

January 13, 2013

Galatians 5:16-21 / Revelation 22:12-16 / Ephesians 5:5-7

Holiness (#7): Fakers vs. Stumblers, Salvation and It's Fruit

Today's passage is a difficult one -- primarily because it asks us, or requires us, to do something we often tend to feel we shouldn't do. It asks us to make a judgment on the basis a person's lifestyle and then respond accordingly. And for us who are familiar with the Scripture, "***Judge not that ye be not judged,***" it seems like Paul is asking us to do what Jesus forbids.

Yet, it may help to now that in the Greek (and in English as well) there are two types of judging. The **first** is "judging" with the aim of condemning and putting the other person down. It's the sense Jesus forbids.

And the **second** type of "judging" has to do with "discerning a wise course of action." This type of judging is actually encouraged by the Bible on numerous occasions, as in I Cor. 6:5, where we read: "***Is there nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?***" That is, listen to both sides and then come up with a wise and equitable course of action?

---

And I share that because that's what Paul does today! He evaluates a situation (a person's words in light of their lifestyle) and then directs us toward a wise course of action in relation to it. Because apparently there were people in the early churches (just like today) who claimed to be believers, and claimed to follow Jesus, and claimed to be saved and have an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Yet at the same time they lived overtly immoral lives, had dirty hearts and minds (and did not try to hide it), or were greedy people.

Thus, Paul, knowing the mind of the Lord in relation to such things, "judges" (that is, in the discerning sense) between their words and their lifestyle, and essentially tells us we must do the same, and then lays out the wisest course of action in relation what we should do.

What is it? We are to understand they are not believers. We are not to let them not deceive us with their empty words. And we are not to be partners with them (obviously because God's wrath comes upon such people and as believers we must be careful not to get caught up in it with them).

Yet it's hard to make such a judgment. Because not only have we ALL known professing Christians that have been immoral, impure, or greedy / but we've ALL / at one time or another in our Christian walk / wrestled with either greed / impurity / or some type of immorality.

And if so, where does that leave US? After all, Paul does say: ***"NO immoral, impure or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or of God."***

---

What does Paul mean? If you can't be immoral in any way, or impure in any way, or greedy in any way, and have any inheritance in the kingdom of God, then where does that leave us?

And since Paul goes on to say that the wrath of God comes upon, "those who are disobedient," and it seems to imply it's those same immoral, impure and greedy people, how does that relate to us, since even we as true believers are often "disobedient"?

And if it refers only to unbelievers, why does it even need to be said, since any true believer would ALREADY KNOW that God's wrath rests upon all unbelievers (John 3:17-18). Their refusal to obey God's command to believe in His Son Jesus (1 John 3:23) is the ultimate expression of their disobedience to Him / as well as what the Bible calls, "the unforgiveable sin."

And, likewise: What does it mean that we are not to "be partners with them," since the implication is that by doing so we risk being caught up in God's wrath against them?

---

So, because these verses raise so many questions, I'm going to ask you to listen carefully, as we examine this text in depth, and try to figure out exactly what Paul means and how to apply it.

---

So, let's look at the text section by section, beginning **FIRST** with verse 5. There Paul writes: "For you can be sure of this...." It's Paul's way of saying that whatever is about to follow is not really open for discussion! / This isn't one of those debatable "grey" areas. / To those who would say, "But Paul, you don't really know them. They may be immoral, impure & greedy people, *but...*" or

"They may enjoy being disobedient, *but...*" To such responses Paul would say there aren't any "buts."

This isn't one of those topics where you simply get to believe what you want. For when he says, "You can be SURE of this," what he means is: "This is the way it is." / It's very cut and dry. / You can't be an immoral, impure or greedy person and have any inheritance in the kingdom of God. / Or to put it in other words: "If you are that type of person, you have yet to be saved."

That's why he can go on to say: ***"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God's wrath comes upon those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them."***

---

LISTEN: Regardless of what we may think (or want to think) if one falls into the category of person that Paul is referring to, they have NO INHERITANCE WHATSOEVER in the kingdom of Christ and of God. That's not my opinion, that's what Paul says. He wants us to know that it's that black and white.

"This you KNOW," says the KJV. / Or as J.B. Phillips put it: "Of this much you can be quite certain..." It's not open to discussion.

---

Which brings us to the **SECOND** and all important issue of defining just who it is that Paul is referring to when he tells us: "No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Who is it that he means to include in that statement? Because if you take it at face value, it would seem to include just about everyone -- at one time or another, even the most earnest of believers. And if so, then the number of the saved would be extremely, extremely small -- if any.

And if you cannot be immoral or impure or greedy and be saved, then where does that leave all of us? The answer to all those questions, I believe, lies in the verses that sent us off on this topic of holiness in the first place -- chapter 4, vv. 22-24.

There Paul wrote: ***"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires***

***and to be made new in the attitude of your minds; to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*** -- immorality, impurity and greed (of course) being just a few of the aspects of the "old self" which we're supposed to be "putting off" or "taking off."

---

And that's the key to understanding what Paul is saying here. Paul's point in this verse is that if a person is a believer, they should not be living and acting in the same exact way they did before they became believers. For believers have been made different!

And listen: Not made different because they took a big breath / and rolled up their shirt sleeves, and hunkered down, and put in some colossal effort to reform their lives. No. If they are true believers, they have been made different by God, who in His gracious acts of saving us, and making us new, and sanctifying us, has altered or changed the basic orientation of our hearts from hearts that didn't see much wrong with sin, to hearts that desire to obey Him and be holy.

---

Few passages make that as clear as II Cor. 5:17 where Paul writes: ***"If anyone be in Christ, he IS a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."*** By a miracle of God's grace, He has mysteriously and supernaturally made us into something we were not.

He altered our nature for the good, thereby giving us: New desires / and new affections / and new aims / and a new purpose for living. A new pleasure in doing what's right instead of what's wrong. A new passion for godliness, and desire to pray, and know Him and glorify Him instead of self. A new desire to please Him, and serve Him, and love Him and worship Him -- and see all others do the same!

In Jeremiah 31:33 God tells us in relation to the new covenant through Jesus: ***"I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts."*** That is, I will cause them to know My law and want to obey it. I will write it in the core of their being and make it a part of their new nature to want to follow and obey all my commands.

He says the same thing in Ezekiel 36:25-27: ***"I will cleanse you of all your impurities, and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you, and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."***

Those are not things **WE** will do, but things **HE** will do when through conversion to Christ He makes us different! He will wash us on the inside, give us a new heart, and put a new spirit in us -- His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit will "move us" (that is, "compel us or make us want") to follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws.

---

You see, coming to Christ has never simply been a decision one makes or a commitment one keeps. It has always been a supernatural encounter with the living God whereby He exercises the mighty power of His grace and moves by His Holy Spirit to make us alive in Christ and break the chains of our bondage to sin. He performs some radical heart surgery, changing the way that we think about things, feel about things and go about living our lives.

That's why Jonathan Edwards could call it the greatest of all miracles! Because in conversion to Christ, God actively moves in miraculous power to alter the entire orientation of our being and make us that new creation in Christ -- whereby we enter the kingdom of God and gain our eternal inheritance with Him.

---

Yet, having said that, will we (even with that new, divinely-implanted nature) obey flawlessly? NO! Never happen this side of eternity. Our obedience -- even with the assistance of God's Spirit -- will always be flawed this side of heaven.

Yet just as surely as we can say that, we can also say that there will there be some sort of change in the direction of godliness. In light of all the passages I just pointed out, I hope it is now crystal clear that you can't become a Christian without some degree of change taking place within you -- a change that makes you at least want to be godly!

A change that even compels you to strive and fight temptation -- in the strength God gives. And on certain occasions causes us to do intense spiritual battle when the old self / or the old sinful inclinations rise up again and try to tempt us to go back to our old ways.

---

It's true. If we don't at least desire to be holy, or pray for God to make us more holy, or strive in some way, by grace, through faith to fight sin, it's probably an indication that we haven't yet received the Holy Spirit -- a Spirit whose purpose for coming into us is to move us toward holiness!

Simply by coming into us, and residing within us, as Paul tells us in Gal. 5:22, the Holy Spirit begins to produce the fruit of holiness: **"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control."** That's one of the ways we can know the Holy Spirit dwells within us! He both begins, and continues, to carry on (for the rest of our days on earth) the work of gradually producing the fruit of godliness in us.

---

Will we stumble and fall and bruise the fruit? Yes. / Will we go through periods of spiritual dryness and drought that stunt its growth? Yes. / Will the fruit be damaged by the mildew and blight caused by us occasionally falling back into old sin patterns? Yes. / Will the locusts and plagues and fiery darts of the evil one damage -- sometimes severely -- the fruit ripening on the vines? The answer is yes, they will.

Like a devious teenager -- taking his pellet gun in an apple orchard in September, Satan targets the ripening fruit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so forth -- and seeks to take them all down, one ripening apple at a time! He wants nothing more than to discourage YOU by damaging THEM.

And thus, it's NOT a matter of stumbling in regard to sin, it's a matter of not even seeking to resist it. It's a matter of seeing nothing wrong with it. It's a matter of seeing no need to turn from it. It's a matter of having no desire to be holy or turn from sin. It's a matter of having no evidence whatsoever of godly fruit in your life.

What Paul is telling us is that: If a person claims to be a Christian but is living in the exact same way they always have or did with the old self fully intact and totally unchallenged... / If they are continually doing immoral things and enjoy indulging in impurity and see nothing wrong selfish greed (which is idolatry and shows that the old self has never been "put off" and the "new self" has never been "put on") then according to Paul that person does NOT have "any inheritance in the kingdom of God."

Their words are "empty" and they are subject to "wrath of God" -- even if they think or say they are saved, born again, or Christian.

---

That's what Paul means when he says someone is an "immoral person." He's saying that being immoral characterizes the essence of who they are and what they do. Just as I might say so and so is a good person, or a competitive person, or a person who always helps others -- because those things characterize who they are as people and what they do on a regular basis -- so it is in each of these three cases here in verse 5.

Hoehner puts it this way: ***"This is not to say that a believer might not fall into one or more of these sins... rather, this concerns the person who is characterized by one or more of these sins."***

---

So when Paul says: "No immoral person, or impure person, or greedy person has any part in the kingdom of God," what he means is people for whom that label characterizes the essence of who they are as people and what they do on a regular, ongoing basis.

---

Which brings us to verse 6, and the **THIRD** thing we must consider, where Paul says: ***"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes upon those who are disobedient."***

So, who are these empty worded and disobedient people upon whom the wrath of God will come?

Hoehner says: ***"It probably refers to BOTH unbelievers and believers who falsely think that worldly living is of no consequence. Believers can be influenced by their culture so that what is acceptable in the world becomes***

***acceptable in the church... [and] Because it appears that the unbelievers were not presently suffering the consequences of their lifestyles, believers might easily slide into a similar mode of life."***

Though immediately following those comments he defines such "believers" as "so-called believers." He has to since Paul has already said they can't be true believers, since a true believer most definitely has an inheritance in the kingdom of God and these people are said to have none.

---

So, what are we talking about? Fakers as opposed to stumblers / sheep as opposed to wolves in sheep's clothing / people who merely say they've been converted as opposed to those who actually have been / people who actually have experienced the life-changing miracle of God's grace, as opposed to those who only say they have, yet go on living in sin, just as they had before -- and see nothing wrong with that at all!

---

Which brings us to the **LAST** thing Paul says: ***"Therefore, do not (that is, you who truly are believers) do not be partners with them."*** Why?

**1st)** Because such people (being proud of their immorality) will always seek to lead you down the path toward ungodliness. The goal of religious-ly immoral people is to make you think that living a life of sin has no consequences. That God doesn't care if we sin, and would never judge sin -- even if in doing so we smugly trample underfoot the grace of God.

**2nd)** We should not partner with them because the word "partner" means "to participate with." And when we participate in sin, and do so often, it has a way (like a hot iron) of searing or numbing out our conscience, which God uses to convict us of sin, and guide us down the paths of righteousness.

**3rd)** We are not to be partners with them, because if God should exercise His wrath on THEM (in the present, in this life) and we are with them as they are judged, we may be caught up in His expression of wrath on them.

What do I mean? If we are with an immoral person and he is out speeding around in a car, drunk and with prostitutes, and you are there (even if you don't participate with them in their drinking or with the women), and he drives his car



into a pole at 80 miles an hour, you will be caught up in God's judgment of him (or them) simply by being "partners with them" in the car (and it has happened).

---

So what's Paul's point? Believers should not become (as we might say), "partners in crime" with unbelievers in their sinful lifestyles or behaviors.

Nor should we allow those who "profess to be believers" (but really aren't, as their sinful lifestyles should make obvious) to convince us that there are no temporal or eternal consequences for living immoral, impure and greedy lives. For Paul makes it clear that one cannot be a Christian and continue to live in any sinful way he or she pleases.

A Christian may fall into sexual immorality, but you'd be hard pressed to convince me it's possible to be a Christian prostitute.

You may hurt somebody and possibly even kill someone in a momentary fit of rage -- and still be a Christian -- but you'd be hard pressed to convince me you can be a hired assassin and a Christian at the same time.

---

Discernment, my friends, we need discernment. We are not to judge in the condemning way, but we are told to judge (in the discerning way) the wisest path or course of action, given all we know.