

Sermon Title: "Under the Influence" Series: Ephesians: "Becoming What We Believe"

Pastor Dave Sattler June 21, 2015 Text: Ephesians 5:1-20 Sources: NIV Life Application Bible;

Commentaries: Klyne Snodgrass & F.F. Bruce; "Bishop Ambrose" Regent History Paper 2010 for Sarah Williams; Dr John A Beck.

Review & Introduction:

- Good morning everyone. I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- Continuing our series in Ephesians, "Becoming What We Believe."
- **<Slide>** Paul's writing to a group of church people on the west coast of modern-day Turkey in a bustling, cosmopolitan city on the Aegean Sea mid-way between Jerusalem & Rome -- in its day, likely the 2nd largest city in the Empire.
- History books report, one emperor established a 'College of Messengers' in Ephesus training people to courier plans & messages and spread Roman propaganda throughout the ancient world.
- One can see why Paul devoted 3 years of missionary work here.
- People flooded into town from around the Mediterranean to pay homage to Artemis, goddess of fertility. It was believed those who came to worship at her massive, marble temple would, in return, be promised abundance -- financially, sexually, agriculturally, & otherwise.
- This boosted the Ephesian economy as worshipers would purchase votive offerings from local artisans to sacrifice.
- As the Christian Church grew in **influence** however, less people worshiped Artemis.
- Vendors consequently began to suffer financially and this was the cause of strife in the city.
- And Christians were blamed for it.
- Pressured, Paul urged them ... to retain unity in the face of persecution, to reject the much-sought-after gods of their city, and to remain true to their belief in Jesus.
- **<Series Slide>** What we believe = vital.
- Even if we're convinced a lie is true, we can begin to play the part.
- Reality is: all of us eventually become what we truly believe.
- In his letter, Paul reminds his precious brothers & sisters in Christ of what he'd previously taught in person: grace, faith, adoption, God's 'grand rescue plan': what to believe. Now Ch 5 opens with this great line, V1: "Follow God's example ... [be imitators], as dearly loved children."
- **<Slide>** ILL - Like any young lad, I loved to imitate people.
 - Especially influential heroes. And loved ones.
 - In the bathroom mirror, with my fake shaving kit, I pretended to be my dad.
 - On the street out front of our house, with my hockey stick in hand, I was Darryl Sittler.
 - [Friends even called me 'Sittler' because of my obsession with hockey and its close sound to my real last name.]
 - Even as a not-so-young youth pastor, returning from an extended road trip with bleached blonde hair and talking weirdly, my daughter once commented, Q: "Dad, you're just trying to be cool like Jonny Morrison [a kid in the youth group]!" She wasn't far off.
- ILL - Story's told of a seasoned African-American preacher ...
 - Addressing his congregation in the deep south, Q: "Be who you is!" He shouted.
 - "If you is who you ain't, you ain't who you is." "Be who you is."
- **<Slide>** What we believe, or more accurately, **who we believe we are** determines how we act.
- Identity powerfully shapes values and behaviour.
- APP - Who are you? I know identity is something many struggle with.
 - Perhaps your early family life was very unstable, you've been left your whole life wondering.
 - Or maybe, a disappointment or set-back so severe has triggered a giant 'identity-crisis' that's left you questioning, "What's my worth? Where do I belong? Who am I?"
- Something I really love about the Christian Story is how it radically **re-defines our identity**.
- In Christ, we are God's "dearly loved children." And this compels us to imitate our Heavenly Father.
- Paul is saying, Q: 'Children of God, this is who you are. Now go live like it. Be who you is.' And Eph 5 describes God's 'grand renovation plan': how to become, how to live as "children of light."
- <READ Ephesians 5:1-20, p 949> Prayer: "God, control me by Your Spirit. Move me outta the way."

Sermon Outline:

1. <Slide> Living as God's Holy People (5:2-7)

- V2 highlights Christ's self-sacrificing love and displays it as the prototype for how we are to live.
- The "But" at the start of V3 indicates a shift ... from practices Christians should adopt to now what ought to be avoided. And V3-7 contain quite a list of self-indulgent sins.
- It's as if Paul were 'video-monitoring' our lives or 'hacking our computers' as he's right on about all the things that still trip us up 2000 years later: sexual sin, greed, & foolish-talk.
- ILL - Our society idolizes sex as it did in the 1st Century Greco-Roman world.
 - People back then were encouraged to have various sexual outlets.
 - Not far off today. Just listen to the 'after-hours' chats or hallway conversations at the office or at school after a big weekend. Or watch, pretty much any TV series or movie ...
 - Sex outside of a marriage is celebrated -- even viewed as a 'badge of 'righteous rebellion,' 'coming of age,' or a natural outcome of human attraction.
- **Sexual sin** has such a draw because it is the one place where pride, power, & pleasure are concentrated. When sin has really gotten hold of us, sexual immorality is often the result.
- In the moment, its appeal is strong. But its negative effects are far-reaching.
- And I have to say loud & clear: lax sexual standards are improper for God's holy people.
- Whether in the 1st or 21st Century, sexual sin does not mesh with life in Christ.
- Because we belong to God, what we do with our bodies sexually matters greatly. It's a big deal.
- APP - Treading sensitively, but if you consider yourself a Christ-follower ...
 - And today you're standing on or in a 'precipice' ...
 - Contemplating or already in an affair, thinking incessantly about sex with a fantasy or real person not your spouse, or even struggling with or acting on sexual identity or attraction outside the boundaries of Christian values, I encourage you to stop and not go forward.
 - Don't hide. Ask for help. Talk about it to someone. Soon.
- <Slide> We live in a culture that encourages all forms of **greed**.
- ILL - Capitalism, materialism, and the pursuit of the 'Canadian Dream' are seen as ...
 - Unquestioned rites in the West no matter their effect on the other people or the planet.
 - Lust for more possessions and more pleasure are goals most of us know all too well.
 - They're imbedded from a young age. God help us. Greed bombards us from every angle.
 - We are driven. To get ... more money in our bank account, more 'expert' letters after our name in our email signature, more 'popular' 'likes' on Facebook, more events in our calendar.
- As a result the gap between basic need and our outlandish greed is cloudy for us.
- Most Christians sadly would not acknowledge greed as sin; or they'd dismiss it as 'not their issue.'
- Yet, in many ways, this desire for "more" is the core sin.
- As one commentator puts it,
 - Q: Greed "takes the place of God, for it, rather than he, determines life. - Snodgrass, p 269.
- <Slide> **Words** spoken 'foolishly' are the source of much destruction. They betray, crush, and create unsafe atmospheres in which it becomes difficult for healthy relationships to form.
- ILL - Using words to try and prove myself ... is a big sin of mine ...
 - 'Word-dropping' to present like an expert, 'verbal-diarrhea-ing' so I don't have to listen, 'potty-mouthing' to come across 'seasoned in the ways of the world.'
 - Or to sound 'cool,' slipping in a double-entendre or slightly off-colour humour.
- But this kind of "coarse joking" and "obscenity" is totally "out of place" (4). It degrades others, undermines values; and, most tragically, it does not reflect God.
- Rather, "thanksgiving" is to be the mark of a believer.
- ILL - Negativity, I find, consumes way too much of my thoughts and words.
 - The energy I spend 'bad-mouthing' others or fixating on things I don't have is massive.
 - But gratitude, draws attention to God's grace and God's desires over my own.
 - Thanksgiving puts the focus not on what I don't have and wish I had ...

- But rather on what I do have and ought to be grateful for.
- Try it! It's hard to sin with words when you're regularly giving thanks.
- Besides, people who are grateful are way more enjoyable to be around!
- I even find myself better to be around when I'm being thankful!

2. <Slide> Living as Children of Light (5:8-14)

- V8: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."
- Vintage Paul, this radical statement effectively sums up his idea of conversion.
- When we come to God, this sweet 'from-darkness-into-light' transformation takes place.
- Scholars call it Paul's "spheres of influence" theology:
 - Q: "People take on the character of the sphere in which they live. We are not light in ourselves, we are only light 'in the Lord.' So when we live 'in Christ' Who is the Light, we too are light!" - Snodgrass, p 271. Like Cf. 2 Cor 5:17 says, Q: "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come!" This is the beautiful testimony of many of my Coffee Time friends, Q: "I'm not the person I used to be anymore!"
- Light's function is to expose, illuminate, & grow. It flushes out impurity. Like a spot on a beautiful art-piece, light accentuates craftsmanship and goodness. And, sunlight makes things bloom.
- ILL - Recently we replaced 4 long-time, burnt-out light bulbs above our bathroom mirror.
 - Imagine the horror -- I mean, excitement -- when I turned them on for the first time.
 - I checked out my hair, flexed my muscles ... felt 'all lit up' like a rock star!
 - Until I looked more closely ... and the light revealed blemishes on my face and colours in my beard I'd not seen before!
- APP - Many of you know firsthand how living in secret shame & darkness can mess with you.
 - Though light feels scary at times, it is truly good for us.
 - While darkness and isolation are the 'friends' of hidden sin ...
 - The 'friends' of transformation are authenticity and disclosure. Satan loses power over us ... when hidden sin is brought out into the light, exposed, and is no longer 'our little secret.'
- We mustn't allow ourselves to be defined by darkness anymore.
- As God's children, our actions get to reflect our faith; God's light in us can come shining out in ways that bless others deeply ... and encourage us in the process.

3. <Slide> Living Wisely (5:15-20)

- V15-16: "Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." How we live -- and play, I might add -- matters.
- There ought to be a carefulness -- a certain urgency to the way we live our lives. This flies in the face of our culture that preaches a 'live hard. play hard' 'gospel' and celebrates 'eating, drinking, & making merry' because 'nothing truly matters.' Everything is 'random' anyway. 'So, drink up!'
- Knowing the draw of alcohol, Paul uses the intoxication metaphor to hammer home perhaps his biggest point here: put your life **under the influence** of the Holy Spirit. This is Paul's 'antidote.'
- "Be filled with the Spirit" (18). If being "drunk on wine ... leads to debauchery" or 'uncontrolled foolish behaviour,' being filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit leads to wise behaviour.
- An outflow of life under the influence of the Spirit is "always giving thanks" (20) -- there again, the importance of gratitude. Singing and making "music from your heart to the Lord" (19).
- <Slide> ILL - Our Alliance school in Calgary recently took the name: Ambrose University.
 - 4th Century Bishop of Milan, he was the first champion of congregational singing.
 - Ambrose loved to gather people to sing. "Worship rose to God in unison enhancing a strong sense of community." And, for many who could not read or write, Ambrose's "psalms, hymns, & spiritual songs" (19) etched God's truth in their hearts.
 - St Augustine even testified, Q: "How I wept during those songs! The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled into my heart."
- Music is a big part of worship. Helps put us under God's influence.

Application:

1. <Slide> A missional living challenge to ... **Leave Your Light On!**

- ILL - We know Christians in Paul's day had difficulty earning a living.
 - Many jobs involved belonging to a union which paid dues to local pagan deities.
 - And early believers felt this to be a compromise of their values.
- I doubt Paul would say, Q: "Don't associate at all with non-Christians." Instead, we have to ask ourselves, are we more likely to influence the world or is the world more likely to be influencing us?
- Perhaps in the church's efforts to relate to culture these past 20 or 30 years, its values have been watered down. If we're honest, today most Christians' sexual practices, attitudes toward materialism, and words look and sound a lot like everyone else around us. And, our light goes out.
- BQ: How can we be in the world but not of the world? That's the \$1,000,000 dollar question.
- It's easier to 'run for the hills' and be completely out OR, to cave in and fully immerse ourselves in it.
- Intensity rises and we are being pressed to sacrifice to, among others, the gods of sexual sin, greed, & foolish-talk. It's tough. From an early age we are taught to fit in. And subtly we end up thinking, talking, acting like our friends in ways that actually go against our values. But this is not God's way.
- APP - AQ: So, how do we "leave the light on" in our day?
 - Not by pronouncing 'hell-fire' and judgment on the world. But, for example ...
 - What would it mean to face up to pornography? And even to speak up against it in the 'nudge-nudge-wink-wink' conversations with co-workers or friends in the cafeteria?
 - Or, what would it be like to give more salary to charity this year? Knowing you'd need to give up that vehicle upgrade, the exotic vacation, and not put as much away for retirement?
 - And, what would it be like to cut the 'business-talk'? To stop being the busy 'expert' & listen ... to your kids, your employee, that street person who always hits you up for cash.
- Our words & actions truly matter. Live different. As "children of light," let God's light shine through.
- Leave your light on!

2. <Slide> It was as unusual a statement then as it is now ... **Be Filled with the Spirit!**

- Always a strong response to teaching on the "filling of the Spirit": manipulation, abuse around the gift of tongues, and the spiritual elitism associated with idea, maybe shy us away.
- Aware of the dangers of emotionalism, we mustn't squelch -- especially we men -- the sheer passion and emotion in seeking the Spirit's filling.
- Q: "It is the will of God that each believer should be filled with the Holy Spirit ... thereby receiving power for holy living and effective service." - Article 7 of our Alliance Statement of Faith.
- The Spirit is to be the dominating influence for all Christians.
- And being filled is not a 'spectator sport.' God calls for active engagement on our part: to want to be filled. And to ask is not to seek some charismatic experience for the mere pleasure or show of it.
- No! The ask is to 'welcome' Jesus and His presence -- to open ourselves up to His continual transforming work -- and not our own -- so that Jesus empowers and shapes our lives, not us.
- Via deeper fillings of the Spirit, we become aligned more and more with God's will and work. And this spills over in **influence** on our thoughts, our attitudes, our words, even our sexuality.
- Truth is: We are nothing without the filling of the Spirit.
- As one writer says, Q: "We should not be so concerned about how much of the Holy Spirit we have, but how much of us the Holy Spirit has." - NIV Life App, p 2139. That part is our responsibility.
- BQ: Where in your life right now have you been holding back and want to receive a fresh filling of the Spirit?
 - Over your tongue, your words? Into your broken relationships?
 - On your health -- mental, emotional, physical?
 - Over your sexuality that's feeling a mess right now? Filling for freedom from that addiction that continues to paralyze you? Over your business or career that's driving you?
- Jesus beckons His followers, 'Come to me & I will fill you.' And the Spirit loves to respond to humble surrender & cooperation and fill us with the power & presence of Jesus. This is life-giving. Amen.