

Ephesians 5:3–4:  
Sexual Sins in Act, Thought, Speech . . . and Sight?

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Sex was a serious problem for Christians in the first century. We do not have to look past 1 Corinthians 5 to see that at least the church in Corinth had problems understanding what was sin or how to deal with it in the church. “Sexual immorality,” πορνεία, is listed by Paul more frequently than any other sin.<sup>1</sup> But sexual sin was not restricted to the times of the early church. A recent survey showed that 69% of all men reported looking at pornography at least once a month, and that number only dropped to 64% for men who self-identified as Christian.<sup>2</sup> Sexual sin is truly an epidemic in the church and world today.

While incessant finger-wagging and fire-and-brimstone preaching is not the solution, careful attention to biblical teaching on the issue of sex would help churches better respond to this problem. Preaching and teaching on sexual sin should not be balked at, even in an age where sexual promiscuity is cheered by our culture. Christians should be eager to hear God’s teaching on sex through Scripture, attentive to apply it to all of their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Ephesians helps a Christian do just that. Paul explicitly teaches on sexual sin in Eph 4:19 and 5:3–5. We will turn our attention to just 5:3–4, a list of six forbidden items held together by a single verb.

In short, Paul’s vice list in Eph 5:3–4 is an extrapolation of the theme of sexual sin. He is not collecting a random set of sins, but is showing the reader how a sexual sin can manifest itself in a number of ways not fitting for children beloved of God. Paul does this by (1) using tight grammatical parallels between the two sets of three vices and (2) beginning the list with

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 94

<sup>2</sup> Covenant Eyes, *Pornography Statistics: 250+ facts, Quotes, and Statistics About Pornography Use*, 2015 ed. (Owosso, MI: Covenant Eyes, 2015). However, regular church attendance makes men 26% less likely to look at pornography.

the word *πορνεία* to highlight the sexual aspects of the subsequent words he employs, many of which contain both sexual and non-sexual denotations or connotations. Further, while Paul explicitly highlights sexual sins in act, thought, and speech, his logic can be applied to sight as well. To establish these conclusions, this paper will proceed by (1) considering the context of Eph 5:3–4; (2) looking closely at the grammar and diction of the pericope; (3) arguing more directly that the two triads together place emphasis on sexual sins; and (4) making application to the church today.

## I. CONTEXT OF EPHESIANS 5:3–4

The book of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus, though these two claims have been greatly contested by scholars.<sup>3</sup> Whether the book was written to the church in Ephesus, Laodicea, or Hierapolis, it is abundantly clear the recipients are Christians, and the instruction is for them.<sup>4</sup> Paul’s characteristic indicative/imperative schema<sup>5</sup> is on brilliant display in the structure and content of Ephesians, with chapters one through three containing the doctrinal exhortation that Christians are now in Christ and chapters four through six containing the ethical outworking of this transformative truth.<sup>6</sup> After describing for

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<sup>3</sup> See Guy Prentiss Waters, “Ephesians,” in Michael J. Kruger (ed.), *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 267–83, at 269–70. For an extended conservative treatment, see Harold H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61.

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 28–30. In fact, there is ample evidence that shows the letter was intended to be circulated among various Christian churches for the edification of all.

<sup>5</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 568–69; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (1966; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 253–58.

<sup>6</sup> See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), xxxvi; Waters, “Ephesians,” 271–72; 277–82.

three chapters the church's holiness, predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and reception of grace that transforms them into God's children as one new man in place of the old distinction of Jew and Gentile—all in Christ—Paul dramatically commands in 4:1, turning to the new topic of exhortation in living, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” It is in this second section of directives of Christian living, predicated on God's redemptive love and transforming grace, that we find out pericope of 5:3–4.

In chapter four, right before coming to our pericope, Paul commands the church to walk in a new way, no longer like Gentiles (4:17). Because they know Christ, they must put off the old man and put on the new man, who is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:20–24). Paul sums a list of imperatives concerning speech, work, and attitude (4:25–32) by telling the Christians to “be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:1–2). The passage we come to in 5:3–4 is likewise an outworking of that principle. Advocating Paul's argument found in Eph 5:3–4 is not legalism; sexual immorality must be rejected because it is not consistent with the Christian's new identity as a beloved Children of God.

One final note on context. Paul's corpus contains a number of “vice lists” (e.g., Rom 1:29–32; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 4:31; 5:3–5; Col 3:5–9).<sup>7</sup> Ladd identifies five overarching themes within these lists: sexual sins, sins of selfishness, sins of speech, sins of

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<sup>7</sup> See Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 84–86; Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 90–94.

attitude and personal relations, and sins of drunkenness.<sup>8</sup> Contributing to the thesis that Ephesians and Colossians are closely related,<sup>9</sup> there is an unmistakable connection between Eph 5:3–4 and the vice list of Col 3:5, which reads: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”<sup>10</sup> Both lists center on the theme of sexual sins.

## II. THE STRUCTURE AND MEANING OF EPHESIANS 5:3–4

The most significant grammatical feature of this pericope is that these two verses contain one verb and two lists of three vices, one before the verb and one after. Also, two dependent clauses provide the basis for the prohibition of these sins. Finally, the first clause of verse five is included with verses three and four to compose a complete sentence. We will evaluate the grammar and vocabulary used in these two (and less than a half) verses to try to come to a basic understanding of this one sentence.

1. *Verse Three.* Our pericope begins with the conjunction δὲ, contrasting the material that will follow with Paul’s command in 5:2 to “walk in love.”<sup>11</sup> Paul immediately lists three vices, showing that Paul has moved from speaking positively about the Christian life to speaking negatively. This begins the first triad in this pericope.

The first of the three words is the well-known noun πορνεία, a word that can strictly refer to adultery or fornication,<sup>12</sup> though often it is translated “sexual immorality” in

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<sup>8</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 571.

<sup>9</sup> See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xlvii–lviii.

<sup>10</sup> Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 94–99.

<sup>11</sup> “δὲ,” BDAG 213.

<sup>12</sup> “πορνεία,” BDAG 854.

contemporary parlance.<sup>13</sup> Its precise meaning is notoriously difficult to unearth, layered beneath “many strata of textual meaning that accrued over the centuries and the ever-present influence of social structure on ancient sexual morality.”<sup>14</sup> However, Harper pinpoints the meaning in the first century Jewish-Christian context as a class of actions consisting of any sexual act outside of marriage, while the contemporary Greek and Roman cultures saw it narrowly as the act of selling oneself in prostitution.<sup>15</sup> Every commentator touching on the subject agrees and includes acts such as adultery, incest, homosexuality, and all other sexual acts prohibited by the OT law.<sup>16</sup> This category of sexual sin heads Paul’s list of sins that will follow; Paul uses the same tactic in Col 3:5, where he lists four sins following πορνεία compared to Ephesians’ list of an additional two (or five, depending on how one counts).

Second, Paul says that ἀκαθαρσία πᾶσα is not to be mentioned. Not only is uncleanness prohibited, but “all” or “all kinds” of uncleanness, especially moral impurity.<sup>17</sup> ἀκαθαρσία is used around 120 times in Leviticus (LXX) alone, in its noun and adjective forms, referring to ritual impurity according to the OT ceremonial law.<sup>18</sup> While there are sexual purity laws in Leviticus, those ceremonial laws cannot be confused with the moral law and moral

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<sup>13</sup> E.g., ESV, NIV, NLT, and NET.

<sup>14</sup> Kyle Harper, “*Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm*,” *JBL* 131 (2011):363–83, at 383.

<sup>15</sup> Harper, “*Porneia*,” 383.

<sup>16</sup> S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 420; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 475–76; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (NTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 228; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 652; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 321; Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, vol. 2 (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 560–61. However, Bruce Malina, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication?” *NovT* 14 (1972), 10–17 notably argued that the word πορνεία does not include “pre-betrothal, pre-marital, heterosexual intercourse of a non-cultic or non-commercial nature.” In response, Joseph Jensen, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina,” *NovT* 20 (1978), 161–84, argued that it does include fornication and wanton sexual behavior, as we have argued here.

<sup>17</sup> “ἀκαθαρτος,” BDAG 34; “καθαρός,” NIDNTTE 2:572.

<sup>18</sup> “καθαρός,” NIDNTTE 2:569–71.

purity.<sup>19</sup> Thus, what Leviticus calls “unclean” cannot automatically be regarded as “unclean” in a moral sense. Paul makes it clear in Ephesians and elsewhere that the ceremonial law has been fulfilled by Christ,<sup>20</sup> and thus his use of ἀκαθαρσία moves away from ritual usage of the LXX into the moral domain.<sup>21</sup> He uses ἀκαθαρσία to refer specifically to sexual moral impurity in a number of places (e.g., Rom 1:24; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5; 1 Thes 4:7), though other times it refers also to other kinds of moral impurity (e.g., Rom 6:19; Eph 4:19; 1 Thes 2:3). Thus, “impurity” or “uncleanness” is how this word is best translated, though understood in a moral, not ceremonial, sense.

Third, πλεονεξία is “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due.”<sup>22</sup> It is used much less in the LXX and NT than the previous two entries. It and its variants are used in several other vice lists (e.g., Mk 7:22; Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 5:10–11; 6:10; Eph 4:19; 5:5; Col 3:5), and instead of speaking strictly of greedy actions, it moves the focus onto greedy desires of the heart, greedy thoughts. It can simply be said to translate as “greediness” or “covetousness.”

The conjunctions Paul uses to connect these pieces of the triad are important. καὶ is used between the first and second items, and ἤ is between the second and third items. Both these conjunctions are coordinating conjunctions,<sup>23</sup> but the disjunctive force of ἤ is minimized

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<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1503–04.

<sup>20</sup> Paul says as much in Eph 2:15, which has a venerable Reformed and critical tradition of being interpreted as specifically referencing the ceremonial law (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 11 [1854; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996], 237; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 192–93; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 93; Hendrickson, *Ephesians*, 135). See also Rom 14:20. Jesus himself declared all foods clean in Mk 7:19.

<sup>21</sup> “καθαρός,” NIDNTTE 2:573.

<sup>22</sup> “πλεονεξία,” BDAG 824.

<sup>23</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 669.

here because of the coming negative μηδὲ; as Blass and Debrunner explain, “[ἢ] comes close to the force of a copulative conjunction, especially in negative clauses . . .”<sup>24</sup> O’Brien may be right that the change of conjunction indicates Paul’s shift from sins of external actions to the inner “spring” of the outer sins, covetousness.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, the translation to English should not be substantially affected by the different conjunctions.

Continuing on, the verb controlling this list is ὄνομαζέσθω, negated with the emphatic μηδὲ. The negated present, imperative, passive verb within its contextual phrase can be translated something like, “let not [noun triad] be even mentioned/named among you.”<sup>26</sup> Though the verb is used twice elsewhere in Ephesians, those contexts are not helpful in interpreting the word here.<sup>27</sup> Most significantly, the agent of the passive verb is not explicitly stated elsewhere in the sentence, leaving commentators divided as to the identity of the agent who “mentions” or “names” because the grammar alone cannot answer that question.<sup>28</sup> First, the agent can be internal, referring to the Ephesian church’s speaking to one another, forbidding the discussion of specific acts of sexual immorality etc. within the ranks of the church.<sup>29</sup> According to this logic, if Paul forbids speaking about such things to one another, how

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<sup>24</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 231. See also “ἢ,” BDAG 432.

<sup>25</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 360.

<sup>26</sup> “ὄνομάζω,” BDAG 714. The ἐν is used as a locative marker here (A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934], 586).

<sup>27</sup> The usage in 1:21 invokes the idea of calling upon the name of a deity, as was common in first century Greek literature and Jewish LXX usage (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 280–81; “ὄνομα,” NIDNTTE 3:514–19). On the other hand, 3:15 refers to God’s authority as father over all living people, having the right to name each of his creatures (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 474–76). See Baugh, *Ephesians*, 420 n. 26.

<sup>28</sup> See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 436–37. Using Wallace’s categories, the focus of the passage is certainly on the subject, the Ephesian church, but it is possible that the passive is used here for rhetorical effect as well, ambiguity leaving room for double entendre.

<sup>29</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 653.

much more does God condemn actually doing these things? Paul is not forbidding speaking of actual occurrences of sin (as Paul himself does in 1 Cor 5:1) or warning others to avoid sin (as he does here), but instead he has in mind speaking about the specifics of sexual sin in regular conversation or merely for amusement.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, the agent could be external, referring to what unbelieving outsiders “mention” about those belonging to the church at Ephesus.<sup>31</sup> Paul wants to make sure the Ephesian church’s witness to the rest of society is properly reflective of the people of God. While commentators debate which of these two interpretations are correct, there is no reason to think that only one of them applies to this situation. The internal agent view is consistent with Paul’s intense focus on the words that Christians speak in verse four, and the external agent is consistent with Paul’s concern for the Ephesian church’s witness through verse fourteen.<sup>32</sup> So, whether fellow church members or society at large, nobody should ever be able to associate the ideas of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed with any member of the church at Ephesus. Paul leverages the grammatical ambiguity of the passive voice to make this broad, sweeping point to underscore the impermissibility of these sins.

Paul’s prohibition is not a bare command, so verse three concludes with Paul’s reminder that acting in accord with his command “is proper for saints” because they are “men selected from the world and consecrated to God,” as Hodge exposits it.<sup>33</sup> Paul just told his readers that they are called to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph 5:2), and

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<sup>30</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 324.

<sup>31</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 165.

<sup>32</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 165–66.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (1856; repr. Geneva Commentary Series; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 205.

now he shows that out of that flows an appropriate sexual ethic.<sup>34</sup> More broadly, Paul is in the middle of a section introduced in chapter four where he delineates the new way of living for a regenerate person, calling the Christian to put off the old man who lives like Gentiles and to put on the new man, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:17–24).<sup>35</sup> Thus, Paul’s demand of a sexually pure life is fitting because the Christian is called to be morally pure like God.

2. *Verse Four.* The verb guiding verse four is still ὀνομάζεσθω from verse three.<sup>36</sup> While many English translations start a new sentence at verse four and insert an implied verb (“Let there be no . . .”, ESV), it is not so in the Greek. These English translations lose the fact that Paul is not only making a statement about not doing certain actions, as the English stand-in verb construction implies, but he is saying that there should be no mention of these certain things among the church by insiders or outsiders. We will consider verse four’s three major elements in turn: first, a second triad of unmentionable sins set off with a καὶ, second, a relative clause, and third, a contrasting imperative phrase set off with ἀλλὰ.

The triad found in this verse mirrors the triad found in verse three. Not only is it another list of three, but it is also modified by a dependent clause, is expressed in the nominative case, is governed by the same verb, and uses exactly the same linking conjunctions as the first (καὶ between the first and second items and ἤ between the second and third

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<sup>34</sup> See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 293–301, 330–33; Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 157–80.

<sup>35</sup> See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 223–31. For a broader discussion of living as believers, including a discussion of Paul’s views in Eph 4, see G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 835–84.

<sup>36</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 474, 477; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 228; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 322.

items).<sup>37</sup> However, the second triad is unique in that it refers to more specific actions and words instead of categories of actions and words.

The three nouns used by Paul in verse four appear as nominative<sup>38</sup> singular feminine nouns and are *hapax legomena*, though the stems of two of the three words are present elsewhere in the NT. The first of this triad is αἰσχρότης, glossed as “shamefulness” or “obscenity,” but more fully captured in the idea of “behavior that flouts social and moral standards,”<sup>39</sup> a word used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to “filthy conduct,” even having sexual overtones.<sup>40</sup> The adjective form of the word is used by Paul three times and typically carries the idea of shameful or disgraceful.<sup>41</sup>

The second of the triad is μωρολογία, a compound word made of μωρός (“foolish, stupid”)<sup>42</sup> and λόγος (“word”),<sup>43</sup> simply means “foolish/silly talk.”<sup>44</sup> The various forms of μωρός are used by Matthew to categorically distinguish “fools” from the “wise” (e.g., Matt 5:22; 7:24–27; 25:1–13) and by Paul to contrast the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:18–24) and in description of types of conflicts to avoid (2 Tim 2:23; Titus 3:9).<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, the word was used by Paul to describe idolaters who, becoming fools, “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and

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<sup>37</sup> However, this is not true in every manuscript, though it can be reasonably established that this is the content of the original autograph. See Appendix below.

<sup>38</sup> They are nominative because they each remain the subject of the verb ὄνομαζέσθω from verse three.

<sup>39</sup> “αἰσχρότης,” BDAG 29.

<sup>40</sup> “αἰσχρότης,” LSJ 43. Liddell-Scott notes the term can be euphemistic for fellatio.

<sup>41</sup> “αἰσχρότης,” NIDNTTE 180–81

<sup>42</sup> “μωρός,” BDAG 663.

<sup>43</sup> “λόγος,” BDAG 598–99

<sup>44</sup> “μωρολογία,” BDAG 663; “μωρολογία,” LSJ 1158.

<sup>45</sup> “μωρία,” NIDNTTE 3:357–59.

creeping things" (Rom 1:23) and "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (1:25), leading to immorality and a depraved mind, but especially to sexual sin as epitomized by homosexual conduct (1:24, 25–30).<sup>46</sup> Thus, μωρολογία is the speech that these fools would use. To assist in capturing some of these ideas, μωρολογία can therefore be translated, "fool's talk."

The final of the three nouns in verse four is εὔτραπελία. Its stem is a true *hapax legomenon*, not appearing elsewhere in the Greek NT or LXX, though it is found in other Greek literature. It is a complicated word that is translated in English as "crude joking" (ESV), "coarse joking" (NIV), "jesting" (KJV), and "coarse jesting" (NASB/NKJV). However, Liddell-Scott highlights a positive denotation of the word and says it means "ready wit, liveliness," though stating it is "rarely" used in a negative sense.<sup>47</sup> Pushing back against this lexiconography, van der Horst argues that even though Aristotle included εὔτραπελία among his list of virtues, he does this "with difficulty and by straining its meaning" because εὔτραπελία is consistently used in both negative and positive ways during his time, having originated as a negative word but over time collecting positive associations.<sup>48</sup> Van der Horst continues, "when [it] is used as a qualification of speech or conversation, it need not be a positive one but may quite well be meant *in sensu malo*," though it is not clear that it "lies in the sphere of dirty jokes, as several translations of Eph. v 4 suggest."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the oldest extant book of jokes, *Philogelos*, with jokes from the second to fifth centuries A.D., attributes twenty jokes to a εύτραπελος, not

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<sup>46</sup> "μωρία," NIDNTTE 3:357–59. Paul is invoking the OT wisdom category of fool in this passage.

<sup>47</sup> "εὔτραπελία," LSJ 735.

<sup>48</sup> Pieter W. van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian? A Note on εὔτραπελία in Eph 5:4," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, Tjitzé Baarda, Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, Willem Cornelis Unnik (eds), vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 163–77, at 174–75.

<sup>49</sup> Van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian?" 175.

one of them obscene.<sup>50</sup> However, a remark by Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics indicates the word suggests innuendo,<sup>51</sup> and Josephus makes it clear that it refers to jokes told at someone else's expense.<sup>52</sup> Van der Horst's study comes to a climax and conclusion as he demonstrates an additional angle of the word:

From some texts it is clear that εύτραπελία was regarded as a typical way of life of the urbane high-society persons, the cultivated, no doubt well-to-do young men, who could afford the life of a gentleman. "It forms part of the realization of life, . . . all the lighter occupations of which amusement or relaxation is the object and accompaniment, opposed to the serious business of life, and corresponds exactly to the French *passe-temps*."<sup>53</sup> It needs no argument that this "virtue" could not recommend itself to the early Christian communities . . . . [!]t is clear that the word εύτραπελία has aspects which made it sometimes unattractive to the Greeks and still more aspects which made it impossible to be posited as a Christian virtue.<sup>54</sup>

So, while the word does not indicate explicit vulgar or obscene humor or banter, it does indicate a conscious, though intentionally subtle, attempt by the speaker to amuse himself and others at the expense of another through wit and innuendo. Van der Horst nearly endorses translating the word "suggestive language" in Eph 5:4 because of the clear negative context, but that translation still leaves much to be desired. Alternative translations such as off-color jokes, undermining wit, and abasing humor might get close to the meaning as well,<sup>55</sup> but they

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<sup>50</sup> Van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian?" 175.

<sup>51</sup> Van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian?" 176. He continues to conjecture, "If that means that the wittiness of the εύτραπελος is characterized by its oblique insinuations in the direction of shameful things, then that might justify the nice translation 'suggestive language' proposed in the *Translator's New Testament*."

<sup>52</sup> Van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian?" 176.

<sup>53</sup> Edward Meredith Cope and John Edwin Sandys, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1877), 150.

<sup>54</sup> Van der Horst, "Is Wittiness Unchristian?" 176–77.

<sup>55</sup> As might other adjectives such as risqué, acrid, unscrupulous, unclean, impure, and indecorous.

do not maintain the various qualities of the word with appropriate balance. We must revert to van der Horst's admittedly less-than-perfect gloss.

So, the triad of verse four could be provisionally rendered, “obscenity,” “fool’s talk,” and “suggestive language.” Compared to the first triad, this group is much more concrete in the kind of behavior it prohibits. Instead of speaking of classes of actions, Paul here moves into descriptions of more particular kinds of actions that are not appropriate. Again, the verb controlling these nouns is found back in verse three, that these things should not be mentioned among the Ephesian church. This verb of speech is interesting especially in light of these explicitly speech-related words. Thus, it here emphasizes an internal agency, that the Ephesians should not be mentioning obscenity, fool’s talk, or suggestive language. However, the external agency is still in play here as well: others should never associate any of these things with Christians.

Verse four continues with a relative clause, **ἀ οὐκ ἀνήκεν**, which stands in bold parallel to **καθὼς πρέπει ἀγίοις** in verse three, both calling the Christians to live lives that are proper for their new status. The relative pronoun in verse four is neuter plural, and its antecedents are three feminine nouns. However, *constructio ad sensum* finds no difficulty with this lack of gender agreement because the sense of the group of illicit activities is neither male nor female, but neuter.<sup>56</sup> Because of this, it is also clear that the relative clause refers back to the entire set of three before it. Furthermore, the verb **ἀνήκεν** is third person singular, as is standard following a neuter plural subject (here, relative pronoun), also following the same *constructio*

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<sup>56</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 337; see Robinson, *Grammar*, 713.

*ad sensum maxim.*<sup>57</sup> The verb (negated) gives the sense here of something that is not appropriate or fitting,<sup>58</sup> again invoking the same contextual soteriological and eschatological categories that Paul brought into view in the previous verse.<sup>59</sup>

After all that has come before—two triads, two dependent clauses, and the main verb, all continuing in one direction in thought—Paul brings into view another matter, a contrasting matter with the conjunction ἀλλὰ<sup>60</sup> augmented with μᾶλλον. Instead of the list of everything from sexual immorality to suggestive language being mentioned among the church, thanksgiving should be mentioned. Again, *εὐχαριστία* is in the nominative case, indicating it also is a subject of the verb ὄνομαζέσθω from verse three.<sup>61</sup> No verb is found in this clause in verse four, leading some translators to imply an imperative to be verb (“let there be thanksgiving,” ESV; see also NLT) and others to imply the imperative to be verb from the beginning of verse four (NIV, NET, NASB). Only the KJV and its close relatives continue to imply the verb from verse three, as is most faithful to the Greek grammar. The word is simply translated “thankfulness,” “gratitude,” “thanksgiving” and the like.<sup>62</sup> It is used 40 times in the NT, and 38 of those times it refers to thanksgiving to God, including the present usage.<sup>63</sup> Paul’s radical shift here shows that thanksgiving is fundamentally opposed to a life of sin; it “reorders

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<sup>57</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 337.

<sup>58</sup> “ἀνήκω,” BDAG 78–79.

<sup>59</sup> See p. 5, above.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson, *Grammar*, 1185–87. While ἀλλὰ is not contrasting in and of itself, the context makes the contrast clear.

<sup>61</sup> However, the negative impact of the original verb is lost here due to the contrast brought into view with ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον.

<sup>62</sup> “εὐχαριστία,” BDAG 416; “εὐχαριστία,” LSJ 738.

<sup>63</sup> “εὐχαριστέω,” NIDNTTE 2:334.

a believer's loves so that they are focused on God.”<sup>64</sup> Thanksgiving ought to be mentioned inside the church, and those outside the church should know the Christians as people who are full of gratitude.

3. *Verse Five.* While the whole of verse five does not belong to our pericope, Porter makes a strong case that the first half of the infamously difficult first phrase of verse five does belong conceptually with the preceding material.<sup>65</sup> The somewhat unusual phrase τοῦτο γὰρ ἵστε γινώσκοντες beginning verse five leaves many commentators admitting the ambiguity or unusualness of the grammatical construction,<sup>66</sup> typically either attributing the grammatical construction to some kind of periphrasis,<sup>67</sup> intensification,<sup>68</sup> use comparable to the infinitive absolute,<sup>69</sup> or some combination of these ideas,<sup>70</sup> and often arguing their position based on some kind of Hebraic background of the phrase.<sup>71</sup> These views have led to representative translations such as, “For you may be sure of this” (ESV), “For of this you can be sure:” (NIV), and “For this ye know” (KJV). In every case τοῦτο is considered cataphoric and the participle is forced to somehow be read dependent on the finite verb ἵστε. But the solution is much more simple than this convoluted one. First, as Wallace points out, a periphrastic participial construction is only proper with verbs of being, so the two verbal ideas are not conjoined

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<sup>64</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 167.

<sup>65</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “ἵστε γινώσκοντες in Ephesians 5:5: Does Chiasm Solve a Problem?” ZAW 81 (1990), 270–76.

<sup>66</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 563; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 422; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 659; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 362.

<sup>67</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 563; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 659.

<sup>68</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 480; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 229.

<sup>69</sup> Baugh, *Ephesians*, 422.

<sup>70</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 362, roots his periphrastic understanding in a Hebraic infinitive absolute.

<sup>71</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 563; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 422; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 659; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 362.

peripherastically here but must be considered individually.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, it is not altogether obvious that τοῦτο refers to what follows, in part because the anaphoric use is preferred over the cataphoric.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, if the verbs must be treated individually, it only makes sense that τοῦτο points to all that came before it, as Hodge argues.<sup>74</sup> In line with these observations, Porter shows that a chiastic structure is embedded in verses three through five, and the dividing line separating the chiasm in half comes between C and C', between ἴστε and γινώσκοντες in verse five, further showing that the verbal ideas are distinct.<sup>75</sup> One final issue is that the form ἴστε can be either indicative or imperative. The grammar of the sentence does not lead to a firm conclusion, though, with Porter, I believe the indicative is preferred.<sup>76</sup>

All of this renders one final clause from verse five that should be included to complete the sentence begun in verse three: “for<sup>77</sup> you know this,” with “this” referring back to the whole of verses three and four, the call to thanksgiving and the preceding list of prohibitions. A new idea then begins with the participle.<sup>78</sup> The participle then would properly then be read as an indicative independent participle connected to remainder of verse five.<sup>79</sup> Paul’s point to the Ephesian church is that they already know these things he is saying—it is not new teaching or

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<sup>72</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 647. It appears that most commentators are looking for some justification for reading the verbs together—as their proximity seems to indicate—but all fall short of making use of known grammatical categories.

<sup>73</sup> Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, 151; Robertson, *Grammar*, 697–98; cf. “οὗτος,” BDAG 740.

<sup>74</sup> Hodge, *Ephesians*, 207.

<sup>75</sup> Porter, “ἴστε γινώσκοντες,” 276.

<sup>76</sup> Porter, “ἴστε γινώσκοντες,” 276.

<sup>77</sup> γάρ, here, is more of a marker of clarification than a marker of cause or reason. See “γάρ,” BDAG 189.

<sup>78</sup> While the NA<sup>28</sup>/GNT<sup>5</sup> text supplies a period after the end of verse four, it would be better for the period to be placed between ἴστε and γινώσκοντες in verse five.

<sup>79</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 653.

doctrine. But the fact that he has to repeat these teachings is instructive for us today, that it is not improper to remind Christians of moral instruction that they have been previously taught.

For our purposes, it will suffice to say only that the remainder of verse five provides a stern warning against sin.<sup>80</sup> Appropriating the roots found in the triad in verse three, Paul states that those who engage in sexual immorality, who are unclean people, and who are covetous people will not receive the kingdom of Christ and God. Not only are such practices prohibited in verse three, but Paul here levies the greatest sanction—eschatological death—against those who practice them.

Thus, verses three, four, and the first part of verse five compose one grammatical sentence. The one verb, ὀνομαζέσθω controls all seven nouns, which are divided into two separate negative triads and one positive command to give thanks. Two dependent clauses are included in this sentence, each one describing one of the two triads. Finally, a concluding phrase emphasizes to the Ephesians that they have heard these things before. Now that the grammatical foundation, logical flow, and broad lexical categories employed in the sentence have been evaluated, we can look more closely at the whole of the interwoven tapestry of prohibited sins Paul hangs on this structural framework.

### III. BOTH TRIADS HAVE SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SEXUALLY-ORIENTED BEHAVIOR

Having laid out the basic meaning of verses three and four, the tasks now before us are to attempt to understand the connection between the items listed in the two triads and to see

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<sup>80</sup> For a taxonomy of theological interpretations of this warning, see René A. López, “Views on Paul’s Vice Lists and Inheriting the Kingdom,” *BSac* 168 (2011): 81–97.

what peculiar contribution these verses make to Paul's sexual ethic. Specifically, is this another generic vice list as that of Gal 5:19–21, listing an entire range of prohibited sins? Or is Paul highlighting the vileness of one particular sin category, as he arguably did in Col 3:5? Further, what is the contribution of this list to the Pauline teaching on ethics? In short, Paul has in view in these lists sexual sins, not a range of different kinds of sins. While some of the categories of sins he lists can include non-sexual sins, Paul is highlighting particularly sins of a sexual nature contained within them and warning Christians that this behavior is unacceptable for those who are in Christ. The primary contributions this makes is with reference to the verb he attaches to the list.

First, let us consider the triad in verse three: sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness. While some noted evangelical scholars disagree,<sup>81</sup> the specific class of impurity and covetousness Paul has in sight in Eph 5:3 is of a sexual kind, extending his prohibition of sexual immorality beyond adulterous sexual acts to other sexual acts not including intercourse and, importantly, matters of the heart.<sup>82</sup> First, Paul places ἀκαθαρτος alongside πορνεία in a list of sexual sins in three other places (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5) and continues that pattern here. Thus, as those lists highlight sexual sin, we have an indication that this one will do the same as it is unfolded. Second, regarding πλεονεξία, it is also linked to sexual sin. The word meaning “covet” in the tenth commandment, ἐπιθυμέω, is closely linked to πλεονεξία in

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<sup>81</sup> Baugh, *Ephesians*, 420; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 652.

<sup>82</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 561; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 165; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 228; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 205; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 320. Interestingly, Best, *Ephesians*, 476, thinks only impurity (and not greed) is considered in light of sexual immorality while O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 359–60, considers the reverse to be true: Paul refers to general impurity and a sexual kind of covetousness.

meaning.<sup>83</sup> While ἐπιθυμέω means “to strongly desire to have what belongs to someone else and/or to engage in an activity which is morally wrong,”<sup>84</sup> πλεονεξία emphasizes “a strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions or to possess more things than other people have, all irrespective of need.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, when the Decalogue connects coveting with sexual sin (i.e. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife,” Ex. 20:17), the idea behind πλεονεξία is also connected to sexual sin. Furthermore, πλεονεξία is also included alongside sexual immorality and impurity in Paul’s list of sexual sins in Col 3:5, and its use in 1 Thes 4:6 clearly has sexual sin in view.<sup>86</sup> All of this indicates that Paul intends “impurity” and “covetousness” to be elucidation in line with and anchored by the first item on the list, sexual immorality,<sup>87</sup> or, as Hodge explained, “Not only fornication, but every thing of the same nature, or that leads to it, is to be avoided . . .”<sup>88</sup> Thus, Paul’s first triad is laser-focused on sin of a sexual nature.<sup>89</sup>

Having established this, we can look at the triad found in verse four: obscenity, fool’s talk, and suggestive language. In a similar way, the explicit reference to sexual misconduct in verse three continues to illuminate the particular sexual angle of these words. The grammatical similarities between the two triads—same parts of speech, controlled by the same verb, use of

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<sup>83</sup> Louw and Nida place them one entry apart, at 25.20 and 25.22, respectively (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d ed., vol. 1 [New York: UBS, 1989], 291–92).

<sup>84</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 291.

<sup>85</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 291–92.

<sup>86</sup> “πλεονεξία,” NIDNTTE 3:781.

<sup>87</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 561; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 165; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 228; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 205; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 320.

<sup>88</sup> Hodge, *Ephesians*, 205.

<sup>89</sup> Some might argue that the differing conjunctions used—especially the use of ἤ which has disjunctive force—indicates that Paul is trying to articulate a difference between the various items he lists, specifically that he is not highlighting their sexual nature. However, the negative context severely ameliorates the perceived problem. See p. 6, above.

the same order of conjunctions—contributes to this conclusion substantially. Since the focus of the first triad is acts particularly of a sexual nature, it then follows from these similarities that the second is likely to focus on the same. To reach our conclusion that the emphasis on sexual conduct in verse three continues into verse four, we will consider how the content of each word in verse four can contain a sexual referent.

First, “obscenity” does include acts and words that are not sexual in nature, but it certainly includes shameful sexual acts and language as well. The word was even used by some as a euphemism for a certain sexual act, indicating the word’s place within the realm of sexual ethics.<sup>90</sup> Next, “fool’s talk” brings out not only a generic version of stupidity and foolishness, but, in Paul’s theology, a foolishness of worldly wisdom that is indicative of unbelief (1 Cor 1:18; 3:19); a foolishness that arises from a rejection of God as Creator (Rom 1:23, 25); a foolishness that embraces sexual immorality (Rom 1:24); and a foolishness that reaches its pinnacle of sexual distortion in homosexual behavior (Rom 1:26–27). Talking like these fools about sexual sin in a positive way is the aim of Paul’s prohibition. Finally, “suggestive language” can refer to any subtle attempt at humiliating another, propping one’s self up through witty speech. It does have overtones of sexual innuendo, though it is not blatantly a reference to “crude [esp. sexual] joking,” as many translators take it. However, translators are right to want to place the word within the context of Paul’s discussion of sins related to sexual perversions. Because of all this, Fowl sees these three items “working together to present a composite sketch of the types of

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<sup>90</sup> See n. 40, above.

speech Christians are to avoid,” standing in sharp contrast to Paul’s positive exhortation in Eph 4:29 to speak to build one another up.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, given the grammatical similarity of the second triad to the first and the fact that each word of the second triad has some reference to words or deeds of a sexual nature and creates a “composite sketch” of sinful speech, it is clear that Paul’s overall intent in verses three through four was to bring clarity to the Christian sexual ethic, how one ought not behave as a child of God. So, the second triad is simply a continuation of the first.<sup>92</sup> These six items should thus be read together as interlocking and mutually enlightening for us to grasp a fuller view of the ways in which hearts of men, prone to sin, might stray sexually.<sup>93</sup> In this way, this is not a generic Pauline vice list of various species of sins. Instead, the six items found in the two triads are more like that of Col 3:5, illuminating the various genera found within one species of sin.<sup>94</sup> Paul is expositing sexual sin.

Having considered the relation between the triads in Eph 5:3–4, the question of contribution of this list to the larger Pauline corpus remains. This is not the only place Paul forbids various kinds of sexual sins (e.g., Col 3:5). It is not even the only place where he calls readers to purity of speech (e.g., Eph 4:29). The primary contribution of this passage is grounded in the unique verb used to drive the entire discussion. Namely, these things should not literally be discussed among the church in Ephesus, and the Ephesians should not do

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<sup>91</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 166. See also O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 361.

<sup>92</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 654; Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 205.

<sup>93</sup> An example of this is how translators have translated εὐτραπέλια in 5:4 as “crude joking” or “coarse joking,” implying sexual jokes. While the word itself does not mean that, read in context of the two triads, Paul is clearly prohibiting those kinds of speech.

<sup>94</sup> Though while still recognizing that all sin ultimately flows from one fount, idolatry (Eph 5:5).

anything to give outsiders a reason to discuss them occurring among the church in Ephesus. There should not be a hint of sexual sin among them, or, as Calvin says, it should be “entirely unknown among them.”<sup>95</sup> Reading more figuratively, there is no room to compromise—not even room for a whisper or for private conversation about these things.<sup>96</sup> Sexual sin must be avoided at all costs, even joking about it and harboring covetous, lustful desires in one’s heart—and maybe even it should especially be avoided because its sinful nature is not obvious to everyone conditioned by societal mores. Paul forbids sexual sin of act (“sexual immorality” and “impurity”), thought (“covetousness”), and speech (“obscenity,” “fool’s talk,” and “suggestive language”).

The Westminster Divines’ exposition of sexual sin echoes Paul’s concerns. Sexual sin does not only extend to adultery and other sexual acts outside of marriage. Positively, the Divines state that God’s law requires chastity in affections, words, and behavior.<sup>97</sup> Negatively, they forbid “all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior.”<sup>98</sup> The Divines understood Paul’s call to sexual holiness and rightly applied it to the people of their day. Eph 5:3–4 is explicitly cited in reference to their mention of “corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto.” This does not merely refer to the passage’s listing of “foolish talk” and “crude joking,” but also because of the command that these things not be mentioned among the Ephesians.

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<sup>95</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 305.

<sup>96</sup> As mentioned p. 6 above, of course there is a proper place to discuss sexual sin (e.g., Paul’s letter and this paper).

<sup>97</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism 138.

<sup>98</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism 139.

To summarize, we see a recurrence throughout Paul's two triads on themes of sexual sin. The two triads are merely an exposition of different ways sexual sins manifest themselves, bringing attention to the importance of the church in Ephesus to stay on guard against these sins. Furthermore, our pericope's important contribution to the Pauline ethic is that sexual sin should not even be mentioned—Christians should stay far away from it. Next, we will attempt to develop how Paul's argument to prohibit sexual sin in act, thought, and deed might be understood in light of our contemporary context.

#### IV. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Writing as an apostle of the new covenant, Paul's exhortations apply to twenty-first century believers the same way they applied to those in Paul's day; no eschatological or redemptive-historical events have occurred between his day and ours. Thus, we also can existentially appreciate the gravity of Paul's appeal that it is "proper" for saints, beloved children of God, to abstain from these things (Eph. 5:3); it is "out of place" for us to not do so (5:4).

But still more can be said. Paul's vision of sexual purity stands in stark contrast to the "sexual licentious" culture of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>99</sup> Verses three and four may even be a

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<sup>99</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 164. See also Ladd, *A New Testament Theology*, 571; D.F. Wright, "Sexuality, Sexual Ethics," in Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 871–75, at 871. On the other hand, J. Edward Ellis, *Paul and Ancient Views of Sexual Desire* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 96–146, at 146, finds a number of Greco-Roman witnesses between the fourth century BC and the fourth century AD who "show an awareness of the dangerous power of sexual desire, condemn excessive overpowering sexual desire, and advocate self-control."

direct counter to first-century cultic worship of the goddess Demeter.<sup>100</sup> Certainly this sexual ethic set Christians in the first century apart from their neighbors. Christians today should expect nothing less.

Further, one of the central teachings of Paul here is that sexual matters should not be treated as amusement.<sup>101</sup> Having a sexualized wit is condemned. Frivolous speaking about sex has no place among the children of God. Paul wholly condemns illicit sexual acts and thoughts in addition to frivolous and amusing sexual talk. These were the areas in which sexual sin was possible in the first century: acts, thoughts, and speech. Christians today would do well to consider these categories of sexual sin thoroughly. “Locker room talk” is accepted by even American Presidential candidates as appropriate in certain contexts, but Paul forbids even such speech being mentioned among Christians. Jokes of a sexual nature are learned from an early age around the lunch table at school, so Christians must constantly be on the lookout for reverting to culturally-formed habits. Advertisers sexualize modern day possessions such as cars and body deodorant, and Christians must fight against buying into these contemporary thought patterns.

By the time of the seventeenth century, the Westminster Divines recognized that Paul’s teaching applied equally to another area of sin: sight. The Divines barred “lascivious . . . books [and] pictures.”<sup>102</sup> New visual technologies created new venues for sexual sins, and the Divines responded to these venues pastorally. They rightly understood that Paul’s exposition of sexual

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<sup>100</sup> Larry J. Kreitzer, “‘Crude Language’ and ‘Shameful Things Done in Secret’ (Ephesians 5:2, 12): Allusions to the Cult of Demeter/Cybele in Hierapolis?” *JSNT* 71 (1998), 51–77.

<sup>101</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 324.

<sup>102</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism 139.

sin is properly extended to sight as well. Not only can sight be considered a type of sexual covetousness, but it is congruent with Paul's fierce desire to see Christians avoid any stain of sexual sin. It takes little reflection to see that pastors in the twenty-first century must likewise apply Paul's ethical instruction to new visual media today. Printed and digital magazines provide access to images of pornography; movie theaters, plastic discs, and the internet provide ready access to sexual videos. All of these media are visual in nature. Just as hazardous, brand new kinds of social media provide variations on the same kinds of sins Paul explicitly bars: venues for anonymous and easily accessible sexual banter (speech); fodder for illicit sexual desires (thought); and fuel for real-life adultery (act).<sup>103</sup>

One precise application of this is visual media consumption habits of Christians. At the very least, if Paul is so adamant of Christians avoiding even *talking* about sexuality in these inappropriate ways, how much more would he condemn Christians *watching* sexual content? A plethora of questions about culture, entertainment, and art immediately are raised but cannot be explored here. But at the very least, Christians must take Paul's warnings here very seriously and think deeply about application to entertainment viewing habits. I am convinced that many Christians do not do this.

For various reasons, readers of Christianity Today were outraged when the magazine publicly posted a review of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a movie about sexuality and debauchery among financial elites in the 1990s and rated R for "sequences of strong sexual content and

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<sup>103</sup> One recent study shows how digital media has grimly affected societal notions of sexually and acceptable forms of adultery. Quin Monson and Scott Riding, *Adultery in the Digital Age in the U.S.* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 2017), accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.deseretnews.com/media/misc/pdf/2017-Adultery-Study.pdf>.

graphic nudity.”<sup>104</sup> What’s more, Christianity Today gave the movie a rating of three and a half stars out of four. Wilkinson for Christianity Today defended the review because it “serves a culture-making purpose: it helps us understand the world we live in new ways; it teaches us about and records our cultural history; and it helps us keep a pulse on ourselves and our culture. And when it’s written well, it brings us both insight and delight.”<sup>105</sup> Paul, however, renders a review of such a movie dubious. First, on a surface level, it requires the Christian reviewer to view explicit, sin-glorifying sexual content. As argued above, this is exactly in line with what Paul prohibits in Eph 5:3–4. Second, it provides illicit sexuality to be mentioned among Christians unnecessarily. A review is intended to create conversations and discussions about the matter reviewed. If Christianity Today was successful in that endeavor, it caused people to violate God’s law. Further, even if Christianity Today mentioned sexual immorality in the review to warn readers of the dangers of watching the movie, it put it in the light of a positive three-and-a-half-star review, so the result would be to encourage some to watch the movie because of the extraordinarily high rating. Finally, and equally important, it gives those who are not Christians grounds to mention that Christians are talking about and viewing content of a sexual nature. Christians are called to be holy and set apart from the world; Christians need not fear being labeled “puritanical” for following God’s law (though they should never desire public criticism or become Pharisaical in their approach to the law). We need to

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<sup>104</sup> Alissa Wilkinson, “Movie Review: The Wolf of Wall Street,” Christianity Today, December 26, 2013, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/december-web-only/wolf-of-wall-street.html>. Christianity Today had to write a piece explaining their position on reviewing R-Rated movies due to the backlash (Alissa Wilkinson, “Why We Review R-Rated Films: You’re a Neighbor Before You’re a Consumer,” Christianity Today, January 24, 2014, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/january-web-only/why-we-review-r-rated-films.html>).

<sup>105</sup> Wilkinson, “Why We Review R-Rated Films.”

guard ourselves before a watching world. Holiness is to be desired and pursued, and viewing a movie such as this does not have scriptural warrant.

## V. CONCLUSION

Paul's vice list contained in Eph 5:3–4 is a list particularly highlighting sexual sins in act, thought, and speech. Paul's logic is correctly extended to more contemporary issues of sin by sight. All four of these kinds of sexual sins are complicated and fostered today by new kinds of visual and social media. While the issues are complex, Christians must take all care to soberly consider Paul's teaching, especially in the midst of a culture that deeply resents biblical teaching on sexuality. May those who are struggling with sexual sin find comfort in God's promises that life is theirs in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. May they also see their sin as elucidated by Paul in Eph 5:3–4 as abhorrent to God and not proper for one who is a beloved child of God, causing them to turn from their sin and repent, only by the power of Christ's Spirit.

## APPENDIX: LOGICAL PROGRESSION AND TEXT-CRITICAL NOTES<sup>106</sup>

3 πορνεία δὲ  
καὶ ἀκαθαρσία πᾶσα  
ἢ πλεονεξία  
μηδὲ ὄνομαζέσθω ἐν ὑμῖν,  
καθὼς πρέπει ἀγίοις,  
4 καὶ<sup>107</sup>  
αἰσχρότης  
καὶ<sup>108</sup> μωρολογία  
ἢ<sup>109</sup> εύτραπελία,  
ἢ οὐκ ἀνῆκεν,  
ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εύχαριστία.  
5 τοῦτο γὰρ ἵστε]<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Note, the GNT<sup>5</sup> apparatus identifies no text critical issues for these verses, and Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2 ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Society, 1994), 539 likewise is silent here.

<sup>107</sup> The NA<sup>28</sup>/GNT<sup>5</sup> text (καὶ) is witnessed by many manuscripts, including P<sup>46</sup>, Ι, B, D<sup>2</sup>, K, L, 33., 630., 1505, the Majority text, the Peshitta Syriac tradition, and the Bohairic Coptic text (with slight variation) in addition to witnesses from Clement of Alexandria and Jerome. In place of καὶ, some manuscripts insert ἢ instead: A, D\*, F, G, ψ, 81., 104., 1241<sup>s</sup>, the entire Latin tradition, and the Sahidic Coptic text in addition to Irenaeus in the Latin version.

<sup>108</sup> An alternate reading (ἢ replacing καὶ) is witnessed by Ι\*, A, D\*, F, G, P, 0278., 81., 104., 326., 365., 1175., 1241<sup>s</sup>, 1739, 2464, the entire Latin tradition, the Harklensis Syriac tradition, the Sahidic Coptic tradition, and two to four Bohairic Coptic witnesses in addition to Irenaeus' Latin version.

<sup>109</sup> Instead of ἢ, καὶ is placed in its stead by P<sup>46</sup>, 629, and Cyprian.

<sup>110</sup> The text and punctuation reproduced here is from both the NA<sup>28</sup> and GNT<sup>5</sup>. See pp. 10–12, above, for why it is preferable conclude the sentence after ἵστε in verse five instead of at the end of verse four.