# Sex and money

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Ephesians 5:1-20

(these notes may be rougher notes than usual)

As is common for Paul, the second half of his letter turns from practical theology to practical calls to holy living. In Ephesians 4, Paul started this turn, with his calls for unity, and a call to the new life. In chapter 5, Paul continues calling on his congregation to put away evil and choose good.

In this section of the letter, Paul especially addresses two big areas of human living: sex and money.

To be honest, sometimes it is difficult to read passages like this, because this is also a passage about separating from people who act badly with respect to sex and money: “do not be associated with them,” Paul says. This feels in strong contrast with how Jesus seemed to develop his movement. Jesus seemed perfectly content to hang out with sex workers and people who exploited others economically, such as the sinful woman of Luke 7 and Matthew the tax collector. To say nothing of this: whenever I get to know people really well, it does seem like they have persistent sex and money problems.

Be that as it may, Paul uses strong imagery about avoiding bad behavior and engaging in good behavior. Those who persist are in danger of losing their inheritance in the kingdom. God’s wrath is on them. They are “darkness,” and full of dark secrets. They are asleep. They are unwise and foolish–you get the idea. The bad behavior he has in mind are especially “fornication” and associated impure actions, and “greed,” which he describes as idolatry. But he also mentions other excessive behaviors, such as unuseful talk or excessive drinking.

It certainly is useful to note that Paul doesn’t just go against sexual sin, but economic ones as well. One can easily imagine Paul saying something like, “You say you are sexual pure? Well, do you lust after money? This also condemns you.

It is also useful to note that Paul’s language here is pretty general. He’s not going after really specific behaviors. I read on a website recently about an anabaptist group that had just released their decision on how long women’s culottes needed to be in order to be acceptable. Paul’s general language provides us a lot of latitude to examine carefully what it means for us to be sexually or economically off-kilter–decisions we should importantly examine each for ourselves, but also with one another.

And again, to be honest, I recognize that there will be people with whom we do not wish to be associated. For example, Christians who loudly profess sexual purity, but are engaged in adulterous behaviors secretly. Or Christian leaders who sexually exploit those in their care–a terrible thing present both outside and inside the Anabaptist churches. Or those who proclaim that greet is good, and what God wants for us is economic wealth.

Paul is not just negative in this passage. He also describes behavior that is positive (not just avoiding negative behavior). We should be people of thanksgiving, filled with the Spirit. We should be a singing people. (Yes, we really should). We should seek “all that is good and right and true”.

In the middle of this passage is an important verse: “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.” Paul is calling us to orient our lives to please God, to please Jesus. And this will take time and effort to figure this all out. As I said, we need to do this both individually, but also corporately.

Let me leave you with this question: How important is it to you to “try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord”? And a follow-up: What are some ways that you can “wake up” and live as a child of the light in your economic and sexual lives?