

Lesson 8
Ephesians 5:1-21
Be Imitators of God

Introduction:

When our son was about 3 years old, he had a little, plastic lawn mower. He loved to walk behind Rob (at a safe distance, of course) and imitate his daddy mowing the lawn. On a much grander scale, we, as God's beloved children, are to imitate our heavenly Father. We are to become more like Him through the process of sanctification. Paul encourages the readers of his letter to "be imitators of God" in 4 ways. They are to:

1. Walk in love
2. Walk as children of light
3. Walk wisely
4. Walk by the Spirit

Before examining these 4 ways, let's first define the verb, *walk*.

The Greek word for *walk* is "peripateo." It means *to make one's way, make progress; to make use of opportunities.*

In the Hebrew, the equivalent word for *walk* means *to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self.* Thinking about both of these definitions (Greek and Hebrew), we could say that a simple definition of *walk* is *live*. A more detailed, biblical definition might be *to daily live our lives, empowered by the Spirit, so that in our choices, actions, words, and heart motives we become more like Christ and glorify God!*

With this definition in mind, let's look at the 4 ways believers should walk, according to Paul in this portion of Scripture.

Walk in Love

Read Ephesians 5:1-6

Our supreme and perfect example of how to walk in love is Christ (vs 2). He died for us, taking our sins and God's wrath for those sins upon Himself. Not only that, He gave us His righteousness! We are no longer enemies of God but adopted, beloved children, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and guaranteed eternal life with Him -hallelujah! Verse 2 also depicts Christ loving us and dying for us as a "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" which hearkens back to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The burnt offering, the grain offering, and the peace offering are all described as having a "pleasing aroma to the Lord" when they were offered up to Him on the altar (Leviticus 1:9; 2:2 and 3:5). Christ, the perfect, once for all sacrifice, had the same effect!

In stark contrast, verses 3-6, describe behaviors, words and thought patterns that are not pleasing to a holy God. These include sexual immorality and impurity or covetousness (ie. greed), filthiness or foolish talk and crude joking. These are all out of place, inappropriate and should *not* characterize the life of a believer! Instead, gratitude and thanksgiving should be traits of a believer. Paul goes on to say (in verse 5) that "everyone who is sexually immoral or

impure or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” In other words, if these are habitual behaviors or the lifestyle of a person, she is not saved and continues to be under the wrath of God! The good news is that at one time the Ephesian believers **were** *darkness* but now they **are** *light* in the Lord (verse 7). See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 to read how God transforms lives.

Note: Don't stop praying for unsaved family members and friends!

Walk as Children of Light

Read Ephesians 5:7-14

“In the Bible, light symbolizes knowledge, wisdom, life, salvation, hope, goodness, righteousness, and spiritual alertness. In contrast, darkness represents ignorance, foolishness, falseness and even death!”

Send the Light from Today in the Word.

In verses 7-12, Paul commands the Ephesian believers not to participate with the sons of disobedience in their immoral acts, their greed, etc. because that is no longer who they are. They are not darkness but light in the Lord! The fruit (or evidence) of being a child of light is a life that demonstrates concern for others, righteous behavior, and integrity in speech and character. As a believer lives this way, she will learn what pleases and honors God. The Ephesians are not only to avoid participating in and discussing sinful deeds (“unfruitful works of darkness”) but Paul tells them to expose sin. This should be done especially when sin is found in the church!

Commentators agree that verses 13-14 are an invitation to salvation in that when believers expose evil deeds and when they use God's Word to expose sin, nonbelievers may repent and be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. In verse 14, Paul paraphrases Isaiah 60:1-2.

Note: Don't stop sharing the Gospel!

Walk Wisely

Read Ephesians 5:15-17

Paul tells the Ephesian believers to examine how they are living their lives. They are not to be unwise (or foolish) but *wise*. The Greek word for *wise* in verse 15 is “*sophos*.” Biblical usages include *skilled, an expert; forming the best plans and using the best means for execution*. Paul also states that they are to make “the best use of the time...”

This is a reminder that we need to be good stewards of the precious time God has given us. We all have a certain number of days on this earth that God determined before we were even born. Psalm 139:16 says, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, *every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*” (Emphasis added). Our time is limited; don't waste it!

Paul goes on to say why they should make the best use of the time and that is “because the days are evil.” This can mean that, in an ethical sense, the days are bad or wicked. Or it could mean the days are full of labors, annoyances, hardships, etc. that cause pain and trouble. I believe both are true; don't you?!

In verse 17, the believers are told not to be foolish (literally mindless or stupid) but to “understand what the will of the Lord is.” The Greek word for *will* is “*thelema*.” Biblical usages for this word include *what God wishes to be done by us; commands, precepts*.

Think back to Ephesians 2:10 that says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**” (Emphasis added) Clearly, good works are included in what God has for us to do!

Walk by the Spirit

Read Ephesians 5:18-21

In the last 4 verses of our passage, Paul tells the Ephesian believers not to be drunk with wine so that alcohol controls their speech and behavior (drunken orgies associated with pagan worship were common in Paul’s day) but instead be filled with (or walk by) the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit was to control their thoughts, speech and behavior! The evidence of believers being filled with the Spirit was singing and encouraging one another in song, praising Christ in their hearts, thankfulness to God for who He is and everything He has done and lastly, humbly submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This last phrase, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” sets the foundation for the relationships that will be discussed in the following verses – husbands and wives, parents and children, bondservants and masters -with reverence for Christ being the motivation for subjecting one’s self to another’s leadership. More on this in Lesson 9!

Let’s close by reviewing how we can be imitators of God.

1. Walk in love.
2. Walk as children of light.
3. Walk wisely.
4. Walk by the Spirit. (This is actually the only way that the above 3 can be done!)

In summary, let’s daily live our lives, empowered by the Spirit, so that in our choices, actions, words and heart motives we become more like Christ and glorify God!

Application questions:

1. What do these verses teach you about God? Think in terms of His character, His actions, His plans, His provision and His priorities.
2. How does what you’ve learned about God change your view of self?
3. Is there anything you need to stop doing as a result of studying this portion of Scripture?
4. Is there anything you need to start doing?
5. What can you praise God for in this passage?