

“Purifying Your Relationships” Ephesians 5:3-7

Introduction:

1. Our theme for a number of weeks has been “Building Better Relationships”. Any building project requires work, plans, sufficient resources, and a certain amount of willingness to put up with the mess of construction. You could buy a vacant lot for the purpose of building a new home, but until you actually disturb the placid site, it is an unfit place to live. In the same way, God calls us to upset our lives, so that we may have better relationships with him and other people.

2. Now if we truly want better relationships, we must also follow God’s plans. This can make us feel rather unpleasant as we disrupt our natural ways to put God’s ways into practice. As any contractor can tell you, there is a time for bulldozers and front end loaders. When all you can see is a pile of uprooted trees and boulders pushed here and there, it may not appear like anything useful is being accomplished. You might even ask, “Does the contractor know what he is doing? Those trees stood for over a hundred years. Now look at this mess!” But then you recall that the contractor is working according to a plan, and you decide to wait and see what he is up to. Perhaps there are some here who need to bring in God’s bulldozers into their way of life to clean up the site so that they can build for the glory of God and their own good. So let’s start them up and see what God has in mind for clearing up our lives.

Exposition:

I. We can purify our relationships by having strong Biblical convictions.

A. God calls us to stand on the firm ground of his truth, instead of drifting on the restless sea of human opinion — “For of this you can be sure...”

1. True Christianity keeps a clear view of our eternal inheritance. Our confident expectation of glory is a source of good motives to turn from sin and to live for the glory of God.

R.Q.: Doesn’t it make sense that if you want to live forever with the Holy God that you would rid your life of those practices that deeply offend him and that are contrary to all that you expect to experience forever?

2. True Christianity also holds firmly to the concepts of God’s holiness, justice and wrath. The truth of what God is and how he acts develops motives to please him. In this text it is the motive of the **fear of God**.

Illustration: Did you see in the newspaper about the high school boy in NJ? He is a 500+ pound lineman. Can you imagine lining up against him? How much more frightening should it be to “line up” against the living God?

Comment: There is nothing wrong or unspiritual about negative motives. It is okay to want to avoid the pain that comes from touching a hot stove; it is **very wise** to want to avoid the eternal pain of God’s wrath. Heb 12:25-29

B. Since we have received God’s truth, we must act against deception — “Let no one deceive you with empty words...”

1. Let us not be naïve. Whenever people sit down to talk at the religious table in life, one of the participants is always Mr. Deception.

2. Mr. Deception had a method he uses—words. Mr. Deception is a communicator. But notice how the Spirit of God characterizes his words—“empty words”. How

can you evaluate whether someone’s words are empty? First, let us consider four kinds of communicators, because in our day we are much more concerned with presentation than with content. The truth or value of a position is irrelevant in our society. What matters to it is how well the position is presented, because then people buy it.

Diagram:

Effective communicator/correct content	Ineffective communicator/correct content
Effective communicator/incorrect content	Ineffective communicator/incorrect content

Answer: You must evaluate someone’s words, not by the package they come in, but by the absolute standard of God’s Word.

Point: In order to have excellent relationships with God and other people, we must purify our minds by the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

II. We can purify our relationships by striving for maximum godliness.

A. The believer’s pursuit of godliness begins with an understanding of our position in Christ—“God’s holy people”.

1. We are to pursue holiness **because we are holy**. We ought to view one another and ourselves according to what we are in Christ. We are set apart for God.

2. Since we are God’s holy people, we must realize that there are many actions that are improper for us. In this context Paul calls attention to three: sexual immorality, any kind of impurity and greed. Let’s look at greed. This sin is endemic in American society. Who wants to be a millionaire? Apparently everybody does! However, greed is the worship of what is created instead of the Creator. It is very easy to be ruined by greed.

Illustration: The Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21). Are you rich toward God?

B. The believer’s pursuit of godliness involves maximum effort: “there must not be even a hint....”

1. The only way to make progress against sin is total war. We will never put sin to death if we only intend to wound it or if we are selective in our targets. We cannot pray, for example, “Lord, help us to limit our greed to a 50% involvement. We’re only going to build half the bigger barns that we originally intended to build!” Can you imagine an adulterous spouse saying to his or her marriage partner, “Honey, I realize I let this adultery thing get out of hand this past year, so next year I promise to reduce my adulterous affairs by 70%”? That is nonsense! **But do we treat the Holy God that way?** “Lord, I know that to get involved with sin is to get involved with spiritual adultery, but I just want to flirt and play around a little bit.”

2. We must take serious action against whatever forms sin appears in. Consider impurity. It is far too easy to fall into it, especially through wicked communication. But we must also see that practices like obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking are out of place for those who follow Jesus Christ.

Apply: Remove double-intended talk. Stay away from “Bible jokes” (turning a text of Scripture from its serious meaning to a cause for laughter).

III. We can purify our relationships by avoiding counterproductive confidants.

Comment: Here pastors are faced with a strong challenge. We have to counter two positions at the same time. A pastor can feel like he is part of a battle scene from *Braveheart* or *Gladiator*.

A. Christians must avoid isolationism.

1. Sadly, most Christians lose nearly all close personal contact with those who are not Christians within six months to two years of their conversion. This can happen for various reasons, such as loss of common interests (the Christian doesn’t want to live in sin any longer while the non-Christian does), a lack of time due to the Christian’s new interests, or poor teaching about separation.

2. Though we are not of the world, Christ has sent us into the world (Jn 17:11,14-18). **You are the light of the world** (Mt 5:14). You cannot be that light unless you are set up in a place where the world can see you!

Comment: Years ago Becky Pippert put it succinctly in her book title: *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*. Until the salt gets out of the saltshaker, it is just part of the decorations.

Illustration: A church is like a base camp for climbing a mountain. It’s a resource place, but it’s not the place for adventurers to spend all their time. God wants us involved in the spiritual adventure of finding people who are lost on the mountains of sin.

B. However, while we must maintain and cultivate friendships with people in the world, we must not let them be our counselors or confidants.

1. We must never become partners with the world in its sexual immorality, impurity and greed. To say this another way, we must never go to the world looking for “something to fulfill our needs”. To do so is to deny practically our position in Christ. You don’t need salt from the world; you are the salt of the earth. You don’t need light from the world; you are the light of the world.

2. When we go into the world, we must have a proper self-concept. We go in order to influence. We go on a mission (Mt 28:18-19). We do not seek them to join them. We seek them in order that they might turn from their sins and join us.

Apply: The only way to keep this attitude is to keep up your fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Rm 13:14; 1 Cor 6:15-17