

## Ephesians 5:1-20 – Imitating God in Love and Light

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Well it's a new day! We finally get to come back to church in person. We can see each other face to face. We can talk, we can even share some food after the service. It's like a new beginning for our church. And what better passage to look at than Ephesians 5, which is about living our new life in Christ. Now we've been given *some* new freedoms from lockdown. But we have been given complete, and eternal, freedom in Christ. But imagine if after all the restrictions are eased, \*schools decided to only do home learning. Imagine if all the shops, cafés and \*restaurants stayed closed and had delivery? That wouldn't make sense, would it?\*

Why would anyone want that? We want to live the way life was meant to be lived. In freedom and safety and face to face relationships. We never want to go back to lockdown, do we?! Well Paul says that now that we have been given new life in Christ, we can no longer live the way we used to live before we knew God.

One of the biggest misunderstandings people have about the Christian life is that it's too easy. When I talk to Hindus and Muslims about Jesus, they say to me, 'If Jesus died for you, then you can just keep doing whatever you like. Why would you want to do good? It's too easy!' But that's completely wrong. If you believe in Jesus, you're saying, 'He's my Lord. He's the boss. I follow him with my whole life.' It's worth looking at a couple of verses from last week again\*:

*Ephesians 4:17-18* So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.\*

We have gone from death to life. From ignorance to knowing God. From darkness to light. And going back to what we were is not an option. So this week, Paul goes on to show what a massive difference Jesus must make in our lives. Our new lives are a stark difference to our old lives. As different as chalk and cheese, day and night. The Christian life must be one of transformation, by God's grace.

### 1. From impurity to godly love

Now that we know God, we are to imitate him. Follow his example. \*When one of my boys was a toddler, he sometimes used to walk around with a toy measuring tape saying, 'pointy-eight two six... pointy-one five three.' It took us a while to realise that he was copying me from when I sometimes used to fix things\*. Even though he couldn't quite get the words right, he was copying what he was seeing and hearing. It's natural to copy those you love; those who love you.

Paul says that now that we are in God's family, we are to copy God our Father, and Jesus our brother:\*

*Ephesians 5:1-2* Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Love is to be the pattern of our whole lives. If someone was to describe you, they should be able to say, 'They are such a loving person.' But how do we know what love means? By copying God, and his Son Jesus. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. It was a sacrificial, self-giving kind of love. This is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's an active love that gives and gives, even when it hurts.

And that is completely different to how we used to live. Before we knew God, we ignored and rejected Him. And as a result, we were ruled by our selfish desires. We wanted to take and take what would fill our wants and longings. But now God has loved us and made us part of his family. So we are to love like he does. And to do that we must totally put off our old lives. So that not even a trace remains\*:

***Ephesians 5:3** But 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.*

The term, 'sexual immorality' means everything outside of a lifelong male-female marriage. That includes sex before marriage, adultery, homosexual relations, paedophilia, incest, and the list goes on.\* Now I think sometimes the church gets a bad reputation for being homophobic, or anti-gay.

But let me say two things: firstly, all of us are broken sexually. We all have thought, said or done things which are sexually immoral. Those who follow Jesus are no better than anyone else. We all come from a place of brokenness and need Jesus to forgive us and heal our sexuality. The desires and actions of heterosexual people have towards someone they're not married to are just as much sexually immoral. It's sad that because of the debate on same-sex marriage, people think we are especially against homosexuality. We need to love all people and invite them to find forgiveness and new life in Jesus.

Secondly, it's not up to Christians or the government or any human being. It doesn't matter what I think people should and shouldn't be able to do. God is the one who designed this world, and our bodies. So he's the one who says what's right and wrong. What's good for us and what's not. And he loved you so much he gave up his own Son for your good. And he is against anything that is not good for you. At the end of the day, we need to ask, 'Do I trust that God loves me, and knows what's best for me? Do I trust that his Word is good and true?'

What's most challenging for me is that he says there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or impurity or greed. That is such a high bar. I know that I subconsciously think, 'Surely, a little bit is ok. As long as I'm not hurting anyone.' I might let myself look at a woman in a movie. Or notice someone attractive at the shops.

But Jesus says, 'But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.' (Matthew 5:28). We are not just forgiven people. We are God's holy people. Set apart to be completely pure and clean. So even a hint of sexual immorality is inappropriate for us.

\*It's like when they report the death toll on the roads, how many people have died by a car accident. The news might say, 'there's been a hundred few deaths on the road this year.' That's great, but we don't want anyone to die, do we? We aim for zero.\* In the same way, we can't be happy with any sin in our lives. In eternity we will completely sin free. So we should always aim for zero.

And Paul goes from our thoughts and actions to our words. Neither should we have any obscenity or coarse language. Now that's part of our culture, isn't it? You might think, 'What's the harm in that?' The thing is, so often it's disrespectful of others, especially women. Or it puts others down to get people to like us. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, it's out of place for God's holy people.

Now we know we're not perfect. So we need to rely every moment on God's forgiveness and grace when we fail. But it's about a general pattern of our lives. Are we generally seeking to live a life of love, putting off our sin, and rejoicing in God's grace? Or are we thinking we can live however we want because of the cross? Paul has really strong words for those who think they can keep sinning without repenting\*:

*Ephesians 5:5* For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

So let us take as a spur from our loving God to live a life of love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

## 2. From darkness to light

The second great contrast Paul makes is that we've gone from being darkness to light\*:

*Ephesians 5:8-11* For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)<sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

He doesn't say we were *in* darkness. He says we *were* darkness, but now we *are* light in the Lord. \*Have you noticed how the flame of a candle doesn't cast a shadow? That's because not only does the light shine on it, but the flame itself is a source of light. When Christ shines on our lives, he doesn't just show up our darkness, he takes our darkness away and transforms us into a light.

Jesus says 'I am the light of the world.' (John 8:12) But he also says to his disciples, 'You are the light of the world.' And '...let your light shine before others.' (Matthew 5:14, 16).\*

We cannot come to Christ without being transformed to be like him. His light produces fruit in our lives. And Paul says, 'for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.' But darkness on the other hand does not produce any fruit. Rather, he calls it the 'unfruitful deeds of darkness.'

\*During the Billy Graham in 1959, around 130,000 people made commitments to Christ. It made such a huge change in our culture, that alcohol consumption went down, and the rising crime rate slowed down.\*

When the light of Christ shines on us, our hearts are exposed. And we can either run from it or be transformed into light ourselves. And the fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth are borne. Have you come to the light of Jesus? If you are here today and don't have a personal relationship with Christ, come into his light today. It is not enough to be a church-goer. Or for your parents to be Christian. Jesus wants to shine his light on your heart, and transform you into a light for others.

And if you do know Jesus, have nothing to do with the unfruitful deeds of darkness. Live as children of the light in all goodness, righteousness and truth. For now you are light in the Lord. Shine your light, so all may see Jesus in you.

## 3. From unwise to spiritual wisdom

We have a new life to live for God, so Paul says to make the most of it. Don't waste it, but learn how to please the Lord.

**Ephesians 5:15-16** *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

Wisdom is not about being smart. It's knowing how to live well practically. How to make the best use of the time we have on earth. Earlier Paul said that all of us at one time used to follow the ways of the devil (2:1-3). Here he says that the days are evil. We're living in time that is controlled by the evil one. The general pattern of the world is to waste the time it has been given. To spend it on selfish desires, which Paul called 'the unfruitful works of darkness.'

But because we have been freed from the devil's control, we can redeem the time. We can use it to serve the Lord. We can learn through practice what is worthwhile and productive and fruitful. As an example of the difference between wasting time and using it wisely, he compares being drunk with being filled with the Spirit.\*

**Ephesians 5:18** *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,*

The extreme of living for your pleasures is getting drunk. And it leads to one thing: debauchery, which is an old word that means indulging in bodily pleasures, excess, letting go. Just going wild. That's why the term 'getting wasted' is very appropriate. Wasting their time and their bodies. But we are those who have been given purpose and value and dignity in Christ. So we do not waste our lives by getting drunk but are to be filled with the Spirit. And it leads to so many good things:\*

**Ephesians 5:19-20** *speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

When he says 'speaking one another', he doesn't mean we don't sing. But the focus is on the truth of the words, which come from Scripture.\* As we sing to one another, we build others up in Christ. But it's also good for ourselves. Singing to the Lord brings us deep joy. We fellowship with the whole triune God. The Spirit fills us with joyful truth, as we thank God the Father, in the name of the Son.

Instead of being wasted by alcohol, we are renewed by the Holy Spirit. One of the stark differences I remember when I started taking my faith seriously was the parties I went to. In late high school, I remember going to my Year 12 formal after-party. People were trying to get drunk or high, and to take advantage of others sexually. But when I went to Uni and grew in my faith, I would go to parties with my Christian friends. And there was just a joy to them. People would play games and sing songs. They would be genuinely interested in you. And there didn't need to be any alcohol to have fun. It was like they were on a natural high. It was beautiful and attractive.

Brothers and sisters, we are to be wise in the way we spend our lives. Not wasting ourselves and the time, but using them to love others and to glorify God. How we use our bodies matters. Because our lives belong to the Lord. So let's turn our backs on the darkness, and live as children of light. For that is what we are. And let us imitate God and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.