

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: On Aug. 23, 1973, **Jan Erik Olsson**, who was on parole from prison, walked into Kreditbanken in Stockholm, Sweden, and attempted to hold up the bank. But the police showed up and Olsson took four people as hostages, including a woman named Kristin Enmark, who despite his threats to kill her, decided she felt safer with the bad guy than the police. There was a stand-off that ultimately lasted six days. At one point, Olsson, the robber, called Sweden's Prime Minister and said he would kill the hostages. Then he put Kristin Enmark, the hostage, on the phone to the Prime Minister and she said, *"I am very disappointed in you... I think you are sitting here playing with our lives."* In the end, some of the hostages actually resisted rescue attempts and, later, refused to testify against their captor, and even raised money for his defense. Now, when hostages identify more with their captors than their rescuers, they call it the **Stockholm syndrome**.
- B. It is amazing that people can get so psychologically turned around that they can no longer tell who the good guys and who the bad guys are! Our Bible passage today warns about that happening to Christians—forgetting whose side we're on. It is important that I remind you again what we've learned in Ephesians—that Christians are not just people who believe in God and try to be moral. Listen again to **Eph 4:22-24...** In the verses after that the Bible has taught us specifically what we've left behind and what we have now put on as Christians. Last week we came to a summary statement in **5:1-2...**
- C. Today, in Eph 5:3-7, the Lord Jesus warns us not to get tangled in the soul-killing sins from which he has rescued us. Vv.3-4...

I. WE CHRISTIANS HAVE MORAL BOUNDARIES WE MUST NOT EVEN THINK OF CROSSING (5:3-4)

- A. The three categories of sin listed here—"sexual immorality, any kind of impurity, and greed"—cover vast acres of dark territory. "Sexual immorality" refers to any sexual relationship outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. Illus.: Once a young couple came to see me about getting married. When I asked about their families, the young woman told me that she didn't really have a father; she had two moms. Then she asked if I thought that was a sin. I said, *"Yes, the Bible says that is a sin, but it is also a sin that you two are living together."* **Any sexual relationship outside of the marriage of a man and a woman is out of bounds for Christians.**

- Doesn't matter if you're committed to one another.
- Doesn't matter if you think your marriage was a mistake.
- Doesn't matter if you love one another.
- Doesn't matter if you're *planning* to get married.
- And don't think that you can do what you want now, and then just ask God for forgiveness later. When you resist God like this, you lose the capacity to actually repent of your sin.

The next phrase, "any kind of impurity," speaks of things that pollute your mind and heart, even if there is no one else involved. There are so many things which soil our souls, which stain and stink—things wearing the greasepaint of comedy or drama, or the scholarly robes of academic inquiry. Our TVs and computers sometimes waggle their fingers to our curiosity and sometimes ambush us when impurity is the last thing on our minds. But the most obvious 'kind of impurity' hurting the church is pornography which fouls our souls and minds and memories with the moral sludge. In a moment, I'll give you some counsel that I think might help.

"Greed" goes along with the first two because all three of these spheres of sin are about grabbing for what we want, no matter what. Greed with its green-eyed envy and drooling desire knows no distinction between *want* and *need*. Greed shoves others out of the way with sharp elbows. Greed defines life by what you have... or what you *want* to have. Greed wastes all it touches. Greed cannot be content, not even when it gets what it wants. Greed whimpers and tugs at our sleeves, jumps up and down and nags at our brains, *"Please, please, please!!!"*

All three of these bundled sins drive us deep into satisfying our senses. Look again at **Eph. 4:17-19...** Thanks to Jesus, we've escaped the futile thinking, the lifelessness and the ignorance of hard hearts. Thanks to Jesus we've been made alive in our hearts, drawn up into the soul-tingling life of God's love, so that we don't have to dive deeper and deeper into sex and impurity and greed just to feel something. We *cannot* go back!

- B. What's more, these sins have their own lingo, their own trash talk. **V.4...** *foolish talk* means *morally moronic* talk, not playful goofiness. Jesus said, "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" [Matt 12:34]. Such people think their talk only offends the prudish, but in fact, it is an affront to the *pure*.
- C. Such behavior and talk is not our style; thanks to Jesus, we're to high-born for such sleaze. Do you see the parallel phrases at the ends of vv. 3 and 4: "*because these are improper for God's holy people*" and "*which are out of place.*" In **1 Cor. 6:9:10** Paul wrote the church in the very immoral city of Corinth listing all kinds of sinful people who will not "inherit the kingdom of God." Then **v.11**: "*And that is what some of you were. 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.*" Here we are now—clean-hearted, set apart for God, declared righteous all through Jesus Christ and by the miracle working in our hearts of the Holy Spirit. We're clean within, dressed in white, having all our sins wiped from our record. So, for crying out loud, stay out of the mud!
- D. Now let me give some counsel to all of us who struggle with what we used to call 'besetting sins'— those sins which we just can't seem to shake, and are almost certainly in one of these three categories we've talked about:

- **God always meets repentance with forgiveness and grace.** We can always come back to him if we wish to, if we repent and lay hold again of Christ our Savior
- **God disciplines those he loves.** He is more determined than we are to see you free of this sin, so he will bring 'fatherly pressure' upon us, if we do not stop.
- **Never stop fighting back.** Never roll over and give up. There is too much at stake.
- **Part of the powerful grip of this sin lies in the secret you keep.** Find someone to talk to; to confess to.
- **Put guards in place for when you are weary or put upon.** This is when we're most vulnerable, so make a plan.
- And then this text gives us a surprisingly helpful command in **v.4 – give thanks all the time.**

All the sins Paul has listed—sexual immorality, impurity, greed, and all the foul talk that springs from such hearts—are about lusting for what one wants but can't have—or shouldn't have. That grasping behavior and talk is fed by lust and dissatisfaction. Thus, the antidote is thankfulness to God. Thanksgiving for spouse God has given us, or for our singleness. Thanksgiving for all that God has made pure in our lives—for all that is *noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable*—and for all the things that God has entrusted to us—all the reasons we have *not* to be greedy, but rather, grateful. Thanksgiving is medicine for our hearts, and it is our soul's antibody against the moral filth around us.

II. BEWARE! THESE SINS ARE DECEPTIVELY DANGEROUS (5:5-6)

- A. Look at **v.5...** The three baskets of sin in v.3 now are used to describe people. An *immoral* person. And *impure* person. A *greedy* person. Those sins have a way of becoming a way of life. To God, these people are not teachers or salesmen or students. They *are* their sins. That's one of the things that happens with these soul-deadening habits. **Illus.:** J. R. R. Tolkien pictured this effect for us in his character **Gollum**. You true-blue Lord-of-the-Ringsers know that originally this character was a Hobbit named Smeagol, but his obsession with possessing the Ring deformed him into Gollum, a name he got after his habit of making "a horrible swallowing noise in this throat." According to my literary authorities (Wikipedia), "*Sméagol still vaguely remembered things like friendship and love, while Gollum was a*

slave to the Ring who knew only treachery and violence.... Aragorn states "his malice gives him a strength hardly to be imagined." That is what happens to people tangled in sexual immorality, impurities and greed. Their names might as well be changed because they have become what they live for. Their greatest strength becomes their capacity to sin!

- B. There's a surprise there in v.5 when Paul interjects, "such a man is an idolater." That changes the nature of those sins, doesn't it? Remember how in **Ps. 51**, after David's sexual immorality, he said to God, *"Against you, you only, have I sinned."* That's because these sins are idolatry, striking at God himself. God said, *"You shall have no other gods before me."* In God's kingdom, idolatry is a capital offense, because it steals honor and obedience due only to the Lord. Obviously, you don't have to bow to a little stone statue to be considered an idolater. These are people who bend their love and aim their life toward immorality, toward impurity or toward greed.
- C. Not only are these kinds of sin a threat themselves, but they are also easy to lie about—easy to portray as being o.k. **V.6** warns, *"Let no one deceive you with empty words."* There are whole phrasebooks of "empty words" seeking to spin these sins. Here are some:
- Living together makes a lot of sense.
 - What happens in the privacy of the bedroom is nobody's business
 - What could possibly be wrong if two people really love each other?
 - We're two consenting adults.
 - Let's go party and have some laughs!
 - It was just physical attraction, nothing more.
 - I've worked hard. I ought to be able to treat myself to some toys.
 - I love making money!
- D. Those ways of life forfeit God's blessings now and forever, and incur God's wrath. **V.5** says, *'For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.'* That means no abundant life here and no heaven tomorrow. None of God's riches for those lustful, greedy hearts. **Having lived in hot pursuit of all they could find to satisfy their senses, they end up utter paupers in body and soul.** **V.6** says, *"for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."* These patterns of life infuriate our holy God because they demean what he has made pure, they sabotage the covenant relationships required by love, they grab and grab what others have, destroying themselves, other people and the creation in the process.

Does this mean that a Christian who falls into these sins will lose their hope of heaven? No. The Bible promises, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* But you know how addictive these sins can be. You know how they nag and badger us, how they want more and more of our time and energy. These are the very reason we needed Jesus to save us, to free us from the bondage of sins like these. But be careful! As **John Stott** writes, *"...if we should fall into a life of greedy immorality, we would be supplying clear evidence that we are after all idolaters, not worshipers of God, disobedient people instead of obedient, and so the heirs not of heaven but of hell. The apostle gives us a solemn warning; we shall be wise to heed it."*

III. SO DO NOT BE PARTNERS WITH THE PEOPLE WHO ACT AND SPEAK IN THESE IMMORAL WAYS (5:7)

Illus.: Remember Kristen Enmark, the 23-year-old hostage who exemplified the Stockholm Syndrome, and became the defender of her captor? Many years later she explained, *"It's some kind of a context you get into when all your values, the morals you have change in some way."* Don't let that happen!

- A. People involved in these lifestyles want you to join them. But stay clear. Don't invest with them. Don't shop with them. Don't party with them. Don't let them entertain you. Don't sleep with them. Don't even *listen* to them, because *"among you there must not even be a hint of"* these things.
- B. They will draw you, not only into these unspeakable sins, but also into idolatry, the grossest offense against God. They will deceive you with their "empty words" and, if it were possible, drag you with them away from the very inheritance Christ died to secure for you.

- C. **Wilbur Chapman** said: *"It's not the ship in the water but the water in the ship that sinks it. So it's not the Christian in the world but the world in the Christian that constitutes the danger."* So BE ON YOUR GUARD!