

February 3, 2013

Psalm 32:3-5 / Isaiah 60:1-3 / I Thess. 5:1-11 / Ephesians 5:11-14  
Holiness (#9) - Undisguised, Sin-Confessing and Sin-Exposing

Today, after speaking so long and pointedly on what holiness is, Paul brings us to the place (in this whole quest for godliness) where he requires us to take decisive action on our part in regard to growing in it.

Why? Because God's stated goal in redeeming us is not simply to bring us to heaven when we die. It's to make us holy. Therefore, God tells us (through the apostle Paul) that there are some things we must do to further the work that He is doing within us.

That is, sanctification (or the process of becoming more holy) -- unlike regeneration which God does quite apart from our participation -- requires that we join together to work with God as He works to cleanse us of sin and make us holy.

Though "regeneration" is what we could call a monergistic work of God (He moves upon us to raise us from the dead in trespasses and sins, and make us alive in Christ, or give us new birth), "sanctification" (or growth in holiness) is what we call a synergistic work. God does what only He can do -- and without Him doing His work, nothing we do would bear any fruit for holiness. Yet when His Spirit does its purifying work and He moves us toward growth in godliness we must stop resisting it and comply with it. We must join with Him in what He's doing.

In fact, a good part of the "work" we must do in sanctification is simply to stop fighting it, and surrender to what He's doing within us. Our job is not to produce the fruit (that's the Spirit's job). Our job is to stop fighting what the Spirit's doing as He moves within us to produce it! It's to stop resisting and surrender to the work that He's doing within us.

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And that's what Paul brings us to today. He brings us to those things which we **MUST** do in regard to this whole task of, ***"putting on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*** The things WE must

do when moving from BEING darkness to BEING light (in the Lord). Or to borrow a phrase from last week: He gives us the things we must do in order to, "be what God has so graciously made us to be, in Christ."

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So, let's look at our text and see what Paul says we must do in order to be the light He's made us to be. And let's begin **FIRST** with the first phrase of verse 11, where Paul writes: ***"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness..."***

Holiness involves separation from sin. It's characterized by the refusal to participate in known sin. It means fighting temptation and rejecting sin, knowing that sin is an affront to the holiness of God, displeases Him, and calls down His divine discipline or wrath against it.

And here (lest this command be misunderstood and cause people to do something God doesn't want us to do) I need to stress that the text does **NOT SAY** (as some have mistakenly suggested) that we are to, ***"have nothing to do with the people who engage in the fruitless deeds of darkness."***

This is **NOT** a prohibition against befriending sinners (or in this case, as becomes clear in the very next verse where he tells us, "it is shameful to even mention what they do in secret," we could say "the really bad type sinners").

Yet due caution should always be exercised, lest weak believers get sucked into the sins of those they seek to befriend. There is often a fine line between befriending sinners and participating in their sin.

Jesus, who is the ultimate example of holiness lived out in everyday life, befriended even the worst of sinners -- drunkards, prostitutes, thieves and tax collectors -- without ever joining them in their sin. He did drink, but He never got drunk -- **ever** -- exercising the fruit of holiness we call self-control or self-mastery.

He attended the parties thrown by tax-collectors, where prostitutes were commonly guests (and where He most likely met Mary Magdalene) yet his only interaction with them was to share the Gospel with them, encourage them to repent, and offer them forgiveness.

He invited himself to dinner at the homes of tax-collectors (the most despised people in all Israel), and loved them as people even though He surely despised their greed and stealing and extortion and evil deeds.

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And Paul expresses the same principle here. We are to have "***NOTHING to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.***" We are to reject sin for the evil it is! Yet we must still seek to love and reach out to the people engaged in such sin. We must reject what they do, outright, as the evil it is, yet we always seek to love them despite what they do.

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It comes back to the old saying: "Hate the sin but love the sinner" -- which is exactly what Paul admonishes us to do in this verse. We are to have, "***nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,***" even as we seek to love those people who do engage in them.

For it is not possible to pursue holiness and engage in shameful acts of sin at the same time. And though I'm not endorsing perfectionism in any way, it is still true that the ultimate expression of holiness would be sinlessness.

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Then we come to the **SECOND** thing we are to do in relation to sin. After resolving that by the grace of God we will have nothing to do with sinful acts, or the fruitless deeds of darkness, or "the shameful things the disobedient do in secret," Paul gives us our second course of action we need to take -- that is, expose it. Or in the context, bring sin out of the darkness (or "out of the closet," we could say) and expose it to the light. Why? Because hidden sin is sin that will fester and grow.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Sin is like mold or mildew in a old stone basement. Cover the windows of that basement with black plastic, or paint them with black paint, and keep the bulkhead door bolted shut, keep that basement dark and cool and humid -- and the mold will continue to grow and spread like cancer.

But take the black plastic or paint off those windows and open that basement door to the full rays of the sun. Open those windows on a hot dry sunny day and put many heat lamps in that cellar with their light shining right on that mold and in no time at all it will shrivel up, die, and crumble at the touch.

And Paul suggests that sin is the same way. If we hope to overcome it, it must be exposed or brought out into the open.

Thus the duty of all believers (as their part in pursuing holiness) is to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness to the light. For as Paul says in verse 14 (and the NIV has mistranslated it): **"everything that becomes visible is light."** Which can be a confusing statement if taken wrongly, which is surely why the NIV translated it: **"For it is light that makes everything visible."**

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Yet that's not Paul's point. He already said that in the first part of verse 13! He's not simply repeating twice that light makes things visible. No. Paul's point is that dark things become light by being exposed to the light. Not that sin is no longer sin simply by being exposed to the light, but that exposure to the light, erodes the life and the power of sin!

When darkness is exposed to the light, it disappears! Light drives away the darkness (and not visa-versa as some Christians tend to think!) And thus sin, when brought into the light, not only becomes visible, it also begins to die! It loses its power! And as it begins to die and lose its power, then like mold, it becomes lighter!

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Ever see what happens to black mold when its exposed to the direct rays of the sun over time? It lightens in color as it dies! Black mold becomes grey, and even takes on shades of white, before it dries up, and becomes brittle, and you scrape it off the wall as it turns to flakes of dust!

That's Paul's point in verse 14b where he quotes an early Christian saying, hymn, or poem, which he himself may have written, and had the people repeat: **"Wake up, O sleeper; rise from the dead (and it means the deadness of involvement with sin) and Christ will shine on you."** And when Christ does shine on us, and our sin, (as is implied by the verse) sin loses its hold or power. Light doesn't simply make sin visible, it has an eroding effect upon it. And that's especially true when you keep the light constantly focused upon it!

The J. B. Phillips version puts verses 13-14 this way: **"It is even possible (after all, it happened to you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also."** Or as the older version of the Living Bible put it (in a fairly good

paraphrase of the verse): ***"When you expose [their sin], the light shines upon that sin and shows it up, and when they see how wrong they really are, some of them may even become children of the light."*** That's what can happen when sin is exposed to the light of Christ or the light of His Word.

So what I'd like to do in the time remaining is share what I think Paul means when he tells us to "expose" sin, or the fruitless deeds of darkness, or the shameful things the disobedient do in secret to the light -- since this is obviously key to any person's growth in godliness or holiness.

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**FIRST**, the word translated, "expose" (which refers to sin) means, in this context, "expose to the light" or "bring out into the open." When we take something that's been locked away in a closed, dark, sealed off room, with no windows and we bring it out into a well-lit hallway, or out into the sunlight, we are "exposing it." It is no longer hidden, secret or in the dark.

Yet this same word can also be translated, "reprove." That is, reprove in the sense of convincing someone of the wrongness or sinfulness of their actions through argument or discussion.

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So the command is twofold: We are to expose sin by bringing it out into the light and reprove sin by showing how wrong it is.

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The **2nd**) it helps to know there was plenty of sin to expose and reprove in Ephesus! The city was a wealthy city, an ocean side city having a harbor, beautiful beaches, and the Cayster River bordering it on its north side. Thus it was a centre of commerce and trade and thus attracted people from all over who sought to get rich, giving it a very mixed racial population. The closest modern day example to Ephesus would be New York City.

It was also home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world -- the Temple of Artemis -- which was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and had 120 marble columns that were each 60 feet high! It was massive! And like Corinth, there were hundreds of "priestesses" (or temple prostitutes) there for your every pleasure. That's surely part what Paul had in mind when he spoke of: "things done in secret that were too shameful to mention."

And Ephesus also attracted a significant criminal population to the city. Primarily because anyone making it inside the temple was given the right of asylum, regardless of their crime.

Thus Barclay notes: ***"The influx of the criminal classes, and the immorality of the temple worship, combined to make Ephesus a notoriously evil place."*** Even Heraclitus, its most famous philosopher -- sometimes called the weeping philosopher -- said that the reason for his tears was that, ***"no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at the immorality which they must see on every side."***

And interestingly, that's where Paul, and the Apostle John chose to spend the largest amount of their time. Over two years for Paul, and John lived out most of his old age there, showing us their desire to shed light, and be light, in that very dark place -- loving and healing and reaching out to the people, while resolutely rejecting and exposing and reproving their sin.

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In fact, in light of all that, Acts 19:18-19 is very revealing in terms of what Paul might mean when he tells us we are to expose sin or the deeds of darkness. Because Ephesus was also a centre of magic, witchcraft and pagan superstition where many people made their living by fortune telling, and selling charms and amulets that promised to cure sickness, childlessness, and make people rich.

In Acts 19:18-19 Luke even tells us that after Paul had healed some, and cast demons out of others, and seven men were beaten severely by one possessed man when they tried as unbelievers to cast them out in Jesus name: ***"The Jews and Greeks living in the city were all seized with fear, and the name of Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who now believed came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publically. And when they calculated the value of the scrolls the total came to 50,000 drachmas (or about \$6,000,000 by today's standards)."***

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But did you hear what they did? ***"Those who believed came and openly confessed their evil deeds."*** That is, they did exactly what Paul says we

should do! They exposed their "deeds of darkness" to the light. They brought them out into the open and publicly confessed their evil deeds as a way of showing they wanted to, "have NOTHING to do with them" anymore.

So when Paul writes in v. 11b that they are to expose, "the fruitless deeds of darkness," they know exactly what he means, because they'd already done it! And thus they also knew that when one exposes their sin publically, or brings it out into the open with the intention of turning from it, even that darkness begins to turn to light!

Evil, when brought out into the open so as to move beyond it, gets swallowed up by the light! And I'm NOT talking about exposing it in a bragging sense (which I have sometimes seen), or like the man in I Cor. 5:1-5 who slept with his father's wife (his step-mother) and then went around boasting about it in the church. Exposing things in that way does no redemptive good whatsoever!

No. I'm talking about exposing it in a repentant way. The way a person does when they see that their shameful deeds are indeed shameful, and have been convinced and convicted by the Holy Spirit that what they are doing is wrong and must be stopped (as with the people in Ephesus who burned their scrolls on sorcery, witchcraft and magic).

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And **last**) I simply want to conclude by sharing a contemporary story where this took place (to help us understand). It happened at Wheaton College back in 1995. Randy was actually there when this "Campus Revival" (as it's come to be called) took place (as were some of the people from my church in Honduras).

And all I want to do is read you a little account of what happened. On Sunday night, March 19, 1995 two students from Howard Payne University in Texas came to speak at the Wheaton College chapel. One of the speakers, a girl named Brandi, shared how God had brought spiritual revival to their school as people did exactly what Paul encourages in this text.

Lyle Dorsett writes: "***When Brandi sat down, an unusual stillness engulfed the chapel.***" She was followed by a male Howard Payne student who during this move of God in Texas, "***felt constrained to confess some person-al sins to his fellow students. And shared how his confession had brought***

***reconciliation with God, deep inner peace, and a renewed sense of oneness with his fellow students."***

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And again, writes Dorsett: ***"The Wheaton students were strangely quiet..."*** Then, he says, ***"a Wheaton senior went to the microphone and confessed sins of pride and asked his fellow students for forgiveness. After a while, a particularly courageous Wheaton coed came forward and confessed a sexual sin. As she spoke, her voice broke. Sobs and tears punctuated her confession. When she finished, dozens of women rushed up to embrace her and pray for her, and a few of those coeds confessed similar sins. If the first man's confession made it safe to step up to the microphone, this confession made it safe to be completely transparent about even the most personal and humiliating failures. In brief, the false masks of perfection began to fall in astounding ways. Those who confessed were not alone in experiencing great joy. Hundreds who came to see what was happening were stirred by a powerful sense of God's presence. Many lost track of time, and the meeting went on till 2:00 a.m. "***

The first night 800 students were present in the chapel, but when it reconvened on Monday, 1200 students showed up. And after a time of praise, ***"lines formed at the microphones on each side of the chapel."*** And, ***"There were radiant smiles of joy, and an almost constant chorus of sobbing and crying."*** They stayed again until 2:00 a.m.

Tuesday 1500 showed up, and Wednesday and Thursday evening overflow crowds of up to 1800 people showed up, with people confessing, weeping, praying, being freed, and committing themselves anew to the Lord and His service.

Why? Because God honors the quest for holiness. Yet hear me well: The quest for holiness demands the exposure of sin -- bringing our sins and struggles into the light so that they may themselves be turned to light.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains it this way: ***"When sin has been brought into the light, and confessed it can be forgiven. Its power can be broken. It can no longer hold the believer in bondage or tear the fellowship apart."***

***The sinner can honestly be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God and the love of the brethren. This is the moment where fellowship in Christ becomes a profound reality [when even the worst of sins are openly confessed, and the love of our brethren continues to be extended to us in spite of it].***

***Open confession of sin to another, so crucifies one's pride, that it rarely ever occurs unless a person earnestly yearns to be rid of his sin. By openly confessing his sin he breaks the habit of secretly cherishing, nurturing or refusing to let it go. He becomes accountable. He gains the support of his praying brothers in his fight to overcome its life-polluting influences."***

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You can do the same today. Find someone you trust and bring some sin out into the open.

Confess it to a brother or sister.

Expose it to the light, and let God begin the process of turning it into light.

In fact, after the service I'm going to ask the elders to come down front, and if God has laid upon your heart the need to do so, I'm going to ask you to come down and share (in confidence) with one of the elders. And if you are a lady, there will be a lady down front here to confess to for you as well.