

Happy Super Bowl Sunday!

- I know you're all wondering who I'm rooting for. Obviously...the red team of course.

If you weren't here last week...we're finally back in our series through the book of Ephesians...

- By the time we're done, I'm pretty sure we have the Guinness World record for longest study of Ephesians in church history...or Jesus will have come back.
- We are currently in Part 2 of our 3 part series
 - Part 1 - our identity as beloved Children of God
 - Part 2 - our collective identity as the family of God
 - Part 3 - our partnership with God in the work of His Kingdom.

Last week, Billy launched us back into Ephesians. He spoke about...

- How we are to imitate (mimic) the love of Christ.
- And in order to do that we must sit and soak in the aroma of the love of God, so that our lives will become fragrant with His love. If we spend time with King Jesus we will start to "smell like King Jesus."

This morning, I'll be reading verses 1-5, but we're going to be focusing our attention on Verses 3 and 5.

- Were skipping verse 4 today (you'll understand why)
- And then next week, Dom is going to lead us through verse 4.
- The title of our sermon today is "The Infection of Idolatry"

EPHESIANS 5:1-5 (NLT)

¹ Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. ³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

PRAY

The words before us in our text today are not likely to find their way into your pretty devotional calendar...

- Flipping to the next month..."Let me see what February says...Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Awesome!"

Nor will these words make their way onto your cute christian coffee mug that you drink out of in the morning...

- Wake up groggy..."I need something inspiring today...Idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God...Wonderful"

If we're honest...our hearts and minds have a tendency to navigate and gravitate toward the more "pretty" verses of scripture.

- The Jeremiah 29:11's, the Psalm 23's, the John 3:16's
- Verses that talk about the immeasurable love and kindness and beauty of God
- Verses that remind us of His promises and His faithfulness and His love.

But when it comes to the verses of Scripture (like the one before us today) that expose and challenge us, the temptation can be to keep our distance...

- To keep them at arms's length...
- Because they're just not quite as easy for us to digest...

I recently had the privilege of filming an interview with a man named Andy Crouch...

- Author of a book..."The Techwise family" (Highly recommend, esp. parents)
- He argues: Great promise of Tech = "Easy Everywhere"
 - Tech makes your life easier, more efficient
 - It's available any time and everywhere you want
- The central idea of the book:
 - Easy is not what forms us as human beings
 - It's actually the difficult and challenging things in life that shape us into the image of God that we were intended to bear from the beginning.

He's obviously speaking about technology, but the exact same principle can be applied to the way that we ingest, interpret, apprehend and appropriate scripture.

- If we only cherry pick the verses of the bible that make us "feel good" or affirm what we already believe then we will never be formed and molded into the image of God...
 - Which is the entire point of the Christian life! (To bear the image of God)
 - This is what it means when Paul says to "Imitate God" in v1 of our passage...
- We need the difficult verses of the bible (like this one), just as much as we need the devotional calendar verses.
 - We need the Ephesians 5:3's just as much as the Psalm 23's

Because the Bible is actually a confrontational book. And it was designed that way.

- It's not a self-help book.
- The purpose of the Bible isn't to make your life easy. The purpose of the Bible is to make your life eternal.
- And because of this, the God's word is not afraid to confront the things in your life (and my life) that need to be dealt with.
 - The things that hold us back from being the people we were created to be.

Like a really close and trusted friend are the scriptures.

- And if we allow the Bible to read us, examine us, confront us, and check us where we need to be checked, and allow our lives to be shaped by its truth, then we be so richly and gloriously transformed into His image.

Now that we understand this, back to verse 3:

- Ephesians 5:3
Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. v3

Paul defines sexual immorality this way:

- He uses the greek word **porneia** – “any sexual activity outside the context of marriage between a husband and wife.”

He then goes further by using the word “impurity”

- This word Paul uses for impurity is **akatharsia** – “the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living”
- This includes sexual activity (particularly acts sexual deviance), but it's not confined to just sexuality.
- It refers to all kinds of impurity and general “uncleanness”.

Then he takes it a step further and introduces the idea of “greed”

- The word Paul uses for Greed is **pleonexia** - The desire to have more.
- More money, more stuff, more power, more influence, more security. The insatiable need for more.

If we're not careful, this verse can read like a kind of spiritual checklist.

- Don't be sexually immoral....ok.
 - “Well I'm married, so that's good. And I don't look at porn. I think I'm doing pretty good there. Next.”
- Don't have any impurity...hmm.
 - “Well that's a little more difficult. I mean I guess there are some things that I struggle with...”
- “And greed? Well gosh who doesn't want a little more in life every now and then?”

- Just three boxes in and you're like, "this is impossible"

But Paul isn't giving us a checklist, what Paul is giving us is a diagnosis. He's trying to diagnose something within our souls, and sexual immorality and impurity and greed are just symptoms of a much deeper and more powerful illness.

- In verse 5, Paul gives a name to this illness
- He calls it idolatry. Look at verse 5 again. NIV says is really well:
 - **Ephesians 5:5 (NIV)**
⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
- This is the master key to unlocking what Paul is getting at, and why he appears to be communicating so directly to the Church and with such urgency regarding this issue.

In order to figure this out, we need to ask the question: what exactly is idolatry?

- The concept of idolatry is first revealed when God gives Israel the Ten Commandments:
- **Exodus 20:4-5:**
⁴ You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. ⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them.
- From this we can gather that an idol is anything that takes the place of, or takes pre-eminence over God in our lives.
 - Notice how God commands the Israelites to not make an idol of any kind.
 - Idols don't have to be bad to be idols. Idols can be and often are the good things in our lives.
 - Sex and sexuality in and of itself is not an idol.
 - Money and wealth on their own are not idols.
 - Material possessions by themselves are not idols.
- It is the elevation of something to the place of God that turns it into an idol.
 - Sexuality becomes sexual immorality when we look to sex as our primary source of satisfaction instead of God.
 - Money and possessions turn into greed when we look to our bank account and our real estate as our primary source of security instead of God.
- In the book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller says this about idols: [An Idol is] anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought...An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure. - Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

If sexual immorality and impurity and greed are the symptoms, then idolatry is certainly the illness.

- And if we are to live the way that Paul is calling us to live, then we must treat the illness and not the symptoms.
 - If we don't, then the real illness will continue to thrive and our symptoms will return over and over again.

If you've read the news recently, you're probably aware of the devastating coronavirus outbreak that is currently wreaking havoc across China and abroad.

- In just a few weeks this epidemic has surpassed the infamous SARS outbreak of 2003
 - So far over 12,000 people have been infected with the virus, and it has claimed the lives of over 259 people.
 - The virus has now spread to every province of China and is now present in over 22 countries across the globe including 5 cases here in the United States.
 - The infection is spreading so fast that I've had to continually update my notes throughout the week. When I started on Tuesday, only 5,300 people were infected.

The global response to the outbreak has been swift, exacting and extensive.

- In total the Chinese government has allocated over \$4 billion dollars to fight the coronavirus.
- 15 Chinese cities, including the epicenter of Wuhan, have been placed on lockdown...
 - Travel in and out of these regions has been completely restricted
 - Which means that 60 million people are currently living in quarantine.
 - Communities that once bustled with recreation and commerce now stand apocalyptically still.
 - One Chinese city has even imposed a measure only allowing one family member to leave the house at a time to buy groceries or seek medical attention.
- This past week, Delta, United, and American Airlines cancelled all flights to and from mainland china.
- And just a few days ago the U.S. sent a chartered 747 jet to the region in order to evacuate key U.S. diplomats and foreign nationals.
 - Their plane landed at an air force base near Riverside, where they are still currently under a mandatory 14-day quarantine until it can be determined that there is no threat of the disease spreading.

Why do we take such drastic measures to fight an infection like this?

- Because we know that just a hint of a deadly and contagious infection left unconfined and uncontained can wipe all of us out.
- Just a small trace of it left untreated can ultimately cause mass destruction.
- We understand the gravity of the situation.
- We understand that the only way to protect humanity from an infection like this is to find it, isolate it, and eradicate it.

The Infection of Idolatry

- When an infection breaks out we don't just sit around and hope that things will get better.
- We declare WAR on it.
 - We send teams and doctors and resources and everything that we can to squash the outbreak before it can destroy the population.

Friends, idolatry is a spiritual infection.

- Sexual immorality, greed, impurity are all a part of an illness that ravages the human soul.
- And it's far more deadly and contagious than any virus we know of. And Paul says that we cannot tolerate it.
- Idolatry cannot run rampant in our souls, nor can it run rampant in the family of God.

The first thing that an idol does is it attacks our identity.

- The identity is like the immune system of the soul.
 - And when we are spiritually healthy (when Jesus is at the center of our lives and we have a right understanding of who we're in Him), our identity is able to regulate the desires of our heart. It's able to keep things in line.
- And what idols do is they attempt to convince us that God is not enough to satisfy our identity.
 - "Yeah, God is love, but if you really want to experience love what you actually need is sex."
 - "Sure God has provided for you, but if you really want to feel secure what you actually need is that raise at work."
 - Remember a few weeks ago when Dom talked about the "Yeah, but also..." box?
 - "Yeah, but also..." is the way that idols hijack our identity.

And then, once an idol has control of our identity, it functions like an autoimmune disease, turning our own identity against us.

- The thing that once kept our soul from being destroyed is now the thing that is destroying our soul.
 - When the identity of a business owner becomes "Entrepreneur" instead of "Beloved Child of God", he begins to forsake his wife and his children and his principles and his integrity in service to the idol of success.
 - When the identity of a teenage girl on Instagram becomes "influencer" instead of "Beloved Daughter of God" she begins to share revealing photographs in service to the idol of affirmation.
 - When the identity of a pastor becomes "Celebrity preacher" instead of "Beloved Servant of God", he buys expensive shoes and watches and cars and houses in service to the idol of Entitlement.
- Do you see how idols infect the life of the Christian?

But the virus of idolatry doesn't just affect the individual Christian. It affects the whole community. Like a virus, sin affects the entire kingdom.

- This is why Paul is saying "Let there be no sexual immorality, no impurity, no greed, no idolatry among God's (holy) people"
- Another translation: "There shouldn't even be a hint among you"
 - Paul understood the threat of sin and idolatry to the health and well being of the Church.
- Idolatry has the power to turn entire nations of people away from God.
- If you don't believe that, just read the old Testament.
 - Time after time after time, the Israelites (people of God), allowed the infection of idolatry to run its course among and time after time decimated them.

Like an infection, the illness of idolatry spreads via human interaction

- This is exactly why Paul warns the Church against the practice of engaging in "Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes" in verse 4 of our passage.
- Idolatry is most easily transmitted through our conversations, our relationships, and our interactions with one another.

Remember in the book of Exodus when Moses went up to the mountain?

- And as time wore on the all people started to get impatient with Moses—and with the Lord.
 - And you can imagine the scene there in the desert:
 - One disgruntled person grumbles to another person about How this isn't working out.
 - And then rumors start to swirl around the camp that Moses isn't coming back.
- Finally the word gets around to Aaron...and look at what they tell him:
- **Exodus 32:1**
...they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt."
- What does Aaron do? He obliges them! He takes all the gold, and melts it into a golden calf. He even builds an altar to it. And the people start to worship the idol...
- But they're not really worshipping a golden calf are they?
- They're worshipping the idol of control...
- The God who led them out of Egypt wasn't enough for them, so they created a God of their own destiny.

Sadly, this narrative repeats itself often throughout the Old Testament.

- Over and over and over again Israel allows the voices of culture and one another to infect their mindset toward God. And time and time again God has to deal with the outbreak of their idolatry.
- The prophet Isaiah paints a pretty devastating picture of the effect of Idolatry on God's people:
- **Isaiah 2:6-8 (NIV):**

You, Lord, have abandoned your people, the descendants of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East: they practice divination like the Philistines and embrace pagan customs. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made.

Do you know what the most effective way to fight the spread of an outbreak is?

- Wash. Your. Hands.
- It's just about the simplest thing that you can do, but it's the best thing.
- To this day, even with all of our technological and scientific advances, still the BEST and MOST EFFECTIVE way to stop the spread of an outbreak is to be washed.

The best way to prevent the infection of idolatry is to be washed - for your soul to be washed by the living water of Jesus.

- To bathe your identity in the beauty of His love.
- To allow our very being to be washed by the truth of God's word.
- To echo the words of David in Psalm 51 when he said
- Psalm 51: 2, 7
- Lord, Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin...Purify me with hyssop and wash me white as snow. -
- To trust in the promise of 1 John 1:9 –
- 1 John 1:9
- ...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

When we get sick, what is the first thing that we do? Deny it!

- Or we blame it something else – “oh it's just allergies”
 - Every time I get sick and I tell my wife...she says “It's just allergies”
 - My leg could be cut off and she would say “eh...it's just allergies”
- Or we diminish it – “it's no big deal...it's just a little cold.”
 - And then we decide go into the office and a week later everyone is out sick and we're like “hmm...that's strange.”
 - Or we drop our sick kids off in the nursery and we're like “well they were up all night with a 102 fever last, but I think they're alright now...”
 - That'll preach.
 - We're like “yeah I think they're okay” as the snot is flooding out of their nose.
 - And then the following Sunday half the church is missing because the kids in the nursery got sick and then they went home and got their parents sick and then everybody is sick!

We laugh about it, but isn't this the same exact thing we do when it comes to sin?

- Sometimes we just outrightly deny that we have a problem at all...
 - We're like, "Lust? Not a problem for me. I've got software on my devices. My heart is guarded, bro"
 - And then two minutes later we're staring at a woman wearing yoga pants walking past the coffee shop.
- Or we might say "Who Me? Greedy? No. I'm not a greedy person. I'm so content. I don't need anything"
 - And then your friend gets a Tesla and all you can think about is how you can get the next model up from them. "They have the model X, well I'm going to get the model Y!" (that's not a model btw...model Y??? I MUST HAVE)
- Look at what the Apostle John says about this way of thinking:
 - **1 John 1: 8, 10**
If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.
- Maybe we don't deny our sin outright, we just kinda diminish it...we say things like:
 - "Looking at a beautiful woman on the street isn't the same as looking at porn."
 - "Wanting a new car is way less 'greedy' then cheating on my taxes."
- At worst, we blindly tolerate sin and at best, cover up our sin as "not that big of a deal."

But Paul is saying explicitly in our passage that it is a big deal.

- Sexual sin, impurity, greed, idolatry, is a big deal.
- It's a big deal for your life.
- It's a big deal in the Church.
- It's a big deal to God.

Look at what Paul says about the idol of greed in His letter to his protoge Timothy:

- **1 Timothy 6:9-10**
⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

And look at what Jesus says about the idol sexual immorality:

- **Matthew 5:27**

...everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

Scripture reveals that ultimately, the illness of idolatry is terminal.

- James shows us the prognosis of our idolatry
- **James 1:14-15**
Temptation comes from our own desires (idols), which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.
- Even our best and most valiant efforts to fight the infection of idolatry will fail and we will ultimately succumb to its effects.

And if you don't know Jesus today, this prognosis is bad news. There's no way to sugar-coat it or soften it.

- At the end of our passage this morning, Paul says this:
- **Ephesians 5:5**
You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God.
- Paul is being very direct about the fact that if you are not in Christ—if Jesus is not the Lord and Savior of your life—then your soul is destined for the grave.

A life of idolatry will always lead to an eternity of separation—and the exclusion from the Kingdom of God and of Christ.

- A life of sexual immorality (which is the idolatry of sexuality) will ultimately destroy your intimacy with God.
- A life of greed (which is the idolatry of more) will ultimately lead you to become spiritually bankrupt.

The idols of this life might promise us immediate satisfaction, but they will fail to deliver anything but death on the other side of eternity.

But, for the one who believes upon Jesus, there is good news: although you might be infected and afflicted by sin and idolatry (as all of us are), your illness does not have to equal a death sentence.

- Because 2000 years ago, someone else took a death sentence on your behalf.
- The Bible says in 2 Corinthians that
- **2 Corinthians 5:21**
Jesus became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God.
- Think about what that means for a second.

The Infection of Idolatry

- Jesus, the only one who was truly immune to sin, sacrificed himself so that we might receive the antidote to sin.
- Jesus became our sickness, Jesus became our illness, Jesus became our infirmity, so that you and I might possess the cure, so that our sick and weary souls could be healed once and for all.
- And this antidote to idolatry is called “grace”.
 - Earlier in Ephesians Paul says that:
 - **Ephesians 2:4**
⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)

Grace is the cure for the illness of idolatry.

- Grace produces in us humility which are the antibodies to idolatry.
- To the one suffering from the idol of pride – grace restores your humility.
- To the one suffering from the idol of greed – grace restores your contentment in God.
- To the one suffering from the idol of sexuality – grace restores the purity of your heart.
- To the one suffering from the idol of envy – grace restores the kindness of your disposition.
- To the one suffering from the idol of anger – grace restores the tenderness of your temperament.
- To the one suffering from the idol of self-righteousness – grace restores the sufficiency of the finished work of Jesus.
- To the one suffering from the idol of approval – grace restores the voice of God’s pleasure to your ears.
- To the one suffering from the idol of control – grace restores the truth of God’s sovereignty to your mind.
- To the one suffering from the idol of bitterness – grace restores the sweet taste of God’s love to your lips.

The really good news today—the best news—is that there is more than enough grace to go around.

- There is a never-ending over-abundant dosage of grace because of what Jesus did on the Cross.
- **Romans 5:20-21**
²⁰ But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- The power of grace upon the soul of the Christian never fades or dwindles
- The potency of the blood of Jesus never wanes or wavers.

This medicine of grace is offered free of charge to any who are willing to receive it.

- We don’t have to pay for it, we don’t have to earn it.
- It is freely given.

The Infection of Idolatry

- But just like with any medicine, we can refuse treatment. We can refuse the supernatural remedy for our spiritual sickness.

Maybe that's you today...

- Maybe you've been struggling with sexual sin or greed your whole life.
- You've tried everything you know of to get rid of it...
- And no matter what it just keeps coming back. Over and over and over again.
- Each time wreaking havoc in your life and your relationships.
- Each time leaving you feeling more and more defeated.
- I'm want to tell you today that you actually don't have a sexual immorality problem, or a greed problem, or an impurity problem.

What you really have is an idol problem.

The 'coronavirus' gets its name because under the microscope, it bears the resemblance of a crown.

- There's certainly some irony there...

Because what is an idol if not a crown virus?

- An invader hellbent on ascending to the throne of your soul.
 - An impostor king who will lie, cheat, and steal it's way into obtaining control of your attention, your affections, your desires, your motivations,
- And that throne belongs to Jesus.

Grace is the cure for idolatry, because grace by nature dethrones whatever is sitting on your heart.

- Theologian Thomas Chalmers said The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one – Thomas Chalmers, The expulsive power of a New Affection
- When grace is apprehended by the Christian, the idols of the heart are apprehended, dethroned and expelled by the power of his love.
- The extent and the extravagance of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross reveals that He and He alone is the only one with enough love, enough mercy, and enough authority to govern the vastness and complexity of our being.
- He alone is the only one strong enough to carry the weight of our soul.

Grace reveals to us that Jesus goes where no other idol will go, that He does what no other idol will do and that He IS what no other idol can be.

So today, let us look to grace...

- And as we do may we find the remedy for our spiritual sickness in the person and the finished work of Jesus.

PRAY

We have a time to respond to the Lord this morning.

- The carpets are at the front of the stage If you need to take a posture of surrender before Jesus today
- The prayer team is to the right and the left if you need someone to point you to Jesus today
- If you are a Christian and you need a prescription of Grace this morning, look no further than the front of the stage.
 - The bread and the cup are a solemn reminder of the remedy of Jesus' blood and His sacrifice upon the cross.

If you are not a Christian...

- If you haven't accepted Jesus as the Lord and savior of your life, the truth is that you will always be controlled by idols until the day that you die.
- You will always be governed by things that were never meant to hold authority over the fullness of your being.
- And at one point another, they will fail you.
 - Maybe not today, or tomorrow, but at some point, they will let you down.
- But I promise that Jesus will never fail you.
 - His love for you will never fail.
 - His forgiveness will never run out.
 - His kindness will never run dry.
 - He will never leave you nor will he forsake you.
- The honest truth is that none of us in this room are guaranteed tomorrow. This life is here one moment and gone the next.
 - The bible declares with authority and triumph that "today is the day of salvation"
 - Today is the day to put your faith in Jesus, and receive everlasting life.

Let's respond to Jesus now.