

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 15 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

ACNA Readings – Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 147; Ephesians 5:3-14; John 6:53-59

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). Then there is a large section in the middle called ordinary time. This season often focuses on the growth of the Church, ending in a season known as Kingdome tide which concludes with the feast of Christ the king. During this time we read and hear the bulk of the teachings of Jesus in relation to the kingdom of heaven and how we are called to live as disciples of the Messiah.

Common Theme. Wisdom is our common theme in this week's readings aside from the Gospel portion, which continues the teaching of Jesus on the Bread of Life. Wisdom is often paired with knowledge, however it is different from knowledge in that it is more pragmatic. Wisdom is often defined as the understanding and application of knowledge. Many ancient cultures consider wisdom to be a valued virtue. We are encouraged in Proverbs to “get wisdom”. We should endeavour to be wiser tomorrow than we are today. Possessing wisdom is not the end goal, however. There is no prize for having the most wisdom when Jesus returns. Instead, as this week's readings suggest, applying wisdom is truly the art of the wise.

Hebraic Context. One of the major conflicts in the early church was the rise of Gnosticism. Scholars debate where different elements of Gnosticism developed from, the dualism of Zoroastrianism or the platonic thought of the Hellenistic world, but most agree that it grew from and beside a Judeo-Christian tradition, largely in Alexandria. Among its chief aspects was Sophia, a goddess of wisdom.² Gnosticism became seductive to many early Christians as Gnosticism stressed personal enlightenment and revelation.

Wisdom as an ideal is not something new to Jewish and Christian tradition. Most cultures in the ancient world valued knowledge and wisdom, including Greek and Persian culture. In the Greek pantheon, wisdom was often personified as a female deity, as were many human virtues and vices. Judaism, surprisingly, had to actually argue against wisdom being a female deity.³

¹ Alternate RCL readings: I Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111

² Sophia has, at various times, been seen as a goddess, the (other) mother of Jesus, an abstract personal endeavour, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself, or even a loathsome aspect of God who created physical matter (Gnosticism often sees everything that is physical as bad, and thus creation of the world was perverse).

³ *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (or *Ecclesiasticus*) 24 may have been written to counter a movement in Judaism that came out of Proverbs 8:12-31, where wisdom was thought to be a female deity that dwelt with God rather than a simple personification of wisdom. John 1 may also have been used to clarify misunderstandings that arose from Proverbs 8.

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Gnostic thought and teaching was integrated into the Gentile world developing alongside the early Church. While the New Testament does not use the word *gnosis* in the gnostic sense it's possible that Paul was aware of the seduction of gnostic thought and wrote against it. The early Church Fathers definitely did.⁴

Coming from a Jewish tradition, Gnosticism did believe the universe was both physical and spiritual but they differed with both Judaism and Christian theologians by arguing that the created, material world (or matter) was evil, and therefore the material was in opposition to the world of the spiritual and that only the spirit was good.

The Hebraic worldview found in the Scriptures does not see the material world as evil, rather God had called His creation good! The messianic redemptive hope was for a renewed creation, not the destruction of the material. There are problems in the world today because of our rebellion and, perhaps, this is most visibly in the physical world. Certainly the physical and the spiritual can be in tension, with the spiritual being able to overcome the trials and temptations of the physical. The fruit of the spirit, for example, is self control (rather than drunkenness) but the fruit of the spirit also has a physical result. If the fruit of the spirit has nothing physical involved then surely it is only theoretical. The good of the spiritual should not detract from the good of the physical.

Redemption in the Hebraic thought was, and is, both physical and spiritual. So too Wisdom is the application of knowledge—something to be taught, explained, and shared (and not just verbally but also physically). Wisdom is not something that should be hidden or considered secret and esoteric.

Proverbs 9:1-6. Proverbs 8 and 9 personify wisdom as a woman, so too the counterpart known as folly.⁵ In this passage wisdom is described as being very active. She constructed a dwelling, prepared a meal, and sent out invitations to come and participate in the banquet.⁶ Proverbs 9:7 states, "Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury." So how is reaching out to the simple and needy while using up your own

⁴ The opening words of our Creeds states, "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." This was in direct opposition to the Gnostic belief that a good God would never create a material earth and thus it must have been some other aspect of God or a break-off piece of God, or possibly wisdom (*Sophia*), as interpreted from Proverbs 8, that created a material and visible earth.

⁵ Personification is defined as the representation of a thing or abstraction as a person. Personification, as a literary device, is a common element in allegory. Wisdom here is plural, *חָכְמוֹת chachmot*, which is a common way in Hebrew to show something as abstract and/or intensive. Also, there may be different aspects of wisdom, but it is still a singular whole.

⁶ The invitation to eat bread and wine isn't an indication of being miserly. To share bread was to share a full meal.

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resources being wise? Here the aspect of wisdom that is highlighted as a positive virtue is hospitality.

If fed correctly, the simple can be saved. They can become wise and full of understanding.⁷ Having learnt something of God and of His will, our response should be to internalize that knowledge in our hearts but also put our understanding back into action.

Psalm 34:9-14.⁸ In the previous verses, David had expressed how he had been delivered by the Lord through the many challenges he had faced. His response was to bless the Lord, to remind his listeners that God had heard his cries and that he knew he had divine help.

The faithfulness of the Lord to redeem David from his situation prompted him now to admonish us to fear the Lord. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom has the component of action as David pairs fearing God with seeking Him. David boldly claimed that those who do seek the Lord will lack no good thing.

A bold statement indeed as, in context, he was fleeing from Saul—without family or refuge. David even tried to hide among the enemies of Israel, surrounded by the idolatry and immorality of the Philistines.⁹ The Lord rescued David from both Saul and the Philistines. During this time David did not own a palace nor raise large herds and yet he proclaimed that he did not lack for good things. With the right perspective you can have very few possessions but feel as though you possess everything. The opposite are young lions, likely a metaphor for those who think they are the strongest and believe that they do not need the help of God. They will go hungry.

David wasn't the only one that needed to seek God. All the saints need to fear God. David invited children, the righteous, and the brokenhearted to join with him in celebration of God's

⁷ Psalm 19:7, 116:6, 119:130.

⁸ Psalm 34 has a specific history associated with it and the context can help illuminate what David was thinking, feeling, and declaring. I Samuel 21:10-22:1 tells of when David had to flee from his closest allies, his own father-in-law and his king, to seek refuge from his worst enemies, the Philistines of Gath. The name of the Philistine king is Achish in I Samuel while he is called Abimelech here in Psalm 34. Abimelech simply means, "My father is king" and was a common title taken by would-be rulers (such as Abimelech, son of Gideon, the first prince of Israel.)

⁹ Idolatry and immorality so often go together (Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 9:20-21). Without a fear of God, society either seeks other gods (made in their own image) or denies them altogether. Either way, hedonistic excess and immorality become prevalent. And, if gods are like us or don't exist, what would be the problem with immorality? In a world where people question what should be considered sexually immoral, the Christian response isn't to look towards societal norms but directly at what God declares.

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protection.¹⁰ He used his experience as an opportunity to teach others.¹¹ In verse 11-14 David described fear of the Lord as an action more than it is an emotional state of being. Fearing God involves a measure of obedience to His commandments. Here David instructed the listener to guard the tongue and refrain from evil speech. Quite simply David urged us to “depart from evil and do good”.

This is the essence of the application of wisdom—to not keep the company of evil and to seek peace. Peace, *shalom*, is not the absence of war it is much more than that. David was a man accustomed to battle who often met his enemies on the field, but the peace he expressed here is the one that passes all human understanding—it goes beyond all our natural and temporal circumstances. But while it might be difficult to understand, it still should be sought.

Ephesians 5:15-20. Paul stated, “The days are evil”. The world hasn’t changed all that much since the first century. Since the days are evil, how then should we live? “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” For Paul, both the walk of God’s people and wisdom had a strong meaning.¹²

Walking, or *halacha*, is the practical living out of the word of God that might seem (at first glance) to be merely theological, historical, or philosophical—it is the practical acting out of the teachings and instructions of God and Jesus. In addition, wisdom wasn’t simply an esoteric principle of the mind. Biblically, wisdom was also to be very practical.

Paul compared wisdom with folly. Folly sometimes acts (always in self-interest), for instance, getting drunk on wine, but folly is also sometimes simply not acting and becoming profligate.¹³ There are many ways to apply wisdom, but here Paul emphasizes three ways to walk with

¹⁰ Sometimes we measure ourselves and others by the standards of the world—looking at the young lions with envy. But David reminds us that God seeks those who are humble, who fear God, and who bless His name. We too can be among the righteous and the saints if only we seek God with these characteristics. That doesn’t mean life will always be easy. The righteous face many afflictions. But God will still protect and redeem His servants.

¹¹ In Psalm 51, having failed through both adultery and murder, David asked to be restored by God. If God was gracious, then David in turn would “teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” We should not only be content in God’s grace for ourselves, but help others seek it as well.

¹² Even though Paul wrote with excellent Greek, Paul himself was Jewish. Not only a Jew, but also a Pharisee who was taught to think in a Hebraic way. Paul did understand Greek and Roman thought and would sometimes use terms and concepts from those cultures but most commonly he brought out concepts from his own Jewish roots.

¹³ Ἀσωτία, debauchery, is an uncommon word in both the Bible and Greek literature in general (only Aristotle, Plutarch, and Athenaeus used it with any regularity). The modern English translation is good in that it largely implies a lifestyle that is filled with food, wine, and sex (none of which are bad on their own) but this is because it is a life that is pulled away from duty and virtue.

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Carefully applied wisdom: Being filled with the [Holy] Spirit, giving thanks to God through song, and submitting to one another.

Correct application of our teaching and knowledge redeems the time during these evil days.¹⁴ Ceasing to apply these teachings will, inevitably, result in a form of debauchery—doing nothing or even falling back into our former ways as we are pulled away from our duties.¹⁵

Wisdom is connected to understanding the will of the Lord. Foolishness is the opposite of wisdom and thus cannot understand God's will and engages in deeds of darkness. Whether in worship or everyday life we must both understand the will of God and then act on it with thankfulness and humility.

John 6:51-58.¹⁶ “I am the living bread” is one of the seven “I am” statements by Jesus in the Gospel of John.¹⁷ Bread, as we have discussed before, can be a powerful metaphor as bread is

¹⁴ If we believe we are living in evil days, the natural thing for a Christian to do is act. It isn't to complain, grumble, or sit around waiting for God to either tear everything down or repair everything while we take what benefit we can from this life.

¹⁵ While Paul specifically singled out imbibing too much wine, Judaism generally celebrated the fruit of the vine. Grapes were one of the seven species of the land God had promised Israel and it was generally used to make wine or occasionally grape honey. God brought forth “food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man.” Both of which became important in the prayers of the Jewish people in the Kiddush (prayer accompanying wine) and hamotzi (general prayer for food but specifically bread from the earth). God blessed Israel with the gift of wine.

Perhaps it was the Greco-Roman drunken orgies of Dionysius and Bacchus that influenced Paul to single out this particular behaviour in Ephesians 5:18 as something the church should definitely not emulate in their times of worship. Or perhaps Paul was showing what the opposite of walking with wisdom would look like—letting the things of this world and self-interest pull us away from the things we should do.

¹⁶ ANCA includes John 6:59

¹⁷ The Gospel writers used the term “εγω ειμι”, I am, multiple times when Jesus was speaking about Himself. Normally, this would not be an odd statement, “I am Odysseus.” However, the phrase εγω ειμι was also used by translators in the Septuagint in Exodus 3:6, 14 as well as Isaiah 41:4, “I am the God of your father”; “I am who I am”; and “I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am He.”

Because of this, many scholars have assumed that Jesus was making a divine statement about Himself when using this term, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” There are some problems with this assumption. Both εγω and ειμι are very common in Greek writings and can be found together (somewhat uncommonly) in texts such as Herodotus, *The Histories* 5.111.3 “My King, ready am I to do either or both, whatever you desire.” No Christian scholar thinks that Jesus was declaring Himself to be Asahel, “‘Is it you, Asahel?’ And he answered, ‘It is I.’” (“Εἶ σὺ εἶ αὐτὸς Ἀσαήλ; καὶ εἶπεν Ἐγὼ εἰμι.” LXX, II Samuel 2:20)

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an essential food element for many cultures (and takes many forms such as loaves, laffa, naan, and Middle Eastern pita). In terms of a physical staple, humans can survive solely on bread and water for quite some time. However, Moses had already declared that we should not “live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 8:3). In the Hebraic context, bread had the usual domestic and economic use as a food staple, but it also had strong religious connotations and uses. The showbread, for instance, served as a perpetual memorial in the Temple. Unleavened bread, such as at Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, reminded Israel every year in a very tactile way that God had redeemed them out of Egypt.

The things of the earth will always remain on this earth, and none of it can be taken into the world to come. The context of Jesus' statement is in the tension between human food, including the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, and spiritual food—between the things that perish and fade and the eternal things that last forever. This is very much in line with the teaching of Moses to live by the Word of the Lord, the very thing which will actually endure forever.¹⁸

The context and reaction of the people around Jesus may give clues as to when Jesus was using it to make a statement about Himself or if it was a simple grammatical construct referring to Himself. But it is simply that, a clue. In John 8:59, the people picked up stones to throw at Jesus after He used *εγω ειμι*.

However, Jesus also used it in John 6:35, 48, 51 “I am the bread of life.” John 8:12, “I am the light of the world.” John 10:7, 9, “I am the door.” John 10:11-18, “I am the good shepherd.” John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life.” John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” And John 15:1, 6, “I am the true vine.” All of these statements are both a metaphor and true. Recognizing the statements as metaphorical should not diminish the truth in any way.

¹⁸ As was the case in John 6:34, the people immediately went back to the physical in John 6:52. Not only was consumption of human flesh (and blood) not kosher, and so repugnant, it was also considered to be ethically and morally wrong. And so the question, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

There are many scholars with the literary (and so theological) belief that Jesus' response was not only metaphorical and spiritual but also spoke to the physical in response to their continued look at the physical concept of human flesh and blood for food and drink. The Eucharist becomes not only spiritual but also physical in a very real sense—the bread becomes the body of Jesus and the wine becomes the blood of Jesus. There are also many scholars who, without taking away from the physical reality of the Eucharist (along with the spiritual), believe that Jesus returned to the spiritual matters He had been discussing in the previous arguments with those He was talking to and was still speaking metaphorically. The bread and the wine, although not only a physical symbol, do not fully transform into the physical flesh and blood of Jesus.

Regardless of our reading of the text, there is something of a mystery in the Eucharist. This shouldn't detract from our thanksgiving to God but it should fill our thanksgiving to God for His great gift of life to all who partake in the body and blood of the Messiah—all who listen and follow the voice of the one God sent.

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Since the miracle of feeding the five thousand, Jesus had been teaching His hearers to move their focus from material things to spiritual realities.¹⁹ Jesus boldly stated that, in contrast to any physical bread that has come before (including the heavenly bread known as manna), He is the true life-giving sustenance.

As Jesus elaborated on His earlier statement, there should be hope. Those who partake have eternal life and will be raised on the last day. God the father (who is eternal) sent Jesus, who lives in the Father. Those who partake of the bread of life will be able to live because of Jesus. And, unlike the manna in the wilderness that only lasted a single day (or two days over Shabbat) and stopped when Israel entered Canaan, this will provide life forever.

In the Christian world, whole denominations have been spawned over the literalness of eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord. Regardless of our particular understanding of the Eucharist, the invitation of the Lord to partake of His eternal life through His body and blood is the same. We have the promise by Jesus that we will partake of His resurrection on the last day and that the life we live with him even now will be a life that lasts forever.

Hebraic Perspective. The problem of evil and suffering is one of the primary reasons people either abandon faith or never accept God to begin with. The problem with rejecting biblical faith on account of suffering is that it does nothing to deal with the evil or the suffering—those things remain. All the atheist has done is reject God, leaving themselves alone with a world of misery and hopelessness. Faith does not deny that evil exists, instead it confronts it head on to explain suffering and something of the world we live in.²⁰

In the Hebrew Scriptures, evil has a broad range of meanings. The Scriptures reveal that many things are evil such as: evil deeds, thoughts, fallen angels, evil monarchs, people, and nations. Evil was never something God desired. It was the consequence of rejecting the goodness of God, both by angels and humans.

When Paul said “the days are evil” he is describing the situation of active evil in his current day. The Greco Roman world was inundated with idolatry. Idolatry always leads to immorality and the preponderance of evil deeds in society. When we consider the existence of evil this should not come at the expense of good. Just because evil exists doesn't mean that good does not exist—there is often good in the midst of evil (although this good is not brought about by evil nor

¹⁹ See Hebraic Context on the benefits and limitations in regards to spiritual versus physical reality as well as the benefits and limitations in regards to spiritual and physical reality.

²⁰ The Scriptures teach us that often faith and hope are born of situations of suffering. Abraham underwent many trials and came through believing in God and receiving a covenant from God that continues to bless the whole world. Israel was born from slavery in Egypt. Paul said, “Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope”. This is not to suggest that we should seek temptations and suffering in order to achieve blessings and faith but rather that suffering cannot be a reason to extinguish hope and belief in God.

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evil brought about by good). But just because they are both present and just because evil is the opposite of good does not mean that they are equal.

Paul admonished us in Romans 12:21; “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”. In the Hebrew Scriptures evil is not denied. Evil is fought. Evil often grows and gains power through the poor choices and false intentions of man. God’s instruction and teaching, the entire Word of God, guides individuals and communities to overcome evil with the good things of God. We are encouraged in the proverbs to “get wisdom and understanding ... and she will guard you”. Paul described to the believing community in Ephesus that our response to the evil times is to walk out our faith with wisdom.²¹

ACNA Readings

Psalm 147.²² The psalmist opens with “Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” and then presents some of the reasons for that worship.²³ The psalm highlights some of the ways in which God serves His own creation and how He defends and blesses his people. Of particular note is the Lord’s care for Jerusalem and the exiles. He brings back the captives and heals the brokenhearted. His love goes beyond the scope of humanity and includes care for Creation itself. The psalmist notes how He pays attention to each and every star in heaven.²⁴ When the Lord casts His eyes towards mankind it is the humble of heart that take His attention. The wicked, those with pride instead of humility, are driven into the ground.²⁵

²¹ Much of Paul's teachings deal with false teachings, including gnostic thoughts. He had to show people the appropriate way to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”. Paul constantly urged the believers to reject idolatry and stop evil behaviour. But Paul also urged believers to imitate God and proclaim the resurrection. God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven; let us bring good into this world by doing the things of God on this earth while we yet live.

²² The word ‘*Hallelujah*’ הַלְלוּיָהּ is an imperative to ‘Praise the Lord’ and the word stands at the beginning of eleven psalms: 106, 111-113, 117, 135, 146-150. *Hallelujah* is also the final word of twelve psalms: 104-106, 113, 115-116, 135, 146-150. These have come to be known as the Hallel psalms.

An imperative is an exhortation or command, such as saying to someone, “Sit” or “Stand up!” It is not inconceivable that, during the Temple service, the conductor of worship would shout Hallelujah, and the worshippers present would then respond to the instruction and join with the Levites in praising the Lord.

²³ We recognize that the majority of the Psalms are prayers and were often sung, but they were also an excellent way to impart theological truths to those praying, singing, or hearing the musicians praise God.

²⁴ Psalm 147:4, 8-9 is one more reminder that Humans, while made in the image of God and beloved by God, are not the sole focus of God. Life isn’t just about me—See footnote 25 and C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*.

²⁵ Pride and humility become intertwined in Scripture. God is gracious to the humble but judges the proud. “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Prov. 11:2). “The LORD detests all the proud of heart” (Prov. 16:5). “The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and

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In the Septuagint this Psalm is treated as two psalms with the additional superscription “a Psalm of Haggai and Zechariah”. Verse 12 begins the second psalm in this arrangement. As a whole Psalm 147 identifies four reasons for praising God. His restoration of Israel, His generous provision, His control over the forces of nature and His word revealed to Israel.

Given the superscription in the Septuagint, this Psalm is likely post-exilic reflecting the restoration under Nehemiah.²⁶ Understanding the psalm in this context emphasizes the importance of joy even in times of adversity and struggle. The return from exile was fraught with difficulties and opposition and the reconstruction of Jerusalem was not an easy task. Our joy is not dependent on circumstances but it rests upon the authority and faithfulness of God.

Psalm 147, and the psalms that follow it, all stress God as Creator and the Director of its forces. God acted by providing peace and food. God is in full control of the weather and all of nature, but God also cared enough about His people that He provided them with a way to live—His statutes and rules. This must be the source of our joy—God. He is in control and He cares for His people.

honor and life” (Prov. 22:4). In prayers, such as Hannah or Mary’s, they recognize that God lifts up the humble. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant... He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

James will write the same, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” While Paul provides an example to follow, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:35). Or, as one version put it: “Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus.”

As another example, humility was a chief characteristic of Moses (Numbers 12:3). According to Jewish exegesis this quality was one that allowed Moses and God to communicate face to face. No other person in the Bible has that distinction. Those who want to talk to God need to put aside pride and become humble like Moses.

C.S. Lewis spoke quite strongly about humility and pride, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” “... The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride... Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind.” “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.” “In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all.” (*Mere Christianity*)

Tertullian disparaged pride, putting it into a category known as the “seven deadly sins”, thought to lead the soul to hell. It is often deemed to be one of Satan’s essential features.

²⁶ At the beginning of the first half of Psalm 147 and the beginning of the second half (or second Psalm) there was an emphasis on the building of Jerusalem.

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Ephesians 5:3-14. The Greco-Roman culture condoned a level of indecency, idolatry, and sexual immorality.²⁷ One could easily argue that after 2,000 years very little has changed. Paul groups together a collection of immoral behaviour and describes this behaviour as so inappropriate that those who do these things have no “inheritance in the Kingdom”.²⁸ That is, their behaviour reveals the complete lack of both inward and outward transformation that would be found in a follower of Jesus.

Paul was not saying that Christians are sinless but rather, as followers of the Messiah, we should not try to excuse or minimize sin nor be active, wilful partakers of sinful behaviour. Paul writes that formerly we were once darkness. He doesn't say “in darkness” but that we “were darkness”. The transforming power of the gospel is so complete that we literally change from being a state of darkness itself to walking in the light and shining that light. That is some seriously good news!

²⁷ This wasn't true only of the Greek and Roman cultures. Idolatry and sexual practices God declared immoral were both common and condoned in Canaan, Egypt, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon, along with many cultures not mentioned in the Bible. It was even commonplace in Israel, Judah, and (from the evidence in the Pauline writings) parts of the Church.

²⁸ Very few people were outright declared to have no portion in the world to come within Judaism. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10.1 states a few exceptions: those who deny the resurrection, those who deny the Torah came from heaven, and Epicureans (Epicureanism was a popular Greek philosophy that developed c. 300 BCE whose followers were often skeptics towards the gods and sought simple tranquility—much like many modern movements). Rabbi Akiva later added that those who read the apocrypha (the New Testament likely was included in this description) and healing magicians would not enter the world to come. Finally, those who speak the name of God aloud would not have a portion in the world to come.

For examples, *Sanhedrin* 10.2 gives 7 names: Jeroboam, the first king of Israel and the one who created places of worship for Israel outside of Jerusalem—none of the kings that reigned after him in Israel followed after God; Ahab, the Israelite king that joined Israel to the idolatry of Jezebel; and Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who did all forms of evil in Jerusalem—including child sacrifice. However, even Manasseh is argued to, perhaps, have a place in the world to come as he sought God in prayer at the end of his life. The other four examples were: Balaam, who caused Israel to sin in the wilderness through sexual immorality; Doeg, who murdered the priests of God; Ahithophel, a traitor to David; and Gehazi, who took advantage of a foreigner and lied before God. Additional examples were also given: those who lived during the flood; the builders of the tower of Babel; the people of Sodom; Korah's rebellion, etc.

To say, these have “no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” was a very strong statement by Paul and should be heeded.