

## Genuine vs. Counterfeit Love – Part 2

Ephesians 5:1-6

*“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you”*

**Introduction:** If something is valuable it will undoubtedly be counterfeited. In fact, there is a thriving, growing, worldwide industry for counterfeit goods. As of 2018 counterfeiting is the largest criminal enterprise in the world with domestic and international sales of counterfeit and pirated good totally between \$1.7 and \$4.5 trillion a year, more than drug and human trafficking. Travelling to LA or New York, you know you can find knockoff versions of Gucci handbags, designer wallets, Rolex watches, and cubic zirconia diamonds. There is \$42 million of the sale of fake labels and tags, dangerous pseudo versions of pharmaceuticals, and fake versions of footwear and sunglasses. On top of this, the counterfeiting of paper money has always been tried and is often successful. The US Treasury Dept. estimates there is between \$70 - \$200 million worth of counterfeit bills in circulation. Most of that could have been the result of the work of Frank Bourassa, who counterfeited and sold over \$250 million worth of fake currency, almost all in \$20 bills (that’s right, your \$20 may be a fake) until an undercover operation stopped him, turning him to a life of security and working for the government to catch other counterfeiters. Frank spent many years and much real money to learn how to counterfeit, to be able to imitate and thus deceive the recipient, and he said the more invisible the better. Counterfeiting takes work and effort, but in the end it only seeks to take advantage of and steal.

How would you feel if you bought something that you thought and were told was real, only to find it was fake? Perhaps you would say ignorance is bliss, but when knowledge comes, being a part of a perpetuated lie leaves us miserable, distrusting, and feeling stupid.

Whatever God creates is valuable, and whatever God deems valuable Satan will produce a counterfeit. This is especially true when it comes to love. Since **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8), meaning God Himself defines it, Satan cannot produce anything other than a fake version, one that from a distance looks authentic until you check the tag. Last week we looked at what genuine, Biblical, God-imitating love looks like, and saw that it was a **forgiving, unconditional, and sacrificial** type of love. This means that the love that is produced by our worldly system will be the opposite of this love, that cannot forgive but only earn, will be conditioned on self-made standards, and will be characterized by selfishness. Perhaps the largest area this is experienced is in the realm of marriage and sexual intimacy, which is what Paul covers here (5:3-6; 5:22-33). Before delving into the text and what we are to **avoid**, it is important to understand how our enemy has sought to distort love in the context of relationship in our culture.

### Love in Marriage:

We will delve more deeply into marriage in a few weeks, but we start with why and how God created marriage as an expression of love. Genesis 2 gives us a description of a perfect marriage, one where husband and wife live in perfect unity without the poison of sin and a demonic system around them. A husband (Adam) was given the charge of loving care for his wife, by working hard in provision (2:15), spiritual oversight in the Word of God (2:16-17) and oversight over the family (2:20; 3:20). A wife (Eve) was to be a helper, a support, a blessing to her husband and family (2:18), one that complemented him perfectly so that they both could glorify the Lord in all that they did. In this, there was perfect physical intimacy (2:23-25), all within the bounds of the covenant of marriage (1 Pet. 3:7). God created this institution for the good of the family and good of society, where men and women were made differently yet each with equal value as image bearers of God (1:26-27), and for the habitation of the whole earth

(1:28) in order that all the earth would praise the Lord. In this union there was exhilaration (2:23), satisfaction, and blessing. It was not created nor viewed as God withholding or keeping people from happiness, but rather Him providing a pathway of joy.

Even after sin entered the world in Genesis 3 and corrupted the institution, God still lavished grace in love. Notice that the **3 aspect of love** are essential in marriage (and all relationships). Forgiveness is a must, since two sinners living in close proximity WILL sin against each other. Unconditional love means we will love without setting our own conditions that can never be met. And it means we will come into marriage seeking to serve, rather than be served, in all areas of life together.

Marriage, as God created it, is a place of love, blessing, enjoyment, satisfaction, procreation, and sanctification. We not only learn to serve, but God exposes areas of our life that need to change and allows us to do it in a place where someone has chosen to love us. It is the **ONLY** place where God has ordained physical intimacy, which defines that anything done for sexual satisfaction outside of marriage is not only sinful, it is outside of God's will and is thus rebellious against Him. Sex is good, enjoyable, brings forth the blessing of children, and is ultimately worshipful. God set all of this up for our good, so that we would have a clearer understanding of Christ's love for us, His bride, His church (Eph. 5:31-32).

### Counterfeit love in culture:

There is a reason that we see the overt denigration of gender identity and sexual expression today: Satan is in full blown assault against the loving institutions that God has created, and desperately seeks to offer counterfeit, imitation, and fake ways that people can pursue a version of love, but are left with empty promises, unsatisfied lives, and left only to blame others for their plight. Our enemy looks with delight over his schemes, since culture has rejected God and bought in hook, line, and sinker, and even as the ship of their lives goes down into the vacuous depths, raise their fists in defiance, thinking all along they were right. Consider a quick devolving of our American culture over the last 60+ years in terms of how sex and marriage have changed. Far from a wholesome, Biblical view, our country has been on a suicidal course for decades. The whole unraveling is simply this: *"how do we get what we want without having it cost us anything? How do we play out our desires (sexual immorality) without guilt, responsibility, sacrifice, shame, or consequences?"* **Here's how:**

- **Getting rid of the consequences, namely pregnancy** – In 1960, the USDA approved of what is now referred to as "The Pill", which became widely available and quickly un-stigmatized. This freed many up to venture outside of the confines of marriage without fear of pregnancy
- **Getting rid of disease** – Penicillin, discovered in 1928, was available for \$0.30 a dose by 1947 and over the next 2 decades rendered most venereal diseases far less hazardous or deadly (i.e. death by Syphilis nullified)<sup>1</sup>
- **Getting rid of the unwanted** – Abortion is legalized in historic "Roe vs. Wade" Supreme Court ruling, allowing women access to abortion and nullifying a "consequence" of immorality
- **Getting rid of marriage** – In 1969, Ronald Reagan signed into law "no-fault divorce" in California, with every other State following suit, so that couple could "get out" of marriages more easily, without the pesky reasons of infidelity or abuse.
- **Getting rid of roadblocks** – creation of the internet – early 1990's, allowed the proliferation of pornography around the world
- **Getting rid of boundaries** – creation of the iPhone and other smart phones – 2007 – allowed for the quick access and private viewing of pornography and pursuing illicit relationships

<sup>1</sup> Alan Petigny, "The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965", p. 104.

- **Getting rid of shame** – Government legislates homosexual marriage in 2013, redefining the institution and normalizing the practice
- **Getting rid of absolutes** – Woke agenda and LGBTQ drive toward normalization – Present day, school curriculum from pre-school through University is designed to teach and indoctrinate an anti-Biblical ideology. Acceptance of others is no longer enough, affirmation is now demanded (Romans 1 told us this). Marriage has been redefined, gender is told to be fluid and changeable, and “*Love is Love*” is now the standardized norm for sexual expression. This is not the first time in history that this has been perpetuated, but the first time in our lifetime and this country’s experience.

Now there are other reasons and factors, but what I want us to see is this is nothing new nor did it come out of nowhere. Some of this came to be from unintended consequences, but all of it is a deliberate eroding of Biblical mandates. It reminds us that our enemy is a schemer, a counterfeiter, and deceives people who are not our enemy but actually need the truth. The problem and caution for the church, always, is that we see the false and uphold the true. It means we must see all of this not as an **alternative to love, but a destructive counterfeit**. We do not condone, uphold, or give credence to false version of love but instead shine God’s truth in **both WORD AND PRACTICE, shining brightly the joyful expression of God’s truth in the gospel**. The gospel offers what is best, which starts with a reconciled relationship with God in Christ from our rebellion, and then trickles down to restorative practices of holiness and purity, seeing to honor God rather than gratify ourselves.

So in the text we will see **2 areas the church must get rid of and 2 stark warnings regarding sexual and all immorality, followed with a conclusion of HOPE for all**.

The church and gospel shine brightest NOT when we set ourselves against the people of the world, but rather believe and live differently, showing the transforming and hope offering power of Jesus Christ. The church is at its absolute weakest when it offers nothing distinctive, tries to be like the world, and soft peddles the truth and gives such candy-coated truth that even if you get to the nutritious center, you’re so full of sugar that it either is missed or no longer helpful. That is why “Putting off” practices is so important.

#### **Getting Rid of Immorality in Practice:**

There are three areas of immoral practice that Paul focuses on here that he described in the letter to the Colossians as things to **put to death since they are earthly/worldly** (Col. 3:5). These include **sexual immorality, all impurity, and covetousness** (or idolatry). Now these are each distinctive but are overlapping, and the major issue Paul is addressing is the counterfeit love of sexual immorality which so pervades the world and seeps into the church itself. In fact, 1 Corinthians 5 describes an ongoing issue in the church there which was going on, unaddressed, that even the pagan world blushed at and said was clearly wrong. The church is NOT immune to worldly influence, and in fact will be targeted by our enemy to take us down in these specific areas.

- **Sexual immorality** – The word Paul uses, *porneia*, is similar to our English equivalent *pornography*, and refers to all illicit sexual behavior that deviates from the worship and mandates set up by God, including prostitution, extra-marital relationships (Matt. 5:32), and homosexuality.

- **All Impurity** – A more general term for the defilement of the whole person, and the addition to “all kinds, sorts, or every kind” encompasses anything left out in the use of *porneia* and extends it any type of foulness (like that of an untreated wound).
- **Covetousness/Idolatry** – The first two covered areas of flesh/action, the idea of “Greed or coveting” here refer to sins of attitude. Obviously this is the opposite of Biblical love, and though it can refer to material desire, even the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Ex. 20:17) identified the object of coveting to be another man’s wife. Col. 3:5 ties this with idolatry, which takes good things God has made, makes them ultimate, and in turn treat them as gods, worshipping them instead of the true God.

Paul said none of these should **named among the church**, or should not go on at all nor be known by reputation, since it is the opposite of Biblical love. There are two important, clarifying principles to name here:

1. **Sexual sin, in any form, must be identified, repented of, and put to death** – We have all heard the stories of marriages and churches that have been brought down by scandals of sexual immorality, so much so that there really is no need to illustrate. Satan has worked tirelessly in our culture to so normalized sexual sin that people word wrangle over what “is” is. Our young people are exposed to much suggestive material through social media, advertisement, and regular programming, exponentially more than when I was a teenager. It takes a Job like commitment to make a “covenant with our eyes” (Job 31:1) to choose not to look at relentless pictures and suggestions that sex outside of marriage is good, right, and normal. It’s important to say this again: *anything done in thought, desire, or action for sexual pleasure or gratification OUTSIDE of the covenant of marriage is SIN!!!* Let’s not mince words nor do gymnastics with texts like this. In order to address any sin in our heart or life we must **first acknowledge that it is there**. Jesus defined adultery not just in the act but in the desire, in the looking at a woman with lustful intent (Matt. 5:28). So sexual sin, in all forms, must be identified, repented of, and put to death.
2. **The church must be CLEAR on the Biblical reality of Sex in order to be LOVING** – “But pastor, love is love! If two people are in love, why would we stand in their way? They aren’t hurting anyone? Doesn’t it seem judgmental to tell people what they can or can’t do in private?” This is the logic of our day, a deceptive narrative born out of the pit. If we are going to be truly loving to people we must communicate the truth. It is true we are NOT to judge the world for simply being worldly, since only God does that (1 Cor. 5:11-13), but there is a difference between judgment and loving in the truth. The difference is that we **accept everyone as image bearers and those worthy of love, but we do NOT GIVE APPROVAL** to actions and decisions that keep them at odds with God, since rebellion against God only leads to judgment and hopelessness. Far too many churches have thought that lessening God’s commands and definitions would help people see Jesus and the church as less harsh. It brought people in the church alright, and then changed that church into the worst form of social club, jettisoning the truth and everyone being living in blissful blindness under the veil of “Christianity”.

Two quick words: **First, to our young people**. This is an area that you must be thoughtful, convinced, and live out with conviction. **Standing for nothing opens you up to falling for anything**. Our enemy would love nothing other than to have you dabble in sexual immorality since “everyone is doing it”, but all that it will do is leave you empty, burned, with broken purity and hearts. “Guard (watch over) your hearts with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23). By faith, trust that God has your best in mind and does not withhold good gifts from His kids. Remember, no Christian couple sets out to enter into sexual immorality, but it happens by degrees. And God knows all that goes on (1 Thess. 4:3-8)

and gives you grace in every situation. **Second**, Proverbs 5 says the way to fight immorality is to be satisfied in God and the wife of your youth. For some, that means moving toward your spouse in all honesty and intimacy, and for others, its waiting for that relationship someday.

### Getting Rid of Immorality in Word:

Tied closely together are our actions and words, so Paul addresses the words that believers use:

- **Filthiness** – These three words only occur here in the NT. This first refers to shameful, disgraceful, or base talk, that which only occurs in the dark or secret (Eph. 5:12) or do in secret, words and jokes you make that you wouldn't if your mom was around.
- **Foolish Talk** - Senseless, silly and futile talk that do not build up or edify in discussion
- **Crude Joking** – Joking that goes too far, dirty, that are sexual in overtone or that cut people down.

All of this would be categorized as “inappropriate” for a believer, out of place. Though the Bible is not opposed to laughter or a sense of humor (Prov. 17:22), there is no place for joking about sin or sinful behavior that God is opposed to. The antithesis of this kind of joking is “**thanksgiving**”, which implies that at the core of every joke is a kernel of truth, and in this case, sexual joking is not content with the way God has created marriage and the practice of sexual union within it.

### Two Stark Warnings for Habitual Involvement in Immorality (Eph. 5:5-6):

What we want to do to close is to let the Word sink into our hearts and minds. I will try my best not to stir your emotions here, but also let the weight of the text speak:

*“For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is **sexually immoral or impure**, or is covetous, that is an idolater, **HAS NO INHERITANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND GOD**. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the **wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**”*

What does Paul mean and say here? Anyone, even someone who claims to be a believer, who is characterized or habitually engages in sexual immorality will not inherit the coming Kingdom. A son of disobedience is one who is known and classified by disobedience, and that person is still under **the wrath of God**, which means they are still in an unconverted state (Eph. 2:1-3). In other words, following Christ, worshipping God, and walking as a Christian is so completely incompatible with sexual immorality that God cannot and will not receive those who refuse to continue on in that sin. **The stakes are that high**. The reality of love is at stake. Our eternal soul and destiny is in view.

Now, does this mean that if you STRUGGLE with this issue you are not saved? Not at all, since the key word is struggle. Struggling with sin is the nature of a believer, as we have looked at the active pursuit of Christ by putting off our old self and putting on the new. However, when there IS not struggle or have been given over to a sin, that is when the concern should be large. But here is where the **hope comes in**. How do we deal with the constant barrage of deception and sexually immoral temptation, and how does true Biblical love combat it?

- 1) **Secure undivided devotion to Christ** (1 Cor. 7:35) – Regardless of our marriage status, our goal is that Christ would be ultimately satisfying, breeding contentment and joy. When we are fulfilled in Christ alone, then we can be **thankful** for everything, even our present state and

circumstance, and take everything else (marriage, sexual intimacy, etc) as a gift of grace from His hand. So we want to start by focusing on the security we have in the **love of God**.

- 2) **Kill Sexual sin in our life** (Matt. 5:29-30; Col. 3:5) – The goal is not to lessen by degrees, but to **“cut off, throw away, and kill”**. This means aggressive acknowledgment, identifying, and turning from sexual sin. This may mean ending a relationship, inviting in accountability, and radically changing habits if need be. An unwillingness to do so is a declaration of your loyalties, your god, and your destiny.
  
- 3) **Repent Freely as Beloved Children** – *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality...and such WERE some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Cor. 6:9-11). There is hope in the fight against sexual immorality, and it comes from the love of Jesus, who died and took our place, and in so doing, **washed us and made us pure, sanctified us and made us holy, and justified us by declaring us righteous**. This means that any believer who by faith has asked for forgiveness, repented of their sin, and follows Jesus can find freedom in the fight, can rid themselves of enslaving sin, and walk purely with the Lord.

So we want to understand the truth and stop walking in deception. Love is defined by God. The world can offer counterfeits only. If we are going to walk in love, we must understand how God calls us to love, particularly in the area of sex and marriage, model that, and expose the reality of what is false. The best way to spot a counterfeit dollar bill is to study a real one. The best way to expose counterfeit love is to embrace and live out God’s love in all areas. This is how we push back against the darkness and shine brightly to those walking in that darkness.