

IMITATORS OF GOD: LOVE, SEX, AND THE GLORY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 5:1-14 • FCBC • 07/23/23

Good morning church, it is a privilege to be worshipping with you this morning. If you are visiting with us for the first time my name is Ryan and I am the pastor for worship and counseling and one of the elders here at FCBC and I have the privilege of opening up the Word to us this morning. I want to start by simply reading our passage and then we'll jump right in.

This morning we're going to be looking at Paul's exhortation to us to be imitators of God in love, sexual integrity. And the temptation I fought this week was just jumping right into what that might look like for us as believers this practically (to just go right for the implications and applications of this text). But I want to pause pretty significantly to unpack that term "Be imitators of God." What in the world does it even mean to be imitators of God? I wrestled with this exhortation from Paul all week and I think if you can read right over that and go directly to the application and the "how" behind this call to imitate God without even a second thought (or a small mental breakdown), I want to gently but honestly tell you, you have WAY TO HIGH A VIEW OF YOUR SPIRITUAL CAPACITIES AND ABILITIES.

Let's go backwards for a bit. We've spent the last five weeks going through the imperatives of chapter 4. As Steve mentioned at the beginning of the book, Ephesians is really broken up into two parts; chapters 1-3 where Paul puts on display the glorious realities of the of the gospel. This is what we've referred to as the indicatives (declarations) that are so predominate in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians. And chapters 4-6 are what a life lived under those glorious realities looks like. We've referred to these as the imperatives or the commands that are so predominate in the last 3 chapters of the book. And so, before we move on, I just want to jog our memory for a moment and go backwards because I think that will serve us well as we get into the 5th chapter of this book. In chapter 1 Paul breaks down the fact that it takes a work of the entire trinity to bring us to God. The Father chooses a people for himself before the foundation of the world according to the good purpose of His will which brings Him glory and promises that remnant of people to the Son. He then commissions the Son on a rescue mission to save and redeem those people through His own blood giving us the forgiveness of our trespasses and the riches of His grace as an inheritance which Paul says He lavishes upon us (in other words he's not stingy with His blessing of salvation). And then the son commissions the Spirit which we see in Ephesians 1:13-14 as promised in John 14:16 and John 15:26 to seal or secure this promised hope of a people that will one day live with their God forever. The Father makes the promise, the Son makes the provision, and the Spirit guarantees our hope until redemptions done until we join in endless praise to God the three in one... and why does Paul say He does this!? It's as we sing "to the praise of His glory, to the praise of His mercy and grace, to the praise of His glory YOU are the God that saves!" If you've come in here this morning and are wondering, "Why am I here? Why have I come? I am overwhelmed by my sin and have grown weary of doing good, what could possibly happen this morning that would change my life, my outlook, or my circumstances?" It's this, you are beloved! In love he predestined you to adoption as sons and daughters through the blood of Jesus Christ, in love he

has called you and given you the forgiveness of your sins and the lavish riches of His grace, in love he has blessed you and called you beloved, in love he is making known to you the mystery of His will which is this great gospel that is making all thing new and right again, in love he has sealed you for the day of redemption despite your ever challenging growth and sanctification he will PERSONALLY see it through!!! That's why you're here this morning because Christ loves you and has called you to Himself! And that's just chapter 1 of the book. Chapter 2 Paul goes on to describe our condition and what we've been called from and called to. We who were sons of disobedience walking according to the passions of our flesh have been saved by grace. Not saved by our own hard work but saved by grace having been given faith as a gift to believe in God. This is not a result of our own doing rather as Paul says it is a gift of God, not of works so that our only boast is in Christ ALONE! This gospel of grace that levels the playing field for all of us, gives us a unity as one body so that you can't look over to your neighbor and say I was more acceptable than you were, more lovable, less dirty, just flat out better. It's so that in Paul's day the Jews couldn't look at the gentiles whom they despised and say "You have no place in this family" rather "this same gift of grace we've received as God's special people has been extended to you through the blood of Jesus, so that you are now as Ephesians 3:6 says, 'fellow heirs, members of this same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel'."

Over and over and over Paul is hammering away at this simple truth, you were saved by God, for God, and to God. To put it another way from one of Paul's other New Testament letter's "to live is Christ and to die is gain!" This is the most important thing about you, your identity in Christ, because that is what you were created for; to dwell with, fellowship with, and worship your creator! So why do I bring all this up again? Well, as we said at the beginning, we've spent the last five weeks going through these imperatives or these commands that Paul is totally unapologetic about. He's saying if your life has truly been transformed by the gospel it should look like this:

1. Don't lie rather tell the truth
2. Don't sin with anger rather be angry and don't sin
3. Don't steal rather labor with honest work so you have something to share
4. Don't speak corruptly rather use your words for building up and giving grace

These are all good things and should definitely characterize the life and living of a Christian! I mean who doesn't want an honest, gentle, hardworking, generous, and encouraging person in their life? I'd even say even non-Christians would consider this type of person to be generally good for their communities, businesses, and society in general. But I want us to consider something before moving on to our passage which contains another (what feels like) weightier imperative waiting for us in the very first verse of Ephesians 5. Consider this:

- There are plenty of honest, gentle, hardworking, generous, and encouraging people in the world who haven't been transformed by the power of the gospel. This begs the question, "What's the difference between a non Christian who's life can be characterized by these virtues, values, and imperatives and a Christian who obeys these commands from Paul and bears fruit?"
 - The power by which you accomplish these good works and...
 - The purpose for which you accomplish these good works

- And that's going to be so important as we look at this next imperative
- You see the power by which the unregenerate person seeks to be a decent person ultimately rests in and relies on SELF and the ultimate purpose for which they seek to accomplish these virtues is FOR SELF
- But the power by which the Christian can bear fruit of this nature is his/her UNION in CHRIST and the purpose for which the Christian bears fruit is FOR the GLORY of CHRIST

The reason why this distinction is SO important is because we get to Ephesians 5:1 and we see this command "Therefore be imitators of God." That's almost seems like an incredulous statement. "Really Paul, imitate God!? You might as well ask me to swim across the Pacific Ocean or jump to mars." God is holy, God is perfect in wisdom, love knowledge, and power. He does all things well. He is perfect in justice; he upholds the universe with the Word of His power. He never sins. And yet Paul seems still to implore us to this anyway and I think this is why he can do this Paul summarizes three chapters of indicatives (or declarations regarding your identity) and it's in the three words in the rest of that verse, "As Beloved Children!" You see, if we aren't saturated in the gospel realities of Ephesians 1-3, if we don't have a robust view of our identity in Christ, then we're going to read right over the phrase "As beloved Children" and not believe that imitating God, as Paul is understanding it, is possible. You see this is why Paul spends so much time unpacking the glorious realities of the gospel for us in Ephesians 1-3. He realizes the only power by which someone can imitate God is by the power of the gospel. And we throw that word around here a lot; the gospel, the power of the gospel, applying the gospel to our lives, gospel, gospel, gospel. It can almost become white noise. So, when I say that Paul realizes the only power by which someone can imitate God is by the power of the gospel what I am saying is "Christ's life and righteousness working in and through you, applied to you through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross, and working in you by the power of the Holy Spirit!"

- You see the Greek word for "imitator" of God in verse 1 comes from the root word: μιμεομαι (mimeomai) this is a verb and noun form from where we get our word mimic.
- But the actual word used here specifically in Ephesians 5:1 is the word: μιμητής (mimites) which is actually primarily a noun form.
- You might be wondering, "Why does that matter, and it matters because if we're going to stay consistent with Paul's line of thought through this whole book, we have to understand that being an imitator of God is not some impossible thing to be accomplished but rather a position in Christ to be assumed that yields fruit! I love how Calvin put it, he said:
 - This principle is followed out and enforced by the consideration that children ought to be like their father. He reminds us that we are the children of God, and therefore bear a resemblance to God just as an earthly son bears a resemblance to his earthly father.
 - You see this is as much about resemblance through identity as it is about bearing fruit through action
 - And that is really good news for us as Paul is about to implore us to do this is primarily in two ways in the text: by imitating Christ's love, and in our sexual integrity

So, with all that in mind: let's look at this first way in which we bear a resemblance as children of God and that's through:

- **Imitating Christ's love**
- Bears the question what does the love look like that I am supposed to imitate
- And how did Christ love us? Well, Paul tells us in verse 2 by giving himself up for us sacrificially.
 - Twice in this book Paul describes the love of Christ as a giving up of himself to the point of death. He says it again in verse 25 giving husbands an example of how they ought to love their wives. He says "as Christ loved the church and *gave himself up*" for her. He says something similar again in Philippians 2 talking about Christ's humbling himself to come to His creation and giving himself up for us in obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross. 1 Timothy 2:6, Paul says he gave himself up as a ransom for all. Or Galatians 2:20 where Paul says, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."
 - Paul seems to narrow in often throughout his epistles on this unique nature of Christ's love which is that of utter and total selflessness in a spirit of "giving himself up" in sacrificial love for his own people, for sinners like you and me.
 - And of course he focuses on this, this is at the very core of the gospel. In this act of giving himself up we see Christ's truest display of love which was sacrificing his own life for His enemies. He gave himself up for you and for me. And Paul says to us here in Ephesians 5:2 imitate that. And guess what, you actually can. You can die to self, and live to Christ and sacrifice for others, and give and live selflessly for the good of those around you and even towards your enemy because remember; You are a child of God, you bear His resemblance and the resemblance of Christ. You share the same DNA. Paul says it this way in Romans 8:11:
 - *the same spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (and that is the Spirit of God) dwells in you and is right now giving life to your mortal body*
 - And that is not only power to be saved but also the power to look like Jesus in the ways that he loves. It's power to change you more and more into the image of God.
 - God had Jesus give himself up for you so that through his sacrifice you might be able to give yourself in sacrificial love to others resembling the love of Christ. You see, you can't give what you haven't received but for those who have received the love of God, He has made them children of God who can live and act in the light of His love
- **He also calls us to imitate God in our sexual integrity:**
 - Verse 3 says not to let any immorality, impurity, or covetousness be even named among you.
 - Your Bible might say fornication but the Greek word for sexual immorality is πορνεία (porneia) where we get our word pornography and came to mean all forms of sexual immorality including but not limited to incest, prostitution,

polygamy, adultery, and any other form of sexual gratification outside of God's good design

- Something interesting to note about the word porneia, In the Septuagint, the term refers specifically to adultery and, metaphorically, to Israel's idolatrous betrayal of her marriage to God. I think this is significant because it speaks to the very nature of our sin which manifests in many ways but at its root is idolatry
- And Paul distinguishes sexual immorality from impurity which is the Greek word ἀκαθαρσία (akatharsia) this is the idea of general uncleanness, or filthiness. It's the idea of loving something dirty or corrupted from its original state of beauty. Paul uses this word over and over in the New Testament and it's often preceded by the word ἐπὶ (epi) which denotes aim or intention. In other words the intention is viewed as the basis for whatever act of impurity Paul is referencing. It's not just careless or thoughtless falling into uncleanness but rather an intention, pursuit, a trajectory driven by motive and desire.
- And then he says covetousness which is not a word we use often in this day and age. It's the Greek word πλεονεξία (Pleonexia) which is often interchangeable with the word greed. As a matter of fact Paul uses this same word in Ephesians 4:19 but there it is translated greed and not covetousness. And yet even in that passage was tied closely to sensuality. It's the idea this intense desire for something that's not yours and you'll stop at nothing to get it. It's this insatiable lust that tricks you into thinking you should have something that God never intended you to have, and you'll do whatever it takes to get it.
- Paul is saying let none of this be a part of you don't even let it be named among you. He says in verse 4 don't even joke about or talk about it or take it lightly.
- And then he says God is so serious about His holiness that anyone who is sexually immoral, impure, or covetous (which is ultimately idolatry) has NO INHERITANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND GOD.

NOW HOLD ON A MINUTE!!! Let's get really honest, you might be asking yourself and rightly so, Ryan, what does this say about me and my condition. I've been sexually immoral. I've been impure or unclean. I've coveted and lusted after things or people that aren't mine. Maybe the scarier thing is, if I'm honest my flesh still does at times!? I struggle. I'm a sinner. I've looked at porn or am currently looking at porn. I find myself as the psalmist says devising evil or ungodliness in my heart. There are moments in the idleness of time I find myself drawn to sin in my thinking, wanting, and lusting. What does this mean for me! That's makes sense!

- We'll look at two ways which we might be tempted to interpret this passage that we ought not to and one way in which I think we have an answer from Paul:
 - **Ignore it:** We might be tempted to make light of this warning and say, "God is benevolent and would never actually intentionally reject someone from his kingdom who sins like this. Who in the world could stand, everyone is a sinner which means no one would have access to his kingdom and his fellowship." And while I understand why we as sinners feeling the weight of our guilt and shame might be tempted to think that; I don't think Paul is lightening up here in regards to sin. He's not apologetic over God's standard and holiness. This isn't the first

time Paul has said this in regards to these sorts of sins. He gives a similar list and warning in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Timothy 1, 2 Timothy 3, and Titus 3. He obviously is trying to make a point about who inherits the kingdom of God and who God's people are throughout the majority of the New Testament. God doesn't capitulate with sin. You don't brutally kill your only son in order to make a deal with the devil. No, God sent His Son to die not to make amends with sin but to destroy it once and for all, defeating Satan and his enemies, overturning the fall and to establish a people and a kingdom where righteousness, love, and holiness is the very air we breathe. Let's not think Paul doesn't mean what he says here because he obviously does as does God who inspired Him to write it.

- **Earn It:** The other thing we may be tempted to think (and some certainly have pressed into) is that this is some beckon call to perfection and that any struggle with sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness (especially in seasons of intense struggle with sin) is evidence of disqualification from the kingdom of God and Christ. Oh church how we have such a limited view of our sin and depravity. We are so quick to measure our holiness by how much we are or aren't actively sinning but we forget that Christ didn't just die to atone for sinful acts, he died to atone for sinful natures. Inevitably in a body this size there are degrees to which some are wrestling with sin. Just because you aren't in the heat of the battle regarding sexual sin or perhaps other sins doesn't mean you are any less in need of a Savior than those who are. If that's the case for you praise God that He by His grace is giving you victory in certain areas of your life, He promised he'd continue shaping you into His image. But don't be deceived sin is deceptive and our enemy is smart and knows how to gain a foothold in our affections so take heed lest you fall. Continue to see that your nature is always in need of a Savior. But perhaps you are in here and struggling with sexual sin and temptation and are in the heat of the battle right now.
 - And listen just as an aside, let's not just reduce our sexual brokenness down to pornography only. Yes, that is a massive issue in our culture and not just in our culture but in the church. But there are so many other ways in which we fight against sexual brokenness in our lives. Remember Satan's strategy always is to take God's good gifts and distort them by telling us that there is a better way to enjoy what God intended; and there is no limit to that line of reasoning. He is crafty, he is a liar, and he'll say and do whatever it takes to convince you otherwise that God is good, His ways are good, and He is to be trusted. Marriages are broken sexually, single people are broken sexually, our children are broken sexually, the way men view women and women view men is often distorted and fueled by the enemies tactics. So, let's not kid ourselves. Yes, our sexual sin isn't less than pornography but we are complex beings so it is certainly more than that as well.

- So you might be in the heat of the battle as we speak and saying “what is wrong with me, why can’t I just stop!” I read my Bible and pray but it doesn’t seem to be working. Listen don’t stop reading your Bible and certainly don’t stop praying because those means of grace will eventually bear you fruit, but you aren’t alone in that feeling of failure. Listen to these words from Romans 7:21-25:
 - *[21] So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. [22] For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, [23] but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. [24] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*
- This is Paul talking here, the very person writing this letter to the Ephesians and giving this very warning. He seems to be well acquainted with the deep struggle against sin and he’s honest about it. He says “my sin is so intense it seems like there are two natures at war inside of me and that’s because there is.” We often say that God has saved us from the power of sin through the cross but he’s left us in sin’s affect here on earth until he comes again eradicating the very presence of sin and Paul’s just honest enough to call that reality out. He says I want to obey the law of God with my mind but often I end up serving the law of sin with my flesh!?
- And notice, he doesn’t say, therefore I’m going to do better and try harder and fix myself. He literally just throws up a cry to Heaven in verse 24 of Romans 7 “O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death!?” And he has an answer to that question which will lead us to our final point today.

If the answer to our question of, “What do we do with this warning from Paul regarding our future hope and inheritance” isn’t just ignore it and live with our sin and the answer isn’t we have to earn our spot in the kingdom of God and Christ by waging war on our sin and doing better and trying harder than what are we left with!?

- **Expose it:** This would be terrifying if it weren’t for the nature of our relationship to God in the gospel! This is why we spent SOOO much time in understanding our union with Christ before we jumped into this passage. Remember Paul’s words “As beloved children?” Because you are a child of God you’ve been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the beloved Son where you have redemption and the forgiveness of your sins. And you might say “yea but I still struggle with my sins...” and I’d say “I know and so does everyone else in here this morning who has a pulse.” But, you’ve been transferred from darkness into light. You’ve been given the forgiveness of your sins not the absence of them, at least not yet. Look at what Paul says in the following verses. The wrath of God (which is the rejection of those identified by their immorality, and impurity, and covetousness into His kingdom as we’ve just talked about) comes on the sons of disobedience, those still living in darkness and rejecting

Christ and his reign completely. But he says to these Ephesian believers and he is saying to you today, that's not your identity anymore! You no longer walk in darkness. At one time you were darkness but you are now light and get to walk as children of the light. What does this mean? It means you no longer have to hide your sins from the wrath of God but instead you get to expose your sins in the light of His love and watch Him forgive you of your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The vehicle we have through the work of Christ that continually draws us to Christ is repentance. Yea but Ryan, what if I sin again today, repent! What if I sin again tomorrow, repent! What if I keep struggling with this sin, then keep repenting! Repent to God, give your sin to Christ and confess your sin to one another! Exposing your sin to God isn't cause to run away from God, it's cause for God to draw near to you and cleanse you from all impurity. Don't get me wrong you can spurn and quench the Holy Spirit and create distance in your fellowship with him but only by not repenting of your sin. God didn't kill his own son for sin to create distance between you and Him rather He killed his own son so that you could have an advocate to the father despite your sin and that advocate is the man Jesus Christ! This is the beauty of the gospel, the beauty of your union in Christ, and the beauty of the Pauline epistles, you **can** be free from sin because you **are** free from sin because you belong to the family of God, through the grace of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in you and that's where Paul started this whole book and where we started our message today.

Be imitators of God in imitating the love of Christ and in your sexual integrity not in order to be children of God but "As Beloved Children of God." The kingdom of God and Christ is made up of those who resemble the Father and look like Jesus and they resemble the father not by not struggling with immorality, impurity, and covetousness, but by repenting of their immorality, impurity, and covetousness and repenting often!

- In other words the kingdom of God is made up of repentant people because repentant people reflect His holiness and want God. Unrepentant people don't care if they resemble God because God and an eternity with Him in His kingdom is not what their hearts truly long for!
- Church can we start normalizing our sin nature? Not normalizing sin but normalizing the fact that we are all in the same battle the apostle Paul was in wherein two natures diametrically opposed to one another are waging war over our affections. BUT, through the work of Christ and the gift of repentance we can walk alongside each other and encourage each other to be imitators of God. That means we can't gasp in disbelief when one of our brothers or sisters confesses sin to us as though we can't believe that their first father and mother were Adam and Eve like the rest of us. But instead, gently yet unapologetically come alongside one another and say, "Hey you're a beloved child, a child of the light, you can take that sin right to the cross of Christ and be freed from it right now. So, let me help you in your growth and fight to kill that sin or idol." And Lord willing they'll do the same for you!
- This requires us to be honest about our sin and to be vulnerable. Church, listen I am one of your elders and pastors and I am constantly fighting against my flesh. I have to fight the sin of sexual immorality with the help of my amazing, wise, and Godly wife in our

marriage and with brothers who care for my soul. I have to fight the sin of impurity and carelessness over uncleanness. I have to fight the sin of covetousness and idolatry lusting after and wanting what I don't have. I have a great need for a Savior but I have a great Savior for my need and so do you and I'd rather you know that and glory in a God who saves then pretend that's not true for some false sense of piety.

There are three things we can do this morning and today as we close:

1. So often I hear the question how do I get involved in ministry at FCBC. We'll I'm going to give you an answer. Look at the person next to you or around you and commit to saying, "Hi, I'm so and so and I am committed to your growth in Christ and would love to get coffee this week and ask you how I can pray for you and where you're struggling and how I can encourage you in your repentance. And then say, "Would you do the same for me?" There are roughly 1200 of us here at FCBC and there are 9 elders. Could you imagine if our entire church bought into the idea that each of us are responsible for and to each other as a family, could you imagine the affect? That's doing ministry in the local church, that's always what "doing ministry" in the local church has looked like!
2. Tonight we'll be coming back to continue the conversation on how we fight for sexual integrity in this church. If all we do tonight is encourage the conversation towards what God intended for sex and sexuality in His good design and how we so often fall short of it but have an avenue to freedom and joy despite our brokenness, then it will have been a success.
3. Start now. We are going to close with singing "O Come To the Alter" and while it is a beautiful song of repentance and salvation we want it to move from our heads to our hearts and act on it. So I'm going to ask you to do something a little uncomfortable and say, "If you're hurting and broken within, overwhelmed by the weight of your sin, Jesus is calling" so come up front during this next song and pray with someone. We'll have members from our sexual integrity ministry as well as members from our prayer team up here who would love to pray with you and minister the gospel of repentance and redemption to your soul. Maybe you've realized this morning I'm not bothered by my sin. Or maybe you've discovered that the power and purpose by which you try to live your life is ultimately self and not Christ. Then come, repent of your sins, confess Christ as Lord, become an imitator of God "As a beloved child" and find true and ultimate freedom from your sin in a Savior who loved you and gave himself up for you! Paul's final words to us this morning:
 - a. Ephesians 5:14: for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."
 - b. Listen, do you want the warmth of the light of Christ to shine upon you, come, repent, and believe

Let's pray...