



Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

*³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

Kentucky Republican Dan Johnson ended his life last week just two days after he was accused of impropriety with a 17 year old girl. I don't know if he was guilty or not. We may never know. This is not a commentary on suicide per se. That's a tragedy no matter the reason. In his suicide note that he left on facebook, Johnson claimed that he suffered with PTSD for sixteen years after helping people at the 9/11 disaster site. That may have been the ultimate cause. But what I want to talk about is his beliefs.

The last thing he wrote in his facebook post was this: GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE NO MATTER WHAT ! That seems like a decent message for someone who was about to take his own life, but there is much more to it than meets the eye. Johnson was not elected as a state representative until last year. Before that he was a pastor and evangelist. Now I am not just picking on a guy who was caught in a tragedy of taking his own life. You'll soon see why I am

focusing on him to start with. His church website does not have much of a doctrinal statement but here are the two main beliefs.

Because Christ already paid the ultimate (essential/FINAL) price and has satisfied the debt of eternal death for sin (offense) at Calvary, our ability to offend God has been eliminated. (John 1:29)

The whole world is saved (redeemed), but all are not aware. Jesus Is the Savior of all men, but has a special relationship with those who believe.

Can you see what he is ultimately promoting? This is nothing less than the heresy of universalism. You can call it Christian Universalism but it is still universalism. He said that the whole world is redeemed by Christ but they just don't know it. Now you can understand why the last thing he wrote in this life was "GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE NO MATTER WHAT!" he really meant it, but in the wrong way.

He also believed a lot of very wacky things. He referred to himself as a pope. He aligned himself with the New Apostolic Reformation that I preached against several weeks back. He claims to have healed countless people and even to have raised a woman from the dead.¹ But more than all of these things, what concerns me is the universalism. Now I find this incredibly strange that someone who claims to be an evangelical would so openly promote universalism. More than that, I am shocked that anyone would follow such a preacher or attend his church. Not only that, he was endorsed by folks in the Pentecostal movement. But what I really want to focus on and why it is relevant to this message is the belief that flows out of his universalism. Specifically, I am referring to the first belief on their website: "Because Christ already paid the ultimate (essential/FINAL) price and has satisfied the debt of eternal death for sin (offense) at Calvary, our ability to offend God has been eliminated."

So think this through with me. He is telling people that they are already saved but just don't know it. All they need to do is accept the fact that they are already redeemed. But he takes it a step further by saying that it is impossible to offend God in any way. Now if he is telling this to those who are genuinely saved—despite his false teaching—that would be bad enough but he is also telling this to hordes of people who are not saved.

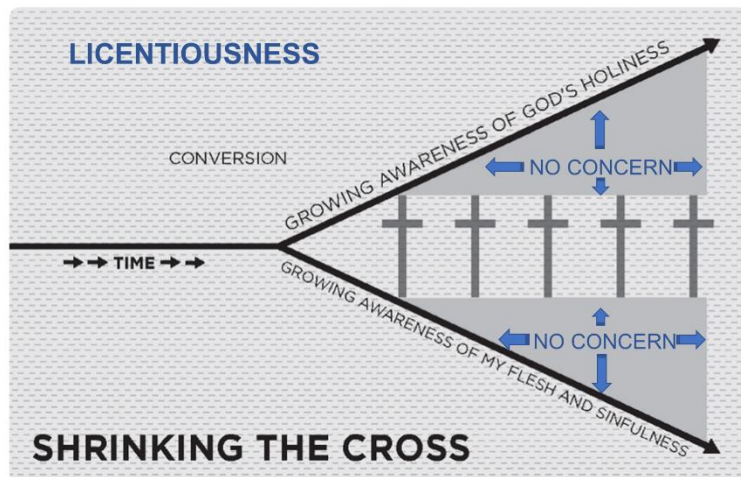
Let me explain how this relates to our passage. What we have in the first part of chapter five is the same thing we will get for the last three chapters—rules, dos and don'ts. You can't say I didn't give you fair warning. Many times I have told you how the book of Ephesians is laid out. More times than you may care to remember. What comes in the first three chapters? Doctrine...followed by? Application. Part of the challenge of preaching through this book has been not to allow the doctrinal sections to be dry and dusty with little to no relevance. Now the challenge for this second half is to make sure that the relevant parts, all of the application is firmly grounded in core doctrine. Otherwise, all you may see is a list of rules, do and don'ts.

And that's all we have for the rest of Ephesians—rules, prohibitions, right behavior, holiness codes, do's and don'ts. That's what we had in chapter four and that's what we'll see in chapter six. When we face such lists and instruction for right living, there are two basic errors that

Christians make. As you try to deal with what Scripture teaches on how to live rightly you tend to either fall into legalism or licentiousness. Now we know what legalism is and I'll say more about that in a bit. But what is licentiousness? It's a word we do not use in our everyday language. If you have heard the word you probably associate it with sexual immorality, and it certainly is. But at its core, licentiousness means someone who feels that they have a license to sin. The typical teaching is someone who is so convinced of God's grace and forgiveness that they don't have to worry about their ongoing sin. It is sometimes called cheap grace. Licentiousness would be an extreme form of cheap grace. If I am a Christian, it doesn't matter how I live because I am already forgiven. This was the problem that the Corinthian church struggled with. They embraced the grace of God to a point that they cheapened it. They believed that even sexual immorality would not affect their relationship with Christ.

This was the teaching promoted by Dan Johnson. His church was filled with bikers and rough around the edges types of people. Now there's certainly nothing wrong with this, is there? Most of us could do a better job at reaching out to those who tend to exist on the fringes of society; those who are deeply hurt and rejected. They need Jesus just as much as the upright businessman with a family of four needs Jesus. But based on their teaching that all are saved and no one can offend God, do you see the serious problems that would cause? The effect is that you gather a bunch of sinners who continue to almost rejoice in their sin. It is widely reported that half of their church building was essentially a biker bar. All of these people need to repent of their sin and turn to Christ and the preacher continually tells them that there is no need to do such a thing.

Now most of us will never go that far into licentiousness but like all things, there is a spectrum of beliefs and practices. You may not be on the extreme end of cheap grace but you might be somewhere on the spectrum or leaning in that direction.



You may recall this “shrinking the cross” illustration. Those who cheapen God's grace do so because they have no concern for God's holiness and no concern for their own sin.

Let me show you how might work using the passage we read, starting with verse three. *3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* When we read a

verse like this, we mentally work it through in our lives. OK, I'm not sexually immoral. I haven't had any affairs. I don't look at pornography. I'm doing pretty good. Those sexual sins are the so-called BIG ONES, right? Those are the biggies to avoid but then there's that pesky covetousness that Paul threw into the list. Do I covet? Well in verse five he said that coveters are also idolaters. In other words, if you want things that don't belong to you, you are covetous and you are an idolater.

Don't dismiss your coveting lightly. For example, lust is coveting. You may never engage in sexual immorality but you might still wish that you could. Lust is coveting because you want something you don't have. You know you can't have it, because that would be scandalous. It would tarnish your reputation and cause great harm to those around you. But you still want it. When you lust after a man or woman, you are coveting them in a sexual way.

But it goes deeper still. Remember that list of idols of the heart I shared last week? Several of you said that was a helpful list. Here it is again.

- The idol of approval (I want the approval of the people I'm talking to)
- The idol of control (Using gossip as a way to manipulate/ control others)
- The idol of reputation (I want to feel important, so I cut someone else down verbally)
- The idol of success (Someone is succeeding— and I'm not— so I gossip about him)
- The idol of security (Talking about others masks my own insecurity)
- The idol of pleasure (Someone else is enjoying life— and I'm not— so I attack her)
- The idol of knowledge (Talking about people is a way of showing I know more)
- The idol of recognition (Talking about others gets people to notice me)
- The idol of respect (That person disrespected me, so I'm going to disrespect him)²

If we are even remotely honest, we will admit that we all have some of these idols of the heart. And they manifest themselves in endless ways. If I yell at my children, that one act may represent several of these.

- The idol of approval—I want the other people at church to think I am a good parent.
- The idol of security—when my children disobey, it shows that I am a bad parent. I feel like a miserable failure.
- The idol of reputation—I don't want other Christians to think that I am not a good parent, that I can't control my children, so I raise my voice.
- The idol of control—I am the parent and they are children. I need to control their behavior at any cost.
- The idol of respect—my child disobeyed me, which is also disrespecting me. It makes me angry.
- The idol of pleasure—it is very inconvenient when my children disobey. It makes me work harder as a parent, so I yell at them.

Are you feeling guilty enough or should I continue? So all I did was yell at my child one time and this cascade of coveting and idolatry spills out of me. I don't have these things but I want them. I want them badly but I am probably not even aware of how badly I want them. I feel that I need them. I must have them. And that's just one small example. All of this happened and the day has barely gotten started. The rest of the day is going to be all downhill from here.

If all that were not bad enough, Paul upped the ante in verse five. ⁵ *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.* Ouch, am I right? I may have dodged the bullet of sexual immorality that Paul aimed at my head but coveting and idolatry riddle my body like a

Holy Spirit machine gun. And since I am a coveter and an idolater, I have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

And then the final nail in the coffin is driven into us in verse six. *⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* This last phrase is meant to remind us of what Paul wrote in chapter two. *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.* Is the wrath of God upon me and am I dead in my trespasses and sins because I am a coveter and an idolater? Now some will say that this passage is talking about habitual sin, not occasional sin? I don't know about you, but if I am honest, I habitually struggle with many idols of the heart. To some degree, they are woven into my everyday life.

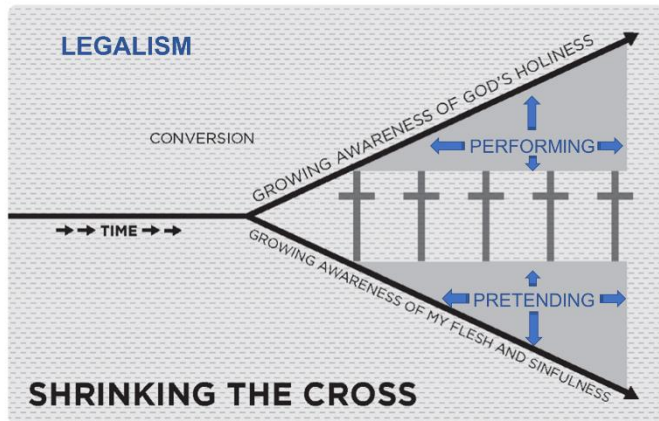
If that is not convicting enough, not only are we supposed to avoid all of these sins but we are supposed to have the positive righteousness of verses 1-2. *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* I am supposed to imitate God and love others with the sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated to us by dying on the cross. I need to avoid all of the bad things and fill my life with these good things. Can you see why some take the path of least resistance and land in licentiousness? I don't want to be condemned or feel guilty all the time so I will apply God's grace and it will cover all that I do. As Dan Johnson believed, I can't possibly offend God by what I do so it doesn't matter what I do.

Or as I said at the start of this message, if we don't fall on the spectrum of licentiousness, we land somewhere in the realm of legalism. Try harder. Do better and maybe, just maybe, things will get better and God will accept me. Then we do certain things to help us to stay accountable. One of the most popular has been the list developed by Chuck Swindoll.

1. Have you been with a woman anywhere this past week that might be seen as compromising?
2. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?
4. Have you spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer?
5. Have you given priority time to your family?
6. Have you fulfilled the mandates of your calling?
7. Have you just lied to me?³

Now is there anything wrong with a list like this? It depends on how it is used. The elders wanted to let you know that we hired Ray Olson to work with our church as a discipleship consultant. We feel this will be a help to our church until we hire a second staff person who will oversee discipleship, and even after that. I was on a video conference call with Ray, our discipleship huddle and a pastor from the Milwaukee area who is doing great work in the area of discipleship. He made a fascinating comment. He believes that lists like this one are straight from the devil. He believes that because he has seen it bring about negative shame and guilt, especially in men, because they are the ones who usually use a list like this one.

His opinion may be a little strong, but I see the wisdom in it. The problem is that there is all law and no gospel in a list like this. Most guys struggle in these areas and it's really easy to get to question number seven and still lie. Have you lied to me? If I am really struggling, how do you think I will be tempted to answer that question? I will be tempted to lie and tell you everything is just fine. It looks like a list that will bring about increased honesty and transparency but it can often have the opposite effect. It's a list that can drive legalism deeper into your soul because if you can answer "no" to all seven questions, you can pat yourself on the back and if you can't, you will either try much harder or lie—or both.



Using the same illustration, we can see that a legalist shrinks the cross by performing and pretending.

The Bible sets a very high standard for Christian living. We cannot escape this fact. And without proper beliefs, we will fall into either the trap of licentiousness or legalism. Both of those places are where the flesh wants to go and certainly where the devil wants us to go.

This is why our beliefs matter. This is why I have been careful to link doctrine with application while working through this important letter. So if licentiousness and legalism are both horrible options, what is the right solution?

What you never want to do is downplay the high standards. We are supposed to avoid these things and we are supposed to imitate God and love others with the infinite, sweet aroma and sacrificial love of Christ. But how? I covet and I have idols in my heart all day long. How am I to reach this standard?

First of all, you won't, and God knows that. In the process of moving in that direction, we will grieve him at times. God also knows that.

Second, always start with who you are. How did Paul address us here? "Therefore be imitators of God, **as beloved children.**" Please don't read over that too quickly. Imitate God, yes. But do it because you are already a beloved child. Now lest I fall into the same error of universalism, let me be clear. Paul is addressing genuine believers in Jesus—those who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ. You have bowed your knees and heart to Jesus and accept his infinite gift of salvation by faith, not by works. The Bible does not teach that everyone is already redeemed and they just don't know it. True faith in Christ is redemption and anything less leaves you outside of the kingdom of God.

So the only way you can imitate God is to so as a beloved child. No matter how many times you hear this it can be difficult to believe. We just need to accept it by faith. The One who created the world has adopted you into his forever family. There's no going back. There's no reversing this personal choice of you. As his child, he chose you from before the foundation of the world.

More than that, you are light in the Lord: *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*. Notice the being verbs—you *were* darkness but now you *are* light in the Lord. It is who you are. It is your identity in Christ. Once you start to grasp this truth, it will begin to crush either error of licentiousness or legalism. It crushes licentiousness because it takes sin and God's holiness seriously but it also crushed legalism because it takes grace and the cross seriously. Let me show you how this chips away at the idols of our heart.

- The idol of **approval**—I want the other people at church to think I am a good parent. The question to ask here is why do seek the approval of others when we already have God's approval? Yes, we can and will grieve the Holy Spirit but that cannot change our status as beloved children. The more certain you become of God's approval the less you will need man's approval.

- The idol of **security**—when my children disobey, it shows that I am a bad parent. I feel like a miserable failure. So you yelled at your kid. It happens but tis doesn't make you evil. By admitting your sin, you receive grace and by apologizing to your children, you teach them what humility looks like and how God lovingly deals with their sin and yours.

- The idol of **reputation**—I don't want other Christians to think that I am not a good parent, that I can't control my children, so I raise my voice. The idol of reputation is nothing more than the fear of man. This happens when we do not fear God and his holiness. If you are a beloved child of God, your reputation is meaningless. If you sin admit it. This allows us to stop performing and pretending.

- The idol of **control**—I am the parent and they are children. I need to control their behavior at any cost. Once we crush the first few idols of the heart with the gospel, the rest will begin to fall like dominoes. The idols of control, respect and pleasure and just sinful expressions of selfishness. Once you are free to admit your sin and receive forgiveness, they will begin to hold less power over you.

- The idol of **respect**—my child disobeyed me, which is also disrespecting me. It makes me angry.
- The idol of **pleasure**—it is very inconvenient when my children disobey. It makes me work harder as a parent, so I yell at them.

This is why beliefs matter. Wrong beliefs can send you to hell. Wrong beliefs can force you into the trap of legalism or licentiousness.

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December 17, 2017

¹ <http://www.heartoffirepopeshouse.com/>

² Robert H. Thune and Will Walker. *The Gospel-Centered Life* (Kindle Locations 757-758).

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2008/may/accountability-questions.html>