University* in the *Center for Human Values* there. He teaches practical, ethical behavior to university students, to those who are the best and brightest in our country.

If you doubt his credentials, listen to how he's described by several leading publications. The *New York Times* says of Peter Singer, "No other living philosopher has had this kind of influence." The *New Yorker* writes, "He is the most influential philosopher alive." The *New England Journal of Medicine* says of him, "He has had more success in effecting changes in acceptable behavior than any philosopher since Bertrand Russell."

Now when you hear that he's dealing with ethics, your first thought may be to think that he is weighing in on the cultural debates of our times – things like abortion or same-sex marriage. Not at all, those are "givens" to him. He is assuming those things. He is going way beyond into a brave new world. I won't go into all that he teaches, but he has even advocated the morality of having a child for the sole purpose of killing that child and harvesting its organs.

What does he say about sexual behavior? Listen to what he's teaching a new generation of the nation's cultural elite. When it comes to sexual issues, Singer has said this, "Any kind of fully consensual sexual behavior involving two people or two hundred is ethically fine." He includes

in his list necrophilia and even bestiality. In fact, in an article entitled, “Heavy Petting”, Singer attacks biblical morality and supports bestiality. He writes that Judeo-Christian tradition has taught us that humans alone are made in the image of God. That’s right. It does. But he says evolution has refuted the biblical account of creation, “We are animals and sex across the species barrier (there’s a polite way of putting it, sex across the species barrier) ceases to be an offense to our status and dignity as human beings.”

If you think Singer’s views aren’t being embraced, they aren’t being held to, consider that in 2002 a play opened on Broadway by the name of ‘The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?’ and it received critical acclaim, and it exalts this very sexual perversion. It’s frightening really what’s going on in our culture. But I believe that we still have not arrived at the full consequences of Darwinian evolutionary theory. I think it’ll get worse before it gets better because if man is an animal, there is no moral code except the survival of the fittest.

With such radical agendas and such perverted views flowing to our society’s elite and from our society’s elite into the universities, it should come as absolutely no surprise to us that the sexual practices of our society have radically changed as well. Or perhaps I shouldn’t say the practices. The sins have always been there because man is a fallen being who loves sin, but it has become much more acceptable than it was. We see that change all around us and how did the change happen? How did this change occur? Understand that it was not an accident. It is a determined agenda on the part of social Darwinians. There are any number of possible illustrations of this. Let me just share a couple with you.

Most of us recognize the name Margaret Sanger – not Singer, but Sanger. She was the founder of Planned Parenthood and famous for her views on birth control. What you may not know is that she was also one of the chief architects of the sexual revolution. That’s because she had a clearly defined and stated goal. I read about this this week in an excellent book that I would highly recommend to you. Nancy Pearcey wrote a book called *Total Truth*. It’s a great critique of our time. She was a disciple of Francis Schaeffer, and it’s really excellent. But in this book, Nancy Pearcey described Sanger’s goal in this way. She said,

It was to construct a scientific approach to sexuality based on Darwinianism. Sanger portrayed the drama of history as a struggle to free our bodies and minds from the constraints of morality, what she called the cruel morality of self-denial and sin. She touted sexual liberation as the “only method to find inner peace and security and beauty.” [Pearcey goes on to say,] “Sanger offered this sweeping Messianic promise [and this is a quote from Sanger herself],: ‘Through sex, mankind will attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world and light up the only path to an earthly paradise.’”

Alfred Kinsey would be another example. He had the same agenda in his major work *Sexual Behavior in a Human Male*. He criticized scientists for labeling in their research some behaviors normal and other behaviors abnormal. He said we shouldn’t make such moral judgments. Sex, he said, is “... a normal biologic function acceptable in whatever form it is manifested.” For Kinsey, he said the only standard of what is acceptable is: what do other mammals do?

What I want you to see, folks, is that people like Sanger and Kinsey had an ideology. They had a goal and that was to apply Darwinianism to ethics. And they sowed the wind, and we are reaping the whirlwind. In March of 1999, *The New Yorker* magazine - this is almost a decade ago now, and it has become much more prolific since then. *The New Yorker* magazine published an article entitled, “The Loose Cannon: Why Higher Learning has Embraced Pornography”. The article reported that today (and that was ten years ago again) in most colleges and universities, there are classes of young people sitting in a classroom studying hard-core pornography. They sit in university classrooms and watch explicit images cross the screen. And in some of the classes that are part of this new trend called porn studies, the students even have to film their own as part of their homework. In the *New Yorker* article, one of these professors explained why this is so important, “Sex is now seen as the motive force of our beings.” He went on to explain that “true inner change (almost sounds biblical, right? Listen to how it comes.), true inner change is discovering the true nature of your sexuality.”

How do we wrap all of that up? Well, I think Nancy Pearcey in her book *Total Truth* was right when she summed it up like this,

In short, sexual liberation has itself become a moral crusade in which Christian morality is the enemy and opposition to Christian morality is a heroic moral stance. Biblical morality is nothing less than the source of evil and dysfunction. Sexual liberation is not just a manner of sensual gratification or titillation. It is a complete ideology with all the elements of a world view.

Here's what I want you to get, folks. Why are things going so much in this sensual, sexual direction? Some of it in the rank-and-file population is just about pursuing their own sin, but understand that it is also driven by an ideology. It is the ultimate outflow of Darwinianism, of evolutionary theory. Man is just an animal. There are no social mores. You can behave however you want.

Now let's be clear. If it were true that we evolved, that there is no God, we are the product of natural selection, then all of those views of morality that they hold would be consistent, wouldn't they? If man is just an animal, then who's to say what behaviors are right and wrong? But thank God it's not true. God created man in His own image, separate from the animals. And God gave to man made in His image, He gave him for this life, for this world, a wonderful gift – the gift of sexuality. And to truly enjoy that gift means doing so in a way the Creator prescribed. And to use that precious and wonderful gift in any other way is to pervert it. In fact, in biblical terms, it is to enter into sexual slavery.

People, we live in a society where those around us are slaves of sexual sin, but they think it's freedom. It's like the parable of the fish. The fish lives surrounded by water doesn't know it's wet because that's the atmosphere in which it lives. These people are the slaves of sin, but they don't know it. They think they're free because it's what surrounds them.

According to Ephesians 2, all of us used to be the slaves of sin as well, but we have been freed from that slavery, and Paul says we ought to live in keeping with that reality. Today we come to the next section of Ephesians 5. Paul explains how it is that you and I can live clean lives in a dirty world. He explains to us how as Christians we should live in a skewed, sex-obsessed culture.

Now, as we come to this new section, I think it's important for me to make sure that we don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. I enjoy our studies and we go in detail, but I think sometimes we can lose the big picture. Let me just briefly review and for those of you who haven't been here in the past. When we began our study of this book, we said that the theme of this magnificent letter of the apostle Paul is God's eternal plan. God has a plan and He's working that plan out in human history.

Chapters 1 - 3 explain the plan. Chapters 4 - 6 apply the plan. Chapters 1 - 3 are doctrine. Chapters 4 - 6: the application. The first three chapters tell us what we need to know. Chapters 4 - 6 are primarily about what we need to do in light of what we know. Chapters 1 - 3: our new position in Christ as part of that great plan. Chapters 4 - 6: our practice, how we should live in light of our place in God's plan.

So, the theme of the second half of this letter, 4 - 6, is clearly applying the reality of God's great eternal plan to our lives. It's stated very succinctly. Look at Ephesians 4:1. As he begins the second half of the letter, here it is. Here's what he's going to talk about, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you [I plead with you] to walk in a manner worthy of your calling which you have been called." Walk in a manner worthy of your calling, your new position in Christ. How do we do that?

Well, we discovered in 4:2 - 16 that if we're going to walk worthy, we have to walk in unity.

In 4:17 down through 24, we discovered that to walk worthy we must walk in the new life we have in Christ. We're not the people we used to be so we can't keep acting like we are.

The last section we've looked at together began in 4:25 and ran down through 5:2. And there, we learned that if we're going to walk worthy, we need to walk in love, love for one another. And Paul's very detailed about how that expresses itself in life and in relationships.

Today we come to the next section. The next section runs from 5:3 down through 14. Let me read it for you. Chapter 5:3,

“But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, ... arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.”

The theme of this section comes in verse 8 where he says, “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.” If we want to walk worthy of our calling, we must walk in the light. We must walk as children of the light. And as we’ll see in its context here, to walk as children of the light is to live a life of moral purity. If we’re going to walk worthy of our calling, worthy of our new position in Christ detailed in the first three chapters, then we must walk in sexual purity.

Now as, even as I read those verses, I know what it’s tempting to do. It’s tempting to sit there and hear those words and because they’re not words we normally think of in context of sexual sin and the struggles that we face with that sin in our lives, it’s very tempting for us to hear that and to see Paul’s views here as simple ideas worked, working in simpler times. You know, I

mean after all, Paul didn't have to live in twenty-first century America. Paul didn't have the internet. Paul didn't have to worry about all the modern technologies that make sexual sin easier. There was no printing press. There was no television. There were no movies. There were no computers. And so, you know, it must've been a lot easier then to have lived a sexually pure life.

If you're tempted to think like that, I'm afraid you betray that you know nothing about the Greek culture of the first century. In the classic ten volume set called *A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* describing one of the words we'll find in our text as we work our way through it, one author explains the Greek view of sexuality. And he explains that it was almost identical to that not of our day today, but of where we're heading, of the projection of where we're going.

You see, the Greeks saw sexual behavior as natural and as necessary as eating and drinking, and any expression of it almost without exception was acceptable. Extramarital affairs were permitted and even encouraged in the Greek world. Plato, no less than the great philosopher Plato, argued that involvement with prostitutes is acceptable as long as it's in secret and offends no one. Even experimentation within the sexes was tolerated.

And if that was bad, (and it was) the situation in the city of Ephesus was even worse. I've had the chance to travel to the ancient city of Ephesus now in modern day Turkey. Ephesus was a huge city by ancient standards. Some two hundred thousand people called it home. It was the capital city of the province. The Roman governor lived there. It was situated on a major trade route and had access to the Mediterranean through the absolutely beautiful Aegean Sea. It was an attractive, prosperous ancient city. But if you mentioned Ephesus in the ancient world, immediately one thing came to mind. The city of Ephesus was most famous for a temple that was there – the Temple of Artemis or Diana.

You remember (if you're even familiar with the book of Acts) that when Paul and his companions were there in Ephesus, they were confronted by those who worshiped this goddess during their time there. Remember, they gathered in the theater, and they shouted for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians"? This was what Ephesus was known for. It is still listed, by the way, the Temple of Diana in Ephesus is still listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient

world. Today, if you go there, and you can go and see, all there is a field with a single column that has been sort of reconstructed from broken pieces. But in its day, it was a magnificent structure.

If you lived in Ephesus, you would've walked to the edge of the city and you would immediately have come upon a very special road. It was made of all marble - thirty-five feet wide, all marble - leading from the city of Ephesus a mile. You would walk this marble highway out to this magnificent structure. When you came to the Temple of Diana, you would find that it was huge. The footprint of the temple was larger than a modern football field. The roof was supported by one hundred and twenty-seven marble columns. Each column was six feet in diameter and sixty feet high, more than twice the height of this ceiling. It was a beautiful, beautiful structure. I've seen reconstructions of it, artist's reconstructions from descriptions of the time, and it was a magnificent building even in that form.

But it was at the same time an absolutely disgusting place. You see, Artemis was the mother goddess of fertility. And so, they believed and taught that the best way to worship her was to engage in a sexual act and that was an expression of worship. So, there were rooms there at the Temple of Artemis, rooms for religious prostitution. And there were more than a thousand, history tells us - more than a thousand priests and priestesses who were there for that sole purpose. Imagine what the Bible clearly calls sexual sin becomes a pure and holy thing that is an expression of worship to your god. It is one of the highest acts of Greek culture.

Understand, that is the culture in which Paul lived for three years when he lived in Ephesus. And he ministered there in that situation. That is the situation in which these people lived to whom he wrote these words. About six years after Paul left them, he wrote back with this letter, and he's still concerned about their sexual purity. He's concerned about the influence that their culture would have on them in that magnificent, but pagan ancient city. So, he writes to these dear friends, and he reminds them of the need for moral purity.

What I want you to see, folks, is that the Christians in Ephesus were facing something that is really no different than what we're facing today. The passage that we are going to study together is every bit as appropriate for us as it was for Christians in Ephesus in the first century. In fact,

I've had the joy over the last really couple of months of meditating on, thinking through this passage, and I can tell you this. As we track our way through over the next several weeks, we will find here incredibly practical help as we pursue sexual purity. As with all the Scripture, there's so much there beneath the surface than meets the eye. It is so incredibly helpful. Paul begins in verses 3 and 4 and I'm just going to lay the foundation today. We're going to look at this passage in detail beginning next week, but I want to set the foundation for you. Paul begins in verses 3 and 4 with a very straightforward command. Look at verse 3,

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Now in the Greek text, this is one sentence. Our English translations tend to divide it up in some way, but it's one sentence. You can also see in the NAS the words at the beginning of verse 4 are in italics. Whenever you see that, know that that means the translators added those words to help, in their minds, clarify the meaning. They're not there in the original. So, this is one unit of thought, verses 3 and 4.

There are two sets of three sins. The first set of sins is immorality, impurity and greed. The second set of sins is filthiness, silly talk and coarse jesting. All six of those sins share the same verb and that verb is a negative command. These six sins, Paul says, "must not even be named among you." Now it's clear that this is about sexual purity for a couple of reasons, this whole sentence. Four of the six words that he uses here are used regularly of sins connected to sexual impurity. So, four of the six words are regularly connected to that. One of the two other words or the fifth word occurs on occasion in a sexual context. So, there's only one word here in this list of six that's a surprise. We'll talk about it when we get there. It also applies to sexual sin in its context.

In addition, verse 12 – if you look down at verse 12, it seems to make the same basic point because it describes the sins Paul is talking about here as those things that are done by them in secret that are disgraceful to even talk about. Paul is saying,

“Listen. You need to know about these things (he’s teaching them to us here). You need to be armed against these sins. But you don’t need to know all the details about how these perversions work their way out in all the gory and grisly details of life. You need to understand they are sin. You need to understand to some extent what they are. You need to understand that they’re not to be a part of your life. But you’re not to dwell in the seedy and unseemly details of how these sins express themselves.”

So, the theme of this paragraph then is putting off sexual sin in all its forms. He’ll deal with sexual sin of action, sexual sin of thought and sexual sins of speech. And in addition to that, we’re to put on sexual purity. The theme of the paragraph: putting off sexual sin in all its forms and putting on sexual purity. Paul’s going to tell us what specific sins to put off, what God’s standard of morality is, God’s standard of moral purity is. He’s going to tell us what virtue to put on in place of that sexual sin, the means of sexual purity. And then Paul’s going to give us the motivation that we need to pursue sexual purity.

We’re going to get to the details of this text next week and I just want to assure you. I know some of you have young children in here. This is as graphic as I plan to get. I will do my best to keep my messages G-rated, but understand the Scriptures deal with this. The Scriptures address this. And I want you to know that I’m only going to go as far as the Scripture goes in addressing these things. But it’s so important that we understand them and that we understand what the text says about them.

Now we’re going to get to the details, as I said, of this next week, but what I want to do in the rest of our time this morning is to make sure that you get the big picture. I don’t want you to miss Paul’s big point. To get his point, you really have to go back to chapter 2. Go back to Ephesians 2. Paul begins Ephesians 2 by talking about what we used to be before Christ found us. Notice he says,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ... [You were spiritually dead because of your acts of rebellion against God and your sins. And in those trespasses and sins,] ... you formerly walked. [And you walked or lived in lockstep with three powerful forces. You walked in lockstep with the spirit of the age or] "... the course of this world ..." [as it's described here. You walked in lockstep, we all did, with Satan himself. We walked] "... according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Satan's major role in the world is (what?) false religion. And we walked in lockstep with some false religion. Even if it was attached to Christianity, it was probably a works-based expression of Christianity and Satan loves that. We also walked in lockstep with a third powerful force, verse 3, and that was our flesh, the lusts of the flesh, the cravings of our fallenness. So, among the sons of disobedience, verse 3 says, "we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh."

Notice the two important words at the beginning of verse 3 – "... we ... all ...". No exceptions. And it's interesting by the way. Paul changes pronouns. He had been saying "you", "you", "you", "you". And he changes at verse 3 to "... we all ...". Paul even includes himself here. Of course, he was included before, but here he makes it explicit - nobody excepted from this. Apart from God's miraculous intervention, there has never been a human being who can't be described by verse 3.

What does Paul mean when he says we lived in the lusts of our flesh? He means that before Christ, there were within us these powerful, sinful cravings for something that God had forbidden us. They're part of our fallenness and those cravings dominated our lives. We weren't free. We thought we were free, but we weren't free. We were controlled, we walked in lockstep with these powerful cravings that were a part of us.

Paul takes another step in verse 3. He says not only do we live with these cravings, but we actually carried them out. Literally, he says, "doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind". This word "desires" is a different word than "lusts". It literally means "will". So, literally the

Greek text says this, “doing the wills of the flesh and the thoughts.” By using the plural, I think Paul is pointing out that there were two wills. There was the will of the flesh and there was the will of the mind. In other words, here’s what Paul’s saying. Before Christ, we did whatever the flesh (probably here meaning “body”), whatever our bodies wanted, and we did whatever our thoughts told us to do. We were driven to do what we were told, and our bodies and our sinful minds dictated, and we walked in lockstep with those things. Paul’s point is before conversion, we were all slaves of our bodies and our thoughts.

But a radical change occurs. Down in 4, he begins, “But God ...” Because of His mercy, because of His love, “... even (verse 5) when we were dead ... made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been ... [rescued].” This dramatic change: regeneration. And with that act of regeneration, of new life, something dramatic happens. Listen carefully. At the moment of salvation, the Bible clearly teaches that the dominion, that is, the rule, the enslaving power of sin was broken. I love the way the apostle John puts it in Revelation 1:5. He describes Jesus Christ as the One who loosed us, who “released us from our sins in His own blood.”

We have new power to overcome sin in our lives. In fact, look at verse 3 of chapter 2, “we ... all formerly lived in [this kind of slavery].” God changes us. No longer do we have a dominating, enslaving love for sin; instead, we have both the desire and the capacity to present ourselves to God. Now don’t misunderstand me. This freedom from the slavery of sin is not the end of our war with sin. In fact, it’s only the beginning. For although we died to sin at the moment of salvation, sin didn’t die to us. As John Murray observed, there’s still a huge difference between an enemy controlling the capital and the whole country and that defeated enemy causing problems in the countryside.

You know, think about the war in Afghanistan regardless of your views of whether we should be there or not. Before we entered the war in Afghanistan, the country was ruled, dominated, controlled by the Taliban. Their word was law. Today, they continue to be a serious problem. They continue to strike targets and cause havoc, but those are two different kind of problems, two entirely different kinds of problems. It’s one thing for them to cause trouble. It’s another thing for them to be in lockstep control of the entire country, for them to rule.

The same thing is true in our struggle with sin. At the moment of salvation, the rule of sin in our lives was broken. The dictator of our souls, the tyrant sin, was rendered powerless and removed from the throne. But during this life, sin will continue to attack us and to make every attempt to cause havoc in our spiritual lives. But never forget, never forget, it is a defeated enemy. We're to spend our lives rooting out the resistance wherever we find it in our hearts and lives.

That's what Paul is telling the Ephesians about our battle with sexual sin. There was a time when we were in slavery to our lusts. In fact, he makes it even a point about sexual sin in chapter 4. Chapter 4:17, he says, "... walk no longer as the Gentiles..." Stop walking like you used to walk. And how was that? Verse 19, "... callous, [having given ourselves] "... over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." So sexual slavery was a part of our past life, but that slavery is over (why?) because God has this great plan that Ephesians is all about, a sweeping plan to do something else with us.

In fact, turn back to chapter 1. Even as Paul begins to unfold God's plan, verse 3, he says God's given us all these spiritual blessings. Verse 4, the first of those blessings is sovereign election. "... He chose us in ... [Christ] before the foundation of the world [why did God choose us? He had a purpose, in order] ... that we would be holy and blameless before Him." God chose us so that someday we would be holy and blameless. He had a purpose.

It reminds me of Romans 8:29 that says we are "... predestined [predetermined destiny by God] to be conformed to the image of His Son..." Can you think about this with joy? One day, Christian, you will be as sexually pure as Jesus Christ. We were made to reflect His moral likeness. And God has designed that one day you will stand before Him in holiness, blameless, as pure as Christ Himself is pure.

How does it happen? Well, look at the end of chapter 1 of Ephesians. Paul says it's because there's this power at work in you. Verse 18, I'm praying that you'll understand (verse 19) "... the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." It's the same power God used to raise Jesus from the dead. It is at work in you.

And what's it doing? Well, it's accomplishing God's purpose. Look at 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them." Listen, folks. We are no longer slaves to sin, slaves to sexual sin, because God has a plan and He's working out that plan. He's already broken the rule of sin in our lives, and now we are to root out the resistance step by bloody step.

Before Christ, we were enslaved, but God has made us free. He's made us alive and set us free. Now Paul says to us, he can say to us as Christians, "Don't even let these sins be named among you." Do you see the contrast? Paul's big point that I don't want you to miss is that because of our change in position in 1 - 3, we can now walk worthy of our calling by walking in sexual purity. And in Ephesians 5, Paul is going to explain how.

You know, if you're here this morning, and you haven't bowed your knee to Jesus Christ, if you've never acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord over you, your only hope is Christ because even the apostle Paul included himself. All of us, left to ourselves, all of us without divine intervention are in slavery to our sin including sexual sin. There's no hope for you apart from Christ. But if you are willing to come and turn from your sin and embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord – if you will do that today, He has the power to set you free.

If you're a believer here this morning, you know what it means to be locked in a struggle with sin. We all are. We all understand these issues and temptations. But you may feel that this goal of sexual purity is completely impossible, "You don't understand. You don't understand where this began in my life. You don't understand how far back it goes. You don't understand the struggles I have, the temptations I face." Listen, I love the way Paul finishes the first half of Ephesians. Look at the end of Ephesians 3. You say, "The position I have, I don't understand how my practice will ever come in line with my position in Christ. I don't see how I can be sexually pure."

Here's Paul. Ephesians 3:20. Listen to how he describes God, "Now to Him who is able to do...." God is able to act. Notice he says God is able to do what we ask. Listen. God is more than capable of doing what we ask Him to do. But he goes on to say God is able to do what we

imagine, what we think. Not only what we ask, but, you know, there are things that are good things that we don't even dare to ask God because we're afraid it'll be an embarrassment. Listen. Paul says God is able to do even what we imagine. But he doesn't stop there. Notice he says He is able to do all that we ask or imagine. He's not done yet though because he says He is able to do beyond all that we can ask or imagine. And he adds yet another. He says God is able to do far more abundantly (God is able to do infinitely beyond) what we can ask, all that we can ask or imagine. That's our God. Listen, folks. We cannot, we cannot make ourselves sexually pure, but we serve a God who can. And He's told us how, and we'll trace it together in the weeks to come.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for its richness, for its clarity, for its directness – Lord, for how it speaks to the issues of our lives. Father, thank You for the circumstances in Ephesus. Thank You that Paul lived there and experienced them, that these people to whom he , writes were Christians like us living in that incredibly pagan environment that's even worse than the one in which we live. And yet, he could still say that it was possible for them to be morally pure in Christ.

Lord, teach us how from this passage. Give us open hearts and minds. Give us willing desires to pursue the path of likeness to Jesus Christ. Lord, we look forward to the day when we will be as pure as He is pure. But until that day, O God, don't let us ever give in. Help us foot by bloody foot to fight the remaining forces of evil in our lives.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who knows they are in slavery to sin, who knows there's nothing they can do, they've tried. Father, may this be the day when they give up their resistance and when they bow their knee to Your Son, when they are willing to turn from their sin and put all of their hope in Christ as the only One who can rescue them. May this be the day.

We pray in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen.