

Series: Ephesians
Title: Fornication Unbecoming a Saint
Text: Ephesians 5: 3
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Ephesians 5:3: But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

Every saint is exhorted to never once be guilty of fornication, uncleanness or covetousness, because it is unbecoming a saint.

This exhortation is to saints only. Only the sanctified can please God, and that through faith in Christ. But though the unsanctified sinner cannot please God, though he cannot sanctify himself or earn a righteousness by anything he does in the flesh, every exhortation of God is good for you, even if only temporally. We warn our unbelieving children and all men, to abstain from fornication, uncleanness and covetousness. But it is my prayer today that God would give you a heart to believe this exhortation in the light of Christ and what he has accomplished for his people. Otherwise, your outward obedience is only vain morality.

The key to seeing Christ in this verse is in seeing why the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to say fornication is unbecoming to a saint. There is the obvious. These sins are unholy. Anything unholy is unbecoming a holy saint. But there is more to it than that.

DEFINITIONS OF WORDS

First, we need to understand the meaning of the words in our text. All three of these sins are sexual sins. Sins which can lead to the birth of children, born of fornication.

“Fornication” is the unlawful, sexual union between an unmarried man and woman. Figuratively, it means idolatry. It is the worship of self. Every person who commits fornication, sells his right to all things holy, lawful and spiritual, for one morsel of earthly gratification.

“Uncleanness” includes every other sexually related sin: adultery, incest, homosexuality, all unnatural lusts, even provocative attire and all things which would entice to these sins. Every person guilty of uncleanness, sells his right to all things holy, lawful and spiritual, for one morsel of earthly gratification,

“Covetousness” in this context, is the constant thoughts and desires for the above. Every person guilty of covetousness, sells his right to all things holy, lawful and spiritual, for one morsel of earthly gratification.

Then we have the word “saint”. A saint is what every true believer is. We are sanctified, set apart, made holy, consecrated for God’s use, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Saints are made so by divine election of God—God the Father sanctified his people when he choose us in Christ before the foundation of the world—“to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” (Ju 1)

Saints are made so by redemption unto God by Christ Jesus the Son of God—God the Son, Christ Jesus, sanctified us when he redeemed us unto God, perfecting us forever by his one offering on the cross—“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb 10: 10)

Saints are made so by the new birth by God the Holy Spirit—God the Holy Spirit sanctified us when he birthed-us-again in regeneration of incorruptible, holy, seed, by the word which is preached unto us—“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” (2 Th 2: 13)

Throughout the old testament, all three of these—election of God, redemption, and birth—were included to make a person a firstborn son. Spiritually speaking, a saint and a firstborn son, are almost synonyms. God said, “all the firstborn are mine” (Nu 3: 13)—there is election. God said, “For on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed [sanctified] unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast (Nu 3: 13)—there is a picture of redemption in Christ our Passover. God said, “Mine shall they be: I am the LORD” (Nu 3: 13)—when they are born, they shall be mine; there is birth. The firstborn son was a firstborn son by birth, by redemption, by God’s own choosing just as every saint is a firstborn son in Christ the Firstborn.

UNBECOMING TO SAINTS

So secondly, the fact we are sanctified firstborn sons by election, redemption and the new birth is why the Holy Spirit moved Paul to connect these sexual sins with being unbecoming to us as saints. These unlawful sexual sins produce children of fornication but they do not produce sanctified firstborn children.

In Hebrews 12: 16, God connects fornication with forfeiting the right of the firstborn, using Esau as the example. He says, “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” (Heb 12: 16)

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the firstborn. All of the privileges and inheritance of the firstborn would be given Esau from his father. But Esau committed fornication, uncleanness and covetousness. How so?—“For one morsel of meat [Esau] sold his birthright.”

In choosing a bowl of beans over his birthright, Esau idolized and worshipped himself rather than God. Esau chose to give up his birthright for a temporary, gratification of feeding his flesh—and doing so he committed fornication, uncleanness and covetousness. He ceased being the firstborn and became profane—a bastard child of fornication.

In Esau, we see Adam. In order of time, Adam was God’s firstborn son. God could say of Adam what Joseph said of Reuben—“Thou art my first born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.” (Gen 49: 3) But like Reuben, God could also say of Adam, that in himself, Adam was ‘unstable as water.’ Adam would not excel. (Ge 49:3, 4) For one morsel of meat—for one momentary gratification of the earthy—Adam disobeyed God, committed fornication, uncleanness, covetousness and became profane, thus forfeiting his birthright

Therefore, because Adam was our representative, when Adam committed fornication, uncleanness, covetousness and became profane, we did too. So God describes all his elect as children of fornication by our first birth. Where? In the description God gives of us in the child—aborted—cast out into the open field. This is a description of all God’s elect because his people are his spiritual Jerusalem. Here is how God says we were children of fornication, “And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.” (Eze 16: 3) Before God, that was the definition of an unlawful union of fornication and adultery. Spiritually, it pictures our first birth in Adam.

Yet, this was according to God’s purpose and grace toward his people. Remember, while Esau and Jacob were still in the womb, “(the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, That the

purpose of God according election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” (Rom 9: 12-13) Here is the purpose of God according to election, why salvation is not of works but of him that calleth, why Adam fell, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that [Christ] might be the FIRSTBORN among many brethren.” (Rom 8: 29)

Christ is the Firstborn, chosen and called of God, even though, in order of time, Christ was born after Adam, even as Jacob was God’s firstborn though born second after Esau, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Col 1: 18) Listen to this firstborn son language in Hebrews 1.

Hebrews 1:2: [God] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3: Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; [the firstborn is the faithful Son who accomplished his Father’s will of redeeming his people.] 4: Being made so much better than the angels, [the firstborn was better than all his brethren] as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they; [like unto the firstborn] 5: For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? 6: And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. [all the brethren of the firstborn worship him, even those born before him for the elder shall serve the younger.]

Because Christ the Firstborn was faithful to his Father, because Christ is our Head—all God’s saints are firstborn children in Christ. We are “the church of the firstborn.” (Heb 12: 23) Every elect, redeemed, born-again child of God is a sanctified firstborn son. We are firstborn children chosen of God in Christ; we are firstborn children redeemed unto God by Christ; we are firstborn children born of Christ the Firstborn.

Be sure to get this point: We are children born of a lawful union between Christ and his bride, not children of fornication. It is because our first husband, the law, died when Christ fulfilled the law on our behalf. Now, our first husband, the law, is dead, that we may be lawfully married to Christ, that we might bring forth fruit, which includes children unto God. (Rom 7: 1-6)

By this lawful union between Christ our Husband and his faithful bride, the church, his bride is faithful to Christ by preaching his word. That word preached unto you is the incorruptible seed whereby Christ births his children. (1 Pet 1: 23-24) The way you and I, as the bride of Christ, do not commit fornication, uncleanness and covetousness is by remaining faithful to Christ our Husband in the preaching of the gospel.

So we were not born-again of fornication, uncleanness or covetousness; we are born lawfully of Christ our Everlasting Father, our Sanctifier and our Sanctification, and made one with Christ the Firstborn! The new birth, of incorruptible seed, by having Christ formed in us, is the only way we escaped being children of fornication. That is what Peter declares by the Holy Spirit, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Pet 1: 4)

We are no longer children of fornication, uncleanness and covetousness but sanctified firstborn children of God; we are set apart by God from the rest of Adam’s fallen race, from our brethren after the flesh like as the sanctified firstborn son was; we are sanctified, consecrated to God, for God’s use—firstborn sanctified children.

Furthermore, being born of Christ the Firstborn, who is also our representative head, every saint is equally the firstborn child of God in Christ the Firstborn; we receive all the privilege and honor of firstborn children, equally with Christ the Firstborn.

We are each equally loved by God in Christ the Firstborn, as Christ is loved. Each firstborn child is equally united to God in Christ the Firstborn. We are each equally honored by God with Christ the Firstborn. What are these honors? If the father of the firstborn was a priest, the firstborn was made a priest. (Nu 3: 12, 13; 8: 18) Every saint of God is made a priest unto God because Christ our Everlasting Father, is the High Priest. (Rev 5: 10) The firstborn inherited the kingly, judicial authority of his father. (2 Chr 21: 3) Saints are kings in Christ our King and together with Christ we shall judge the world. (Rev 5: 10; 1 Cor 6: 2) The firstborn inherited a double-portion of his father's inheritance. (Deut 21: 15-17) Saints are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ the Firstborn. (Rom 8: 17)

Here is the point. We are sanctified firstborn sons by the lawful union of Christ and his bride, born of the incorruptible seed, the word preached unto you; but not by fornication.

THE EXHORTATION

So lastly, let's hear the exhortation in our text, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." (Eph 5: 3)

The exhortation in our text is similar to that in Hebrews 12 and for the same reason.

Hebrews 12: 14: Follow peace with all men, and holiness, [Christ] without which no man shall see the Lord: 15: Looking diligently [to Christ] lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; 16: Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright....[he goes on to give our one motive, for you are] 23...the church of the firstborn.

Seeing the great blessings God has so freely bestowed upon us, remember this came not by fornication, uncleanness or covetousness—but by divine election, blood redemption and by the new birth, by a lawful union between Christ and his bride.

Therefore, do not let these things even once be named among us, as becometh saints: not in the act, not even in covetous thought.

1 Corinthians 6: 16: What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17: But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. 18: Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

The sinner sins against his own body personally. But worse, because our body is now one with the Lord, we sin against Christ's own body. Sound strange?

1 Corinthians 6: 19: What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20: For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

This is in your spirit as well. When he speaks of "covetousness" he speaks of the thoughts of the heart. It means let these things not be named among us, in enticing of others in their hearts or by being enticed in your own hearts.

The woman who dresses like a harlot is as guilty as the man who covets her in his heart. That is one reason I speak to you about the importance of how we dress, especially in the Lord's house, that is, wherever we are congregated together. When visitors come, they will not give the gospel an ear if they see our wives and daughters dressed in an unbecoming way. The principle for Paul telling the women not to dress in immodest attire was the same with why Paul circumcised Timothy before he went into the synagogues of the Jews—had he not they would not have even listened to the gospel of Christ. It is the same principle for which the Gentiles were told to abstain from all things connected with their idolatrous worship—because the will-workers who studied the law of Moses every Sabbath-day would not even give the gospel a hearing if they saw them doing so.

That is why we are exhorted in our text to abstain from these things. Everything is for Christ's sake! If Christ is not motivation enough to make us obedient then our profession of Christ is vain! It is that simple. (Look at Eph 5: 5)

Ephesians 5: 5: For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6: Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7: Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

If we were merely told to abstain from fornication it would be the law of Moses, as it was in the ten commandments given at Mt. Sinai. But seeing Christ and how he has made us firstborn saints, this is a gospel command from Christ our Redeemer. So if a man despises this command, he despises Christ!

1 Thessalonians 4: 1: Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2: For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 3: For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: 4: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; [as firstborn sanctified children] 5: Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: 6: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. 7: For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. 8: He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

May God bless his word and make us obedient!

Amen!