

Well, we have an exciting couple of passages here today, not to say controversial, but particularly relevant to us here today.

If we look at the passage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we will see one of the key passages in the battleground that is all around today.

Verse 3 says, in the NIV, "among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, because these are improper for God's holy people" and you will probably be familiar with the discussion that is going on around this issue, and will be wondering, perhaps, what the future will hold for us, for the Church of England and for the wider Anglican Communion. But that's not yet what I want to talk about.

There is a problem. And the problem is that I didn't read the whole verse. "among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, **or of greed**, because these are improper for God's holy people".

"Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

Now, except for the saving grace of Christ, it becomes much more an issue to each of us here this morning. And let's thank God for that, because we can all look our own lives, and even if we can say "no sexual immorality here" or even "not even a hint of sexual immorality", then we are still in big trouble, because of the problem with greed, or foolish talk. I know I am!

But out in our society, we don't have people lobbying for

equal rights for greedy people, even though Paul talks about the greedy or those who are in any way impure **in the same breath** as he talks about the sexually immoral. So let's not get any holier-than-thou ideas ourselves, because we aren't. There's a pass mark of 100% in God's tests, and we all fall short because not one of us is righteous. That's a very dismal way to look at ourselves, but it's true. Only by the saving death and resurrection of Christ can we have our relationship with God.

It was a dear friend of Viv's and mine who first mentioned this extraordinary fact to me: while people spend more time and effort talking about the issues of sexual immorality, this issue shouldn't be getting more publicity: greed is just as important, and it is just as much a part of our society, which is built on it. And it has become so much a part of our society that we don't even notice it.

Conspicuous consumption is a term used to describe the lavish spending on goods and services that are acquired mainly for the purpose of displaying income or wealth rather than to satisfy a utilitarian need of the consumer. In the mind of a conspicuous consumer, such display serves as a means of attaining or maintaining social status.

But when it comes to the rest of it, we've got to look at what it means to avoid greed and impurity. When we look at the words of scripture, we see that we are expected to submit to the government authorities where they are not in contravention of scripture. What does this mean? It means that we keep to the speed limit. Somebody was mentioning this very subject recently, and didn't seem to be taking it too seriously. It is! And what about jobs for cash? The issue of the cash economy and not declaring

income to the taxman is illegal, dishonouring to ourselves and dishonouring to God.

Yes, if we pay cash, then maybe the job will be 17½ percent cheaper, but that doesn't make it right. Even if we put the money we save into the plate here at church, that still doesn't make it right. And there will be people who say it doesn't make any difference, or that it's not important. I say to you that it **is** important, and that I strive not to pay for cash jobs in this way. And I also tell you that sometimes I have failed on this one, and sometimes it's almost impossible to get someone to put a payment properly through the books. That's very troublesome indeed.

In our gospel reading, Christ is accused of casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons. I'm not talking about that either, but about what he said in response. "Any kingdom divided against itself will fall, and a house divided against itself will fall." This has been true right through history: where there is division within a kingdom, or a house, or an organisation or any other body, then we can be sure it will fall".

We could look on Jesus' words as prophetic, describing the end of the Roman Empire in the sixth century. It suffered senseless violence as people split into two warring factions, the blues and the greens, which invaded the peace of families, dividing friends and brothers. There was crime and killing as the warring factions almost destroyed civilisation. The Dark Ages followed on shortly afterwards. There was no reason behind it. If people had an allegiance to one colour, they hated people of the opposite colour enough to kill each other.

But in honesty, while that is true, we must say that these words of Jesus stretch much further and much wider than just the fall of the Roman Empire. We can possibly see that the church is divided against itself at the moment, with those who do not uphold biblical truth pitted against those who do. Verse 6 says "let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." These are dark days indeed, and we must pray for a godly resolution to the problems casting a long shadow over our land and our church.

Yet we must turn away from all forms of darkness and be children of light, of which the fruit is goodness, righteousness and truth.

On the one hand, as Saint Paul says, it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret, while on the other hand, light makes everything visible.

"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

That's the promise: turn away from all the darkness and live as children of the light, finding out what pleases God.