



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, January 12, 2025

Ephesians 5:1-7

If you have your bibles with you this morning we are going to be starting chapter 5 in Ephesians and doing a bit of a deep-dive into the first 7 verses. Last week Paul started to get into the nitty gritty of what it looks like to live as children of God and placed the emphasis that our hearts intent should be positioned so that we are not grieving the Holy Spirit - that our actions can either draw us closer into relationship with the Lord or pull us away. Now in chapter 5, Paul continues the same theming of this instruction and now opens up by calling us to be imitators of Christ:

Ephesians 5:1-7

'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.

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. 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. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Paul's instruction now is to be imitators of Christ. Which in and of itself is a fairly straightforward example as the act of imitation is something that can be easily grasped. Another way to say this would be to say to copy, to mimic or even more commonly....to follow. The Greek word that Paul uses here is the word, 'mimētēs' which simply means to follow. But notice that Paul doesn't just instruct us to follow Christ but now he follows it up with the call to follow as dear children. This is significant and actually changes the direction of the instruction drastically. You see, following as adults and following as children can be very, very different.

Generally speaking, as adults we tend to be set in our ways. Over the years, we have all developed core thought patterns, routines, and systems, and often approach life with a sense of independence

or even pride. As adults, we can be slow to embrace change, hesitant to admit that we don't have all the answers, and prone to analyzing and overthinking even sometimes, the simplest of instructions.

Children, on the other hand, are inherently malleable. In their innocence, they tend to be quick to trust, eager to learn, and ready to imitate the example that is before them. They don't carry the weight of pride or the illusion of having it all figured out. When a child follows, it's not calculated or skeptical - it's driven by a genuine desire to emulate what they see before them. If you are a parent here - this would likely make a whole lot of sense. Even as kids, if we can go back far enough I'm sure we remember times when we would follow or imitate our parents:

Example #1: I can clearly remember as a kid waking up in the morning almost every morning to footsteps pacing the kitchen and back-kitchen hall of our house (if you remember from a few weeks ago my room was in the basement so I heard all the sounds.....lol). but every morning, those footsteps belonged to my Dad as he was praying and reading His Bible before leaving for work. Even at that stage - even though I didn't imitate him in pacing the floor, I endeavoured to imitate the action of embracing prayer and the reading of God's Word in my life. I knew it was important so I strove to make it a part of my life as well.

Example #2: When my kids were younger, we would often read them books before bed and the picture Bible was one of Clara's absolute favourites. There were times where instead of Mommy or Daddy reading the story to her, she would endeavour to play that role instead. And she would try her best to imitate exactly how we would read it with all of the inflection, articulation, actions and emotion:

Show Clara reading book video.

This sense of completely innocent imitation and following is exactly what Paul is teaching here. It's not over analyzed or something that results in analysis paralysis, it's just simple faith and trust because they see us doing something and want to do the same. And so, the concept of childlike trust and imitation was central not only to childhood in almost all societies, but also to the way that disciples would have followed their rabbis in first-century Judaism.

In first-century Judaism, Rabbis always had disciples - students who followed them closely to learn not just what they taught but also how they lived. These disciples studied their Rabbi's every move, every word, and every action in order to understand how to live out the Scriptures. The goal was to one day emulate their rabbi so completely that they could teach and lead others in the same way.

There was even a common phrase among Rabbis and their disciples that went something like this: 'May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.' This was a vivid way of saying, 'Follow your Rabbi so closely that as they walk, the dust they kick up lands on you.' Obviously it's metaphorical language, but the idea is that if you truly wanted to follow your Rabbi, reflect their character and allow their life to shape your own, then it would absolutely require this kind of proximity in how you follow them.

So, when someone applied to be an apprentice of a Rabbi, they weren't just signing up to learn facts or memorize Scriptures - it was this level of proximity that they were committing to. It was said that in doing this they would be taking on the Rabbi's yoke - which is an interesting term - but it was a term that referred to the Rabbi's interpretation of the Scriptures and the unique they lived it out. The yoke was that Rabbi's set of teachings and instructions, and the disciple's role was to carry that yoke by living according to the Rabbi's way.

So, in Matthew 11:29-30 when Jesus says to the disciples to, 'Take my yoke upon you...' He's pointing them back to this well-known tradition of what it means to follow as a disciple. Jesus goes on to say though, that His yoke is different: 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' This was completely different from the heavy and burdensome yokes of many of the Jewish Rabbis. Jesus was offering a yoke rooted in grace, love, and even rest. And, He invites all who will, to walk with Him, not under the crushing weight of impossible standards, but in the freedom of a life shaped by His example of sacrificial love.

And the level of closeness and devotion that was exhibited with the Rabbi's and their pupils is the same kind of relationship Jesus invites us into. To be His disciple is to stay close enough to Him that His way of love, grace, and humility permeates every step we take. It's not a passive act; it's an active, intentional following - a willingness to be shaped by Him in every aspect of our lives. And as we walk in His footsteps, covered in His dust, we discover the beauty and joy of a life transformed by His presence.

Ultimately, the way we do this - Paul says - is to walk in love. I love what Paul is doing here. To me, he's giving a beautiful description of what it means to be a disciple. You see, to imitate Christ means to follow, and the way we do that is to walk - one step after another. You can't follow someone if you aren't willing to take steps. This instruction to be an imitator of Christ is so much more than just a mindset shift or a heart adjustment - it requires action. And this is why Paul says that we aren't just to walk aimlessly, but that there is clear direction and that we are, 'to walk in love.'

And, as imitators of Christ, who are called to walk in love, one might naturally assume that Paul would now give us instructions on just how we are to carry that out. Well, true to form, instead of giving us the positive attributes that walking in love entails, Paul now starts us off with the negative. These are the things that you are not to do as you imitate Christ by walking in love.

Now, as we walk through this list, I want you to see that Paul isn't throwing out random sinful behaviours here. He's pointing us to a deeper reality. A reality that imitating Christ will mean following after the things of the Spirit, not the temptations of the flesh.

And it seems that Paul breaks them up according to groupings:

The first grouping we see in verse three speaks to sexual temptation: Paul uses the words fornication, uncleanness and covetousness. Paul's reminder is that all sexual activity needs to be confined to the covenant of marriage between a husband and a wife. Anything outside of that covenant is therefore incongruent with the call to imitate Christ. And all three terms are connected:

Fornication speaks to the act of indulging in sexual temptation, uncleanness addresses the impurity of the heart and mind that drives such actions, and covetousness reveals the insatiable appetite for more.

And the focal point for all three of these is self-centredness. It's all about me and what I want. Which is completely the opposite to what it means to imitate Christ. Perhaps the first step in imitating Christ is to submit our will, and desire to Him and allow His will and desire to become our own. After all, this is exactly what Jesus modelled for us just before He went to the cross by saying to the Father, not my will, but yours be done.

Verse 5 underscores the seriousness of these sins, declaring that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous individual - described as an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. These are sobering words for Paul and serve as a reminder of the seriousness of sin. Paul reminds us that these behaviours are incompatible with God's kingdom because they reflect a heart centred on self - elevating our personal desires far above obedience to God. It's important to note that Paul is not addressing individual struggles here but a lifestyle characterized by these sins - a hardened, unrepentant heart that reveals allegiance to sin rather than to Christ.

In the second grouping, which is found in verse four, Paul now shifts the focus to the elements of filthiness, foolish talking and jesting. In the original Greek, all three of these elements share some-

thing in common and that is speech - that the words coming out of our mouths either speak life or death.

Both Matthew and Luke teach on this theme and this is where we read the famous line - '...out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks' - meaning that whatever is in there (point to heart), is eventually gonna come out there. (Point to lips).

Filthiness refers to obscene or shameful speech or behaviour that degrades others and dishonours God. Foolish talking on the other hand, refers to unwise, empty, or even careless words - gossip would be a good example. My father-in-law used to call this type of language, bottom drawer behaviour. And jesting, in this negative sense, refers to inappropriate humour that entertains at the expense of someone else. And, just like the previous three, the focal point for these three is also self-centredness - where it's all about me and what I want. And so, it's completely understandable to see how this kind of speech would not be appropriate for imitators of Christ - because this is not how Christ acted.

6 self-centred things that we are not to do as imitators of Christ, but now Paul gives us the challenge. Instead of these 6, we are to embrace giving thanks. How now does this single instruction of thankfulness help to combat: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, or coarse jesting? Well, quite simply, unlike the previous 6, at the core of thankfulness, is a heart that is focused on God rather than self.

You see, what thankfulness does is actually shift the focus from what I want - to what God has already provided! And think about it, if we are truly thankful with what God has provided, then it's a lot harder to fall prey to these things.

Thankfulness combats fornication, uncleanness and covetousness because it fosters contentment in God's design for relationships and sexuality. When we're grateful for His boundaries and blessings, we no longer need to seek fulfillment in sinful, fleeting pleasures.

And when it comes to filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting, thankfulness transforms our speech. A thankful heart naturally produces words that are uplifting and God-honoring. A heart of gratitude leaves no room for degrading or trivial speech because it focuses our hearts on building each other up and glorifying God.

Ultimately, living thankfully is a weapon against self-centredness because it turns our eyes away

from ourselves and towards God. It shifts our desires from what we lack to what we've already received. And in doing so, it aligns us with the heart and character of Christ, enabling us to live as true imitators of Him.

So.....what about you? What are you thankful for? What immediately comes to mind when I ask that? Take a few minutes and think about it. Now, take a few moments in silence and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what else you should be thankful for that may not have made the initial list. I think you'll find that the list that is starting to emerge may surprise you.

Paul now closes off this section with a strong call to discernment. To not let people with empty words distract or deceive us. I like how the message version puts it:

Ephesians 5:6-7 (MSG)

'Don't let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with Him. Don't even hang around people like that.'

The Message refers to these 'empty words' as religious smooth talk, which is soooooooo true! This is persuasive but empty arguments that seek to excuse or justify sinful behaviour by downplaying the seriousness that Paul has just warned us against. He's reminding them and us that not everyone who speaks the right Christian language actually has a heart submitted to God. Some may appear spiritual on the surface but lack true alignment with Christ, using their 'religious smooth talk' to lead themselves and others astray.

Paul goes on to say that God's wrath is directed toward these 'sons of disobedience' - those who persist in sin and refuse to repent. The warning is clear: don't give them the time of day - steer clear. Just to be clear though, this isn't about avoiding sinners in need of grace but about guarding against those who knowingly promote sin while disguising themselves as righteous - kind of like a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' type of analogy.

And listen, this call to discernment isn't as difficult as it might seem. Spend even a little time with someone who says all the right things but whose heart is far from God, and you'll begin to see the true colours of their heart soon enough.

This call to discernment fits perfectly into the larger theme of imitating Christ. To follow Him means walking in the light and truth, not being misled by voices that mask darkness with religious pretence. It's a challenge for every believer to test what they hear and ensure their lives reflect gen-

uine obedience to God's will.

Next week we will focus on what it means to imitate God as we walk in the Light, but for today, it's a reminder that we are to be covered in the dust of our Rabbi. To walk so closely with Jesus that His words, His actions, and His Love shapes every single step we take. Being covered in His dust means more than just proximity - it means allowing His example to transform us, replacing self-centredness with gratitude; replacing impurity with holiness; and replacing empty words with truth. It's a call to walk in love, in light, and in truth, following so closely behind our Savior that His presence leaves a mark on every part of our lives.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Blessing

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