

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Sundays @ 2:00 p.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Open Arms Fellowship www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 3, 2018

Behavior Befitting Saints

by Dan Trygg

“But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints...” -- Ephesians 5:3

It is very important to see this verse, and the following verses, in light of the overall context. **Paul is still talking to the Body of believers in Ephesus about putting aside old strategies of living life. These were strategies that people who do not know God (including their former selves) utilize** in order to cover their inner emptiness and distract themselves by pleasurable experiences. The apostle had described how they had put aside the inner undercurrent of pain, not wanting to face it, and instead had gone in a headlong pursuit of activities that would make themselves feel better. In the long term, **these strategies do not work, however, because they are avoidance techniques. They do not address the real inner problems of the soul.** The undercurrent of pain remains, beneath the flurry of sensual activity. Whenever there is a pause, we begin to hear its whispers once again.

It is as if we are in a leaking boat. We bail profusely for a time, with our little coffee can, but inevitably we must rest, or we forget, and soon we are up to our ankles in water once again. The leak is relentless. All of our efforts at keeping afloat simply buy us a little time. They are survival techniques we have devised to stave off the inevitable. The truth is that we will eventually fill up with water and drown, unless we can get our boat fixed. Nothing that we attempt really deals with the leak, however. At first, bailing is not so bad. You can do it without too much effort. After while, however, you begin to find it takes a lot more energy than you thought. You begin to tire of it, to find it laborious and boring. Your muscles grow sore and cramp. The edge of the can chafes at your skin. Your fingers wrinkle from wetness. Your feet are uncomfortable, because they, too, are wet. It's no fun to bail any more. You make up "bailing songs", and "bailing games", to make it fun, but the water keeps rising. The leak is still there. The incoming water is without mercy. Some of us tire enough to where we begin to look for solutions. We hook up to other boats, but we soon find they leak, too. As we look around, boats of every size and shape, from the simplest rowboat to the huge luxurious ocean liner, all are leaking. All are slowly sinking. Some have pumps, but the pumps don't quite keep up, or intermittently require maintenance, and the water rises once again. In fact, it seems that the biggest, fanciest boats, those that stick up higher above the water, are actually filling up faster than some of those simple rowboats. All their fancy equipment weighs much more, putting more downward pressure on the outer hull. The rate of leakage seems proportionally faster.

What happens when we come to faith is that God hears our cry for help and gives us a new inflatable life-raft to ride in. It's just big enough for us, however. We can't take all our gear from our other boat into the life-raft. Typically, what happens is that people tie up their life-raft to their old boat, and begin to make their way toward shore. They want to try to save their possessions, as well as their old boat. The life-raft feels really different to ride in. It rides higher in the water. It's lighter in the water, as well, which means it takes less effort to move. The plastic oars that came with it seem kind of "wimpy", but they work fine. They are definitely much lighter than the old wooden oars. The old oars won't fit the life-raft oar-locks, anyway, and canoe paddles won't work very well, because the raft is so round it is hard to keep paddling straight in any direction. Some stubbornly attempt to use the old equipment in the new raft, even though it doesn't work. In addition, the floor of the raft is flexible; it "gives" when you move around, which takes some getting used to. Some people find it uncomfortable, because it is different, and they prefer to ride in their old boat. Many others go back to the old boat, and continue to bail, because they don't want their things to get wet, or to be lost in the lake. Some do spend the majority of their time in the new life-raft, with only occasional trips to the old boat. From the vantage point of the life-raft, some begin to notice that the old boat stops sinking, or slows to an almost imperceptible rate, when no one is inside of it to weigh it down. The old boats are equipped with enough floatation, so that they won't go down to the bottom. They will just fill up to the gunwales and sit there. There is no danger of losing them, though waves could wash out some of the possessions inside of them. In the end, if we can adapt the story to fit what happens with spiritual reality, God would encourage us to no longer visit the old boat, or worry about the things we may have had in it. Why? Because when He returns, He will give us an entirely new

boat, free of charge. It will be completely outfitted with what we need. The old boat will be cut loose. The life-raft, however, will be expanded, and become the floatation base for a new, houseboat shell that will fit over it, complete with a pollution-free trolling motor. Then, there will be so much more to discover, both about the boat, as well as the lake, that we will not think about the former things at all.

What does this little parable have to do with Eph. 5:3ff.? The application is that the behaviors and attitudes Paul describes in these verses are "old boat behaviors", bailing-techniques we tried in order to deal with life in a leaky boat, that are no longer appropriate to us. They were not healthy or truly helpful then, and they certainly have no place in our new life-situation. **They are behaviors which are antithetical to who we are. They are contradictory to all that we have identified with as servants of Christ.** They are behaviors that are contrary to the revealed desire and purpose of God for us. Since we are ones dedicated to serving Him, they are not fitting or proper attitudes or activities for us to be involved in. They are incongruent with our claims or desires to be godly, i.e., they do not "fit with" what we say we want. **You can't have it both ways. Either you are choosing to live as a "dedicated one", a saint, a Christian** (every believer *is* a saint, a "holy one", having been set apart from common life by being purchased by Christ's shed blood, having been given a new birth, being indwelt by the *Holy Spirit*, and empowered to live a life *for* God), **or you choose to live in ways that are contrary to that.** As the apostle John wrote, "...God is light, ...in Him there is no darkness at all. If we *say* that we have fellowship with Him, and yet walk about in the darkness, we are phony and do not practice the truth..." (I Jn. 1:5,6).

What is Paul concerned about? What behaviors and attitudes, what "old boat" ways of living, does he have in mind? There are several he mentions in the next several verses, but they are just examples of what he later refers to as "unfruitful deeds of darkness" (vs. 11). Let's briefly look at those mentioned in verse 3.

(1.) **"Immorality"** -- The Greek word is porneia, from which such English words as "pornography" (a writing or depiction [graphē] of erotic behavior) and "porn" (an adjective describing a business or activity dealing with erotic, often illicit, sexual behavior) are derived. The word in Greek can refer to a very broad array of activities under the heading of "immoral sexual behavior". It refers to any act of sex outside of marriage, including pre-marital sex (fornication), adultery, sex for hire (prostitution), homosexual acts, pedophilia (sexual stimulation or inappropriate contact with children), necrophilia (stimulation or sexual contact with a corpse), bestiality (sex with animals), compulsive masturbation, pornography and sexual fantasizing. Obviously the common thread in defining this word has to do with sexuality. It is not general immorality, such as stealing, or lying, or violence, etc., but specifically sexual immorality which this word describes.

(2.) **"Uncleanness"** -- The Greek is akatharsia, a negated form of the word meaning to cleanse or purify, this word has a literal meaning of "dirty, foul or impure", as well as a metaphorical application. Uncleanness was what was ceremonially defiling, especially in regard to God. What was "clean" (acceptable) or "unclean" (unacceptable, distasteful, or abominable) to God was what was in agreement with His ways, or what was contradictory to His values. Impurity could have to do with breaking rituals or taboos, but often it was associated with sexual behavior that was defiling. Here in Eph. 5:3, it could be referring to any act of the old, impure way of living life, or specifically of sexual behavior that was contrary to God's revelation.

(3.) **"Covetous"** -- The Greek is pleonexia, which literally means "having much". The word is used of the sin of greed, where "having much" refers to the insatiable desire to have what does not belong to you, as far as wealth and material goods are concerned. Or, the word can refer simply to the dynamic of an insatiable craving for more (ala 4:19). Often it is used for unending sexual desire. This verse could be understood reflecting this usage. It could be rendered, "But sexual immorality, even defiling uncleanness or unending (sexual) greed, let it not be named among you, as is fitting among holy ones". If the verse is to be understood this way Paul is describing out-of-control, promiscuous sexual behavior that has two characteristics: (a.) It is defiling to those involved. It is behavior which God finds distasteful and hateful. A person doing such things cannot feel free and confident in coming before God with that uncleanness in his or her life. (b.) It is a trap. It is behavior that never satisfies. There will always be a drive for more, a growing appetite for a more pleasurable experience, which often leads those involved to take greater risks to attempt to find. The solutions to life's hurts are not found here.

"let it not be named among y'all" -- **This phrase gives us all the responsibility of dealing with this.** Both those who are stuck in these patterns, as well as their brothers and sisters in Christ who may know of their struggles, must **insist on resolution of this problem. It cannot go on and on.** The inconsistent behavior cannot be allowed to continue among us, or we will be mocked and ridiculed as hypocrites by outsiders (I Cor. 5).