

Imitate God, walking in Love

Message 17

3.5.23

Ephesians 5:1–14 (CSB)

Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, ²and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. ³But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. ⁴Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. ⁵For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

LIGHT VERSUS DARKNESS

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. ⁷Therefore, do not become their partners. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said:

Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

1. Be imitators of God...

A. That's a bold command.

1. Imitate God.

2. "In the early church, many new believers needed models to show them how to live a redeemed lifestyle, since up to that time their lives were shaped by a pagan culture."¹

3. Several times, Paul tells a group of believers to imitate God and Godly leaders so they may know how to live.

B. Paul gives strong instructions because ambiguity is the enemy of holiness.

1. "Did God really say..." is a powerful question that gets people in trouble.

2. All the details of Leviticus, and Exodus, and Deuteronomy made clear God's expectations of Israel and what holiness looked like.

3. Paul desires the believers in Ephesus to walk closely with God.

a. However, there are actions and behaviors that God will not tolerate.

b. If we partner or participate with those actions or behaviors, we cannot walk with God.

C. "Be imitators of God..." is a loving opportunity.

1. It seems restrictive, and it is.

2. The Church is the Bride of Christ.

a. We can only be betrothed to one lover at a time.

b. To use Paul's analogy in Ephesians, we can only be the body for one god at a time.

c. We must choose to either be the hands and feet of Jesus or the hands and feet of Satan.

¹ Mounce, William D. 2006. In [*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*](#), 352. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. To imitate God is to walk in love.

Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, ²and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

A. The Christian's walk looks like love.

1. We imitate God because He loves us, and we love Him.
2. If "imitation is the highest form of flattery," then the invitation to imitate God expresses love.
3. Think about it:
 - a. The King of kings and Creator of the universe allows us to imitate and follow Him.
 - b. It is an offer to learn in His style and His methods.
 1. Centuries ago, apprentices would follow a master and learn their style.
 2. Even today, students learn in the style of their teacher or hero, mimicking their songs or the vibrato in the voice or the colors in their painting.
 3. Children learn by mimicking the people around them, and the more the child loves the person, the more they mimic.
 4. Ephesians 5 is an offer to be an apprentice, a disciple, to Jesus, learning how He loved and how He gave himself for us.

B. The apprenticeship in sonship teaches us how to please God.

1. Notice verse 2 says Jesus "gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God."
2. This refers to the sacrificial aspect of Jesus' death, where He presented His blood upon Heaven's altar, described in Hebrews.
3. We cannot do that, but we can love God and others in a way that is a pleasing offering to God.

C. The calling we have, to walk worthy of our calling, is to live and model Christ's love.

1. A love that forgives.
2. A love that is faithful.
3. A love that endures.
4. Of all the things we are called to, every one of us is called to love as Christ loves us.

3. Sin is the "antithesis" of love.

A. Oxford dictionary: **Antithesis: person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else.** Their example: "love is the antithesis of selfishness."

³But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. ⁴Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. ⁵For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

1. Today, I do not intend to take time to define sexual immorality, or greed or what is obscene.
2. What I want to show you is that these actions and behaviors are the direct opposites of the life and love God has for us.

B. **When I choose these things, I reject Christ's love.**

1. Those who reject Christ's love have no inheritance in the kingdom.
2. **Therefore, it is impossible to live a life characterized by sexual immorality, impurity, greed, or obscenity and be a member of the kingdom of Christ.**

C. A key to understanding this hard truth is because of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

1. Paul wrote: 4: 30 ³⁰And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.

2. First thing to notice is that the Spirit is a person, for He can be grieved and disappointed.

3. Second, grieving is a response of the Holy Spirit living inside of a believer.

a. Paul is not talking to unbelievers here but to born-again Christians.

b. Thus, it is possible for believers to live in such a way that our actions grieve the Spirit of the Living God.

c. **God's love for us is unconditional, but not His approval.**

1. If God approved of everything we thought, acted, or lived, it would not be possible for us to grieve Holy Spirit.

2. Just because a child of God does something, it does not mean that the Father approves.

3. Paul says that if we participate long enough in those things, then we are cut off from our inheritance.

4. Thankfully, the Spirit lovingly convicts us to correct our path so we may walk "worthy of our calling."

d. That is why we are asked to live so we do not grieve Holy Spirit.

4. **Ephesians 5 warns believers about activities and lifestyles where the Holy Spirit does not participate.**

a. We like to quote the promise that Jesus "will never leave us nor forsake us" which is true.

b. Yet, it is also true that He will not go with us if we go to where He has said not to go.

4. My Jesus wouldn't do that?

A. But the Jesus of the Bible will.

Ephesians 5:6 (CSB)

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.

1. It appears that even in Paul's day, some people disagreed with this teaching!
2. Surely, Jesus is not that strict.
3. Surely, Jesus would not permit people to be punished.
4. Surely, Jesus wouldn't be so mean.

B. When we read Scripture, we see a Jesus that takes holiness, truth, and standards seriously.

1. So serious that He is willing to look people in the face and say "no". You have no inheritance here.
2. Yes, Jesus is loving.
 - a. But love does not negate or cancel out His expectations and standards.
 - b. If you want to walk hand-in-hand with Jesus, you can't hold onto sinful things simultaneously.

C. The believers in Ephesus faced a drastic change.

1. To follow Jesus, they had to give up worship at Artemis' temple.
 - a. Yes, it was part of their culture.
 - b. Yes, all their family and community worshipped there.
 - c. Surely, it wasn't that big of a deal.

2. Yet the worship of Artemis or Rome stood in sharp contrast with the way of Jesus.

a. So they had to choose:

b. A life like their Gentile neighbors and former way of life, or a new life like Jesus.

Prayer: *Becoming comfortable with tears of repentance.*

A. I feel like we are being called to imitate God more closely.

1. Part of that calling involves repentance.

2. If we stay full of those things which separate us from God, then we cannot keep walking with God.

B. But the Good News is that through Jesus, we have everything needed to win.

1. The Holy Spirit never asks us to do what He won't help with.

2. As we put away our old life, and put on the new, the Holy Spirit is there to ensure it goes on right.

3. When we are tempted, the Spirit gives us a way out if we will take it.

C. Through Jesus, you can walk a life characterized by God's love.

1. You don't have to live angry.

2. You don't have to live cursed.

D. This morning, I want to make the prayer time pretty broad:

1. I want to invite all who desire to look less like our old selves and more like Jesus to join me in the front.

2. If we need to repent, we repent.

3. Then we rejoice over what Jesus has done.

