

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 9: Walk in Love and Light -- Ephesians 5:1-14

Watch a small child for an afternoon and you will see something both funny and profound. The little boy stands the way his father stands. The little girl uses the same phrases her mother uses, in the same tone, often at the most inconvenient moments. No one sat them down and taught a class on it. They simply love the parent, and they cannot help becoming like the one they love. Imitation is the most natural thing in the world for a beloved child.

That is exactly the image Paul reaches for as he opens Ephesians 5. Therefore be imitators of God, he says, as beloved children. It is a staggering invitation. We are not merely to obey God from a distance like nervous employees; we are to imitate Him like adoring children, copying the family likeness. And the specific trait Paul tells us to imitate is love: walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The measure of our love is the self-giving of Jesus at the cross.

But Paul knows that love can be counterfeited, and he immediately draws a sharp line. The culture around the Ephesians, like ours, used the language of love to excuse all manner of impurity and greed. So Paul says plainly that sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness must not even be named among the saints, and that our speech should be marked by thanksgiving rather than by filthiness and crude joking. Real love and runaway desire are not the same thing. One imitates God; the other imitates the darkness.

And darkness and light is the second great picture in this passage. At one time you were darkness, Paul says, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. He does not say you were in the dark and now you are in the light, though that is true. He says something stronger: you were darkness, and now you are light. Your very identity has changed. So live like what you are. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but shine, until even the sleeping are awakened by the light of Christ in you.

Group Discussion: Paul calls us to imitate God as beloved children and to walk in love as Christ loved us. Why is imitation such a natural picture for the Christian life, and how is imitating God as a loved child different from merely obeying rules out of duty or fear?

Personal Reflection: Paul says our love should look like Christ giving Himself up for us. Whose good are you currently unwilling to sacrifice for, and what would self-giving love cost you there?

Read Ephesians 5:1-14

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 and 2 Paul calls us to be imitators of God as beloved children and to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. What does it mean to imitate God, and what does the self-sacrifice of Christ tell us about the kind of love we are called to?
2. The measure of love here is Christ giving Himself up for us. Where is your love for others still mostly about your own comfort and convenience, and who is God calling you to love more sacrificially?
3. In verses 3 and 4 Paul says sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, and crude or filthy talk must not even be named among the saints, but rather thanksgiving. Why do you think Paul links sexual sin, greed, and corrupt speech together, and what does it mean that these should not even be named among God's people?
4. Paul sets a high standard for what fills our speech and imagination. How do your words, your entertainment, and your private thoughts measure up to a life in which impurity is not even named, and where is God calling you to a higher standard?
5. In verses 8 through 10 Paul says you were once darkness but now are light in the Lord, and he calls us to walk as children of light, discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. What does it mean that our very identity has changed from darkness to light, and how should that change the way we live?
6. Paul says we are now light, yet there may be areas still in shadow. Where in your life is there a gap between who you are in Christ and how you are actually living, and what would it look like to walk in the light there?
7. In verses 11 through 13 Paul says to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead to expose them, because the light makes everything visible. What should the Christian's relationship to the surrounding darkness be, and how is exposing darkness different from simply condemning people?
8. Paul warns against becoming partners in the works of darkness. Where are you most tempted to quietly go along with what you know is wrong, and what would it mean to step into the light instead?
9. In verses 5 through 7 Paul says no sexually immoral, impure, or covetous person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God, and he warns, let no one deceive you with empty words. What does Paul teach here about the seriousness of persistent, unrepentant sin and the inheritance of the kingdom, and how does this confront the deceptive idea that a person can live in ongoing sin and still be saved?
10. Verse 14 calls out, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one area where you sense Him calling you to wake up and step into the light.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom, yet such were some of you, and you were washed; 1 John 1:5–7, God is light, and if we walk in

the light we have fellowship and cleansing; Matthew 5:14–16, you are the light of the world, so let your light shine; Galatians 5:19–21, the works of the flesh and the warning to those who practice them; Philippians 4:8, think on whatever is true, honorable, pure, and lovely.