

11/24/24 Christ Fellowship

## Unified in Gratitude – Ephesians 5

P. Diddy

Kanye West

Andrew Cuomo

Bill Cosby

Cuba Gooding Jr.

Harvey Weinstein

Actor Kevin Spacey

Comedian Louis C.K

U.S. Senator Al Franken

CBS anchor Charlie Rose

U.S. Rep. John Conyers-D Mich

NBC anchor Matt Lauer

Radio host Garrison Keillor

Do you know what all of these high-profile, once-upstanding citizens and leaders of our country have in common? All joined a much longer list of men who have been accused of some sort of sexual misconduct in just the past few years. The charges go back decades for some but are just now coming out. There are many others that have been accused and for most of these, no legal charges have been brought and we want to always keep in mind that our country still believes in the phrase, “innocent until proven guilty” but almost all of these in my list have admitted to at least some sort of **misconduct**.

That’s the word that gets used the most with these men as well: misconduct. Is that the word God uses for actions like these? No. God uses the word “sin” but Hollywood and Washington D.C. much prefer the watered-down “misconduct”. Doesn’t that sound better? Isn’t that easier to say and easier to hear than “sin” which has so much spiritual and religious meaning that this world is so allergic to these days?

I'll be honest. I don't want to preach about this. I would much rather think about, study about, preach on and celebrate the grace of God or the mercy of God and what that means for us today but instead I have had to trudge through some muck and nastiness in preparing for this sermon. But muck and nastiness is the reality of where our society is today and to help keep that muck and nastiness from creeping any further into the church, I would ask you to turn to the New Testament book of **Ephesians and go to chapter 5, verses 1-4.**

Muck and nastiness, misconduct, sin or whatever you want to call it is not new to 2024. Believe it or not, P. Diddy is not the first person to ever be found to be living a perverted lifestyle. I have an idea that most Americans today are secretly thinking, *"Man, I'm just glad they don't know about me. I am glad they don't know my thoughts and what I have done in the past. I'm glad I've never been caught."* The truth is that people have always perverted themselves and perverted God's will and God's Law and for thousands of years, people are just glad it's not them getting busted.

It was that way in Paul's day when he wrote to the church in Ephesus. He wrote them, not like he wrote to other churches, warning or correcting bad doctrine, but instead Paul wrote to encourage a church that he had started and he loved and was passionate for as part of the body of Christ. He didn't want anything bad to happen to them and wanted them to be aware of evil and the battle that they were fighting and so he wrote this letter to them. I preach this today for the same reason. This isn't to chastise anyone. Not at all. It is to warn and prepare all of us about the truth of this world. I love you too much not to preach this from **Ephesians 5:1-4**. Let's read that.

*"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 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. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."*

Wow, you didn't know you were going to need your steel-toed boots this morning, did you? Paul was good at stepping on toes, that's for sure. In fact, if your toes weren't stepped on there, you might want to go back and re-read that because there are not many people that get out of that unscathed. Just be glad I didn't read a few verses before or after that. Paul hammers on them with this letter, again, not because they were bad people or

living immorally but because he didn't want them to slip into that lifestyle like so many others had.

There are a couple of other things that all those men on that list have in common besides being accused of sin. First, none of them started off just deciding to do something like this. It always starts off with a thought. Now, if a person could get into trouble just for his thoughts, we would all be in bad shape, wouldn't we? In **2 Corinthians 10:5**, Paul tells us we should take every thought captive, meaning we should be aware of what we are thinking and not allow bad thoughts to go any further.

It's not a sin to be tempted and sometimes we all have evil thoughts pop into our heads, but we should arrest those thoughts and throw them out before they become something we start to dwell on. You've heard it said that it's not a sin for a bird to fly over your head but it is a sin to allow it to make a nest in your hair. So, as long as we take those thoughts captive and throw them out then we are okay. But when we allow those thoughts to stay there and build a little nest and then make themselves at home, it leads to trouble.

Because all we need then is an opportunity and those thoughts go from 0-60 real quick, don't they? That flaming arrow of the evil one starts as an unintended thought and the next thing you know, you are publicly humiliated and about to lose everything you hold dear including your family, your job and your good name. But look again at what Paul says we are to do to keep that from happening in **verses one and two of Ephesians 5**.

*Be imitators of God and walk in love...just as Christ gave himself up for us...as a sacrifice.* That's the root of that verse and I believe if we can truly understand that and then live it out, then we will be able to live like God wants us to live. But what does it mean to imitate God and walk in love and give ourselves up as a sacrifice? I mean, that sounds sweet and nice and like what people sitting in church should talk about but what does it really look like?

Well, if we want to imitate God, then Jesus should be our model. Jesus said in **John 14**, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* and Paul says here that Jesus gave Himself up for us as a sacrifice. We know that and love that and appreciate that about Jesus but now we are called to imitate Him so what are we supposed to sacrifice? Are we supposed to die on a cross? Of course not, but we are to sacrifice ourselves and that means, in today's world, we are going to have to give up some of our rights and in doing so, we will glorify God and keep ourselves away from sin.

Let me give you a really good example of what that looks like. In 1948, a handsome, young 31-YEAR-OLD preacher was coming off a successful stint as a Youth for Christ evangelist and started an independent evangelism ministry that lasted over six decades. God was blessing his ministry and with his charm and good looks, the doors began to open for radio, magazine, newspaper and TV that would ultimately bring Billy Graham into world-wide attention and fame.

But God protected Billy by giving him the wisdom to know early on that all that popularity could easily lead to trouble. So, with the rest of his revival team, Billy made a promise to himself, the world and to God that he would always conduct himself worthy of the calling. The team gathered in a hotel room in Modesto, California. They drew up a compact that became known as the “Modesto Manifesto,” and in it they laid out guidelines for every aspect of their ministerial lives including finances and how churches and crowds would be treated but the most famous provision of the manifesto called for each man on the Graham team never to be alone with a woman other than his wife. Graham, from that day forward, pledged not to eat, travel, or meet with a woman other than Ruth unless other people were present and it ought to be your rule as well. I have had this rule as long as I have pastored, and I’ll be honest, it’s a pain. Life would be easier if I didn’t have this rule because I hate seeing women walk down the road and all I can do is wave.

It has been a sacrifice sometimes because I have had women get mad at me because I wouldn’t drive them somewhere or wouldn’t meet with them in the church office. A woman in the community came in one day to the office and closed the door behind her and said, *“Pastor, I need your help!”* I said, *“Not right here you don’t. Let’s go outside.”* I grabbed two chairs and we sat under the tree in the shade and talked.

It wasn’t because I was afraid she was going to do something inappropriate. Nor was I tempted to do anything. My biggest concern is somebody else seeing me meet with somebody or pick somebody up and not know what was going on and start a rumor. *“Well, I saw him with so-and-so and they were together a long time and I’m pretty sure something inappropriate was going on.”*

Do you know what happens after that? I lose my job. I lose your trust. The church is horribly affected for years and the Kingdom of God suffers...because of an untrue rumor. Is it fair? No. Is it their business? Probably not. Does it happen? All the time.

Ladies, this ought to be your rule as well. When I was researching those names I started with, I was amazed how many of the women accusers started out their story with something like, *“Well, we were in his hotel room alone when all of the*

*sudden...*” Seriously? Please know I am not blaming the women for what the men did. Absolutely not. I’m just saying that ladies need to protect themselves and you do that best by not allowing yourself to be put in that position.

In **verse 3** it says, *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.”* When we use the Billy Graham Rule, nobody gets tempted. Nobody has any misconduct and no rumors get started that there were. Now, when it says we are to be imitators of God, one of the major characteristics of God is that He is holy. That’s what this is all about. In **Leviticus 11**, God said we should be holy because He is holy. So, what does it mean to be holy? Does that mean we are uptight and don’t have any fun, praying and fasting all day? Man, I hope not! No. Holy means separate, different, literally to be set apart for God’s work and as Christians, that ought to be a main characteristic of us as well. **C.S. Lewis** said, *“How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets real thing, it is irresistible.”*

It takes some sacrifice to be holy, though. We sometimes have to sacrifice going where we want and doing what we want so that we are not tempted, we are protected and so there is not even a hint of immorality. Let me ask you, do you remember what happened to all those women who accused Billy Graham of sexual misconduct? Do you remember when that scandal hit him? No? You don’t remember? No, you don’t because it never happened. It never happened with his son Franklin either because he lives the same way.

I mentioned earlier that sin always begins with a thought. **James 1** says that when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. Not one of those men I mentioned earlier believed his thought life would ever cause him problems. It was just a thought...but then he had opportunity and that thought came to life. It’s the same with all of us.

We have to take those thoughts captive and never give ourselves opportunity. **Romans 13:14** says, *“clothe yourselves with the LORD Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”* The King James says to make no provision for the flesh, that old man that creeps up on us when we don’t take our thoughts captive.

Read all of **verse 3** again. *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.* We are holy and so therefore we are different from the world. The world often uses obscenity, foolish talk and course joking as it says in **verse 4**, but that is out of place for us.

Instead, we are thankful, right? Thankful for what? Thankful for God's grace and mercy, His forgiveness and love that we desperately need because we all mess up. We all are guilty of misconduct in one way or another and so we need God's forgiveness of that sin and we all need each other to hold us accountable to keep it from happening again but also, when there is true repentance, we are to be imitators of God who forgives.

I was bragging on this church this past week to a pastor friend and he said, "*It sounds like the people in your church understand grace.*" I thought that was very insightful of him because that is true. We have received grace from God and we give grace to others because we are imitators of God.

\*music\*

But you can't imitate Him without being a follower of Him; a disciple who learns from Jesus and then tells others what you have learned. If you have never asked Jesus to be Lord of your life and to forgive you of your sins, then do that today. Repent of those sins and turn away from them and ask God to take control of your life here on earth with the promise of Heaven in the next life.

Do that right now as the music plays.