



**Ephesians 5:1-14**  
**Be Imitators of God**

As we go through the book of Ephesians we've been looking at the ways God is calling us to change. We've seen that He has a plan for our lives. We've heard the call to put aside the old way of life and put on our identity in Christ. Now this morning we'll hear a call to imitate the Christ whose name we bear as Christians, and we'll be challenged to examine the new lives we've been given to see if there is anything that doesn't belong. It's hard stuff to hear sometimes, but there's nowhere else, outside the church, that these things are being said today and yet, as we will see, they are matters of eternal life and death.

As we have already noticed in previous studies, there are concrete examples of things we need to look out for in our lives. We'll talk about the desires of our hearts and the words that come out of our mouths. We're in a section of the Bible that is clear-cut, black and white, blunt and to the point regarding what should and should not be happening in our daily lives.

The Christian life isn't just ethereal or philosophical, it's real. And it involves real choices in your daily life that have real repercussions. It isn't just about singing songs to Jesus and having encouraging verses posted near your desk. It demands certain things of us, and Paul lays out a few of them in Ephesians. In Chapter 5 he's going to give us two lists of things that should not be a part of the Christian's life, each list has three parts. The first is a list of desires that come from the heart; the second is a list of things that come out of our mouth.

But first let's back up a bit into Chapter 4 in order to get the context. As we read, notice the distinction between two ways of life:

**Eph 4:17** This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, putting away lying, *"Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,"* for we are members of one another. 26 *"Be angry, and do not sin":* do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may

have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

**Eph 5:1** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Christian, this is a call to us today. This is direction for our lives. There are things we are not to do, and things we ought to be characterized by.

As we begin our study this morning in Ephesians 5:1 we're told immediately: "**Be imitators of God as dear children.**"

That's pretty good imagery, isn't it? We all know what it's like to watch children, especially little children, imitate mom or dad. We have stories, cute stories and embarrassing stories of when our children imitated or repeated something they learned from mom or dad. And sometimes, when it happens, someone else will say, "Well, we know who they learned that from."

That's exactly what we want to happen with us and God. We want people to see us do things, hear us say things, and think "Well, I know Who they learned that from."

We're told in verse 2 to **walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.**

So, we have a pattern to follow. And it's always this way, God asks us to show others what we have already experienced. We receive from God and then we reflect toward others. **We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).** We know what love is because the Bible gives us a definition and then we see it being worked out in Christ.

Of course, imitation doesn't just involve things we do, it also involves things we don't do. And that is where Paul turns his attention next.

He says:

**3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;**

Let's take a look at each of those.

Fornication is not a word you hear much today, it's a totally foreign concept in our modern culture. It's a myth to many people, because fornication is also translated sexual immorality and there's a militant effort underway in our culture to declare there's no such thing as

sexual morality, so there can't be anything such as sexual immorality. There is no right and wrong, anything goes. If you desire it, it's OK.

Meanwhile, God says He made sex and sexuality for a reason, that there are right and wrong ways to use it. He says that we can actually have corrupted desires, that we shouldn't trust every impulse our hormones generate. God insists that theology trumps biology.

The Greek word here, the one Paul first used when he wrote this passage, is *porneia* – the root of our modern English word pornography. Friends, there is nothing new under the sun. Sex and sexuality and things like pornography have been with us all throughout human history. But the word didn't mean exactly then what it means now, back then it referred more to the actions involved than some pictures or videos of those acts. *Porneia* referred to *all* sexual activity of any kind outside the boundaries of one man and one woman together in marriage. So, God's standard is that any sexual activity, outside the boundaries of marriage must “not even be named among [us] as is fitting for saints.” It is a rigorous standard, and it's meant to be that way.

There's no way to downplay it, there's no way to talk your way out of it. This is the holy standard of a holy God and you ignore it at the peril of your own soul. He backs you into a corner and says you either choose your own ideas about sex and sexuality or you choose Him, but if you come to Him, you're going to have to give up your ideas and receive His instead. It's worth it, it's totally worth it, but worshipping God may require some significant changes in your thinking, patterns, and habits in this area.

Next we come to uncleanness – the Greek is *akatharia* – you may recognize the root for what we call a cathartic moment or experience – a time of profound purification or cleansing – catharsis. But this has the prefix 'a' which means without that – *akatharia* – without purification, without cleansing.

It's a word that is used throughout the New Testament to describe a state of hedonistic indulgence and unholiness. You Bible students will recognize it from Romans 1 where Paul describes the descending spiral of greater and greater depravity that comes when we resist God. He wrote:

**Rom 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

**24** Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, **25** who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

That's a haunting quote from Scripture – that you could choose sin for so long that God would give you up to it and let you go farther and farther into what is simply called “uncleanness.” No wonder it is not to be named among the saints.

And finally, coveting. Coveting is a strong desire for something someone else has. It's #10 in the Ten Commandments – You shall not covet your neighbor's house or wife. It's OK to be inspired by others, motivated by others, it's OK to want to work hard to accomplish and achieve, but we have to be on the lookout for compulsive, overwhelming, ethically compromising desires.

Honestly, you probably have to judge this one for yourself. Fornication is something you commit; it involves actions in the physical realm. Coveting is something that happens in the dark corners of your heart. You'll need God's Spirit to bring you conviction on this one, and He will, if you're listening, if you want to hear. You'll know when you're coveting. Do a little self-assessment and ask – what do I want most in life? What am I trying so hard to accomplish or achieve? What do I feel so empty without? Are you coveting?

Christian, we are being called to regularly monitor what is happening in our hearts and, as we're about to see, what is coming out of our mouths. Remember, remember, remember, this all written to the Church, it's not written to the world of the unsaved. This is all coming from a letter written to a body of believers just like us and this is what God has to say to the church and Christians like you and me:

**3** But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; **4** neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Filthiness, foolish talk, and coarse jesting. Have you ever noticed that it doesn't take long before most casual conversation goes to these exact things?

When I was in the Marine Corps we used to joke that every entry in the Marine's dictionary began with the letter F. Curse words, profanity, obscenity, vulgarity, filthiness the Bible calls it, was so common that most people didn't even think about what they were saying, it had no meaning anymore, it was just filler for a corrupted vocabulary. When God grabbed my heart during my second enlistment, I remember how challenging it was to learn to speak with our filthy filler words. I had to learn adjectives all over again.

Filthy language is pretty easy to identify. But what about foolish talk? I'm raising children right now, and as many of you parents know, it's easy for young mouths to get silly and make a quick turn right toward potty talk. Foolishness comes pouring out of little hearts. In fact, the Proverbs teach us that

*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child;  
The rod of correction will drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)*

Foolish talk occurs naturally, it has to be driven out. It's like weeds in a garden. You don't have to teach people to speak foolishly, it just happens. But it's not supposed to happen with us as Christians.

And then there is coarse jesting. This is everything from teasing, picking on someone, putting them down because "that's just how we show affection," to telling coarse, dirty jokes – talking about, laughing about, things we're not supposed to be doing physically.

Christian, not only should these things not be coming out of your mouth, but as much as possible, you need to guard them from entering your mind. There are times when you just need to walk away from the conversation everyone else is having. There are shows you don't need to watch. There is music you don't need to listen to.

And listen, I get it – it's going to be awkward for you at times. I made mention a few months ago at the Men's Breakfast about my struggle with the Amazon series the Grand Tour – it's three British men taking cars all over the world and testing their performance to see what they're capable of. The car part of it is amazing, fun, interesting. But sooner or later the conversation among the hosts always descends into foolish talk and coarse jesting – sexual innuendos of all kinds. And it's just not the kind of thing that I could imagine sitting on the couch next to Jesus and saying, hey, Lord, watch this, You're going to love it!

Look, we've just got to be honest about it – your Christian faith is going to make you weird at times in the eyes of everyone else around you. You can't always please God and be one of the guys at the same time. We're called to *be imitators of God as dear children* and that means *fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, [must] not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

In both of these lists we're told certain activities are not fitting for us as Christians. It's below you, it's beneath you. In the military there is actually a law against conduct unbecoming a officer. In sports there is the charge of unsportsmanlike conduct. Many profession have a code of ethics. We understand the concept in so many other applications; the Bible is calling us to understand it as it relates to our status as children of God.

But the Christian ethic is not all negative, it's not just put off all of these things, it's also positive – do this instead. Imitate God, love as Christ loved, be His representative, be helpful to others in your life instead of pulling them down or leading them astray. Instead of using your mouth for filthiness, foolishness, or foul jokes, use it for *giving of thanks*, use it for helping others and praising God.

The tongue is a powerful thing – life and death are bound up in it. You can make someone's day or wreck their week with a simple comment or remark. And that is especially true of

those of you who are entrusted with leadership, whether in the home, at work, on a team, or in any other environment. When you, as a leader, speak words that are encouraging, inspiring, or when you recognize accomplishment or effort, when you give out praise or thanks, it carries weight. And when you speak with filthiness or foolishness, it carries weight too.

James puts it rather bluntly when he says,

**James 3:9** With [the tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Brothers and sisters, you don't have to like it, but you have to accept it: our words have meaning and affect people. And most seriously of all, they reflect what is already going on in our hearts and minds.

Which leads us to the reason why our desires and our speech must be different:

**Eph 5:5** For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Right here we find Scripture drawing a line in sand with culture. The Bible says, “**For this you know,**” or another translation says “**you may be sure of this**” (ESV) that God will judge people whose lives are characterized by sexual sin, impurity, and covetous desire – the wrath of God will come upon them.

Christian, right here you have to make a choice – do you believe that? Do you believe what Scripture really says? Because most people don't. They want to minimize these sins, they want to explain them away, they want to call them a lifestyle or make excuses. They say it's complicated. They shake their heads and say well, you've just got to get to know them, or they're just being boys.

But how does that line up with

**6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

God is trying to tell us, there is a direct line between certain behaviors and eternal judgment so don't let anyone brush it aside or tell you it's not a big deal. These things will be judged by God – they will bring about the wrath of God on people who are disobedient.

And that's really interesting to me because sometimes people make this artificial distinction between the God of the Old Testament who they portray as mean and judgmental and brooding and the God of the New Testament who they see as kind and

loving. That's a false distinction. God is God, there is no change. We find threats of His wrath and judgment in both Testaments because He is Holy and just.

We talk about salvation because God saves us from His wrath in Christ. The good news of Christianity is that Christ has come to forgive us for all these things. It doesn't matter what your sexual experience was, it doesn't matter what you have coveted, or how unclean you have been. It doesn't matter what kind of jokes you have told or laughed at or how you used to talk – you can be forgiven of all of it, in an instant, in a moment, by simply responding to God's call to repent.

No sin is big enough to hold you down or hold you back; you can be cleansed, washed, forgiven. And God promises He will never bring up your past again. He will make you new. But then once you're new, once you're clean, He says, don't go back to that old way of living.

**Eph 5:7** Therefore do not be partakers with them.

8 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,  
Arise from the dead,  
And Christ will give you light.”

Christian you have to understand, not all unity is good, sometimes there needs to be division. If your “friend” or “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” or spouse, or favorite show or brand, author or artist, or whatever is leading you astray, encouraging you to go along with empty words, you need to let there be division, even if it's painful right now, because sooner or later it's going to cause even greater pain when consequences or conviction come and bite you.

The Scripture says it is “**shameful even to speak of the things they do**” – but what fills your entertainment? What do the lyrics of your songs speak about, the videos you watch, the books you read – are there things you need to purge from your playlist or watchlist or DVD library?

Could you invite Christ to go room by room through your home or apartment, could you hand Him your computer or phone and say, here – take this and see if there is anything here that is unhelpful to me? I actually pray over any new electronics that enter our home that they would be useful to me and my family and would not lead us astray. It helps me stay aware of the danger.

What about the conversations you have, do you hear and tell dirty little jokes? Or ladies especially, do things devolve into gossip as you share about things that should not even be named among you? Brothers and sisters, what kind of stories do you listen to people tell about what they did this weekend or last night?

If you are a Christian, a transformation has occurred. There has been a real change – we once were one thing, “[but now](#)” ([vs 8](#)) we have changed, and we are encouraged to be what we now are. There is a new standard and it’s light.

If you’re going to imitate Christ, if you’re going to be known for being His, if you’re going to be in a relationship with Him, these things need to be driven far from your life. These are things that are going to cripple your ability to love others as Christ loves and grieve the God you claim to love and worship. Drive them far from your life and surround yourself with godliness and holy examples. You can’t imitate what you don’t know. So learn more of God, fill your life and your mind with worship and the Word. Put on Christ, even it’s an act at first; imitation is the most sincere form of flattery right?

But first, consider: where do you need to repent today – not just repent to become a new Christian, but today, at this point in your Christian life, where are you headed the wrong way, and where do you need to work on repenting? Even mature Christians still go astray and we need to repeat the most basic steps: to identify where we are going wrong and to repent, change course, and follow Christ more fully. We don’t want to get set in our ways, we want to seek out sanctification and purification – we “[find out what is acceptable to the Lord](#)” and walk in His light. We want to imitate Him as dear children. We want to love as He loves.

Doing all of that is going to require letting go of some things and taking up others. I can’t tell you what the exact formula is for your life, but I can encourage you to take it to the Lord in prayer. Submit your life to Him and let Him shape and mold Him for your benefit and His glory.

Let’s pray.