

Follow God's Example

Ephesians 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:1

“Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children...”

We can find the theme of unity throughout the entire book of Ephesians. Yet it is easy to misunderstand the nature of this unity. It does not mean to accept any and every kind of people without discernment. This unity is found in Christ alone. When we examine America's national seal, and our coins and dollar bills, we find the motto: “E Pluribus Unum.” It means “Out of Many, One.” Out of many peoples, races, religions and ancestries has emerged a single people and nation. We are united in the idea of freedom, democracy, and equality. In the same way, those who accept Christ as Lord, regardless of their human backgrounds, become “one” as members of God's church. To accept Christ as Lord is essential to become one. To accept Christ as Lord means to submit to his Lordship. Christ is head of the body and the center of the church. Each member must live a Christ-centered life and grow to the full measure of Christ's image, that is, grow in godliness. Therefore, we can say that to grow in godliness is absolutely necessary for unity.

In today's passage we find the key words: “love,” “holy,” and “light.” These reveal God's character. God is love (1 Jn 4:8). God is holy (Lev 19:2). God is light (1 Jn 1:5). As we learned in 4:24, those who accept Jesus as their Lord are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. That means the seed of God's life has been planted in them and they grow in God's likeness. In 5:1-20, Paul gives more specific instructions how we can grow in godliness. Today, we can learn three ways to follow God's example which involve his love (1-2), his holiness (3-7), and his light (8-20).

I. Walk in love (1-2)

Verse 1 gives a general direction for godly life. It says, **“Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children...”** “Therefore” refers to 4:32: **“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.”** To follow God's example is to imitate his character in being kind, compassionate, forgiving, loving and so on. What? Follow God's example? The standard seems to be too high. Many people think, “Don't set your goal too high. If you can't reach it, you will be frustrated.” Then why did Paul direct us to follow God's example? It is because he believed God who is working in us. In Philippians 2:13 he said, **“...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in**

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order to fulfill his good purpose.” God is working in us! God is the one who set this high standard out of his love. God loves us so dearly, as his children. Sometimes we feel that God ignores us. But to God, we are dearly loved children. God loves each of us so much. As his beloved children, we should grow to the full measure of his likeness. That is God's heart's desire for us.

Verse 2 says, **“...and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** Everyone likes the word “love.” But people usually associate it with receiving love, not with giving love. However, love is giving; love is sacrifice. When someone is downhearted, giving them a word of encouragement is love. When someone is in need in some way, to provide for them is love. The greatest love is to give oneself up for others (Jn 15:13). Jesus' death on the cross is the greatest expression of his love for us. Jesus not only solved our sin problem, but he also became our example. 1 John 3:16 says, **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”** For example, when someone needs intensive care, it is not easy to help them, bringing them to our homes. This involves sacrificing our privacy, money, time and energy. I know one person who is practicing this kind of love, and I thank God. Jesus' love is acceptable to God as a fragrant offering. When we sacrifice ourselves to love others it is also acceptable to God. In this part, we find that God's example is forgiving love, while Christ's example is giving love. In order to grow in godliness we need to practice God's forgiving love and Christ's giving love.

Moms In Prayer (MIP) is a worldwide association of mothers of school children. Since moving to Portland, Oregon, M. Sarah Theresa Ahn has joined a local meeting and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. It began with five moms sharing prayer topics about their own children. Then they formed a circle and praised God, silently confessed their sins, and prayed for each child one by one. One mother of four has a biological son and three adopted children from Kazakhstan and Africa. Two of her adopted children are deaf and the other is severely retarded. She intentionally adopted these children because she knew they would most likely be neglected by others. She prays for them daily and serves them with love with all her heart. She is walking in the way of love and has become an inspiration to others.

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II. Live as God's holy people (3-7)

In this part, Paul tells us how to live as God's holy people. He warns against two groups of elements which Christians must avoid. And he gives us the reasons why. The first group is in verse 3. **“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.”** The words “not even a hint” tell us that these things should be completely absent from the Christian fellowship. The first thing is sexual immorality. This comes from the Greek word “por-ni-ah,” from which we get the word pornography. It refers to illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and intercourse with animals. In regards to impurity, Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23, **“For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come--sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”** These things ruin our personality. They are contagious like a disease, and quickly spread to poison the Christian fellowship. The problem is that we cannot manage these evils by our will power. We need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us, which alone can purify us from all sin (1 Jn 1:9).

Paul gives a clear reason why God's people should avoid these things: **“...because these are improper for God's holy people”** (3b). He who called us is holy, so we should be holy in all we do, for it is written: **“Be holy, because I am holy”** (1 Pe 1:16). Holy? What does it mean to be holy? Does it mean to engage in religious activity and walk around with an austere manner? No; it is far from that. When God called the Israelites to be holy, he gave them a different standard and way of life from the world. Paul said in Romans 12:2a: **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** A Christian's way of life is different from that of worldly people. Our value system is different; our way of thinking is different; and our world view is different. We have the great privilege of living among God's holy people. We must live holy lives out of respect for God and our dear brothers and sisters.

We find a second group of things to avoid in verse 4: **“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”** These are all related to speech. Here in the USA, we have the privilege of freedom of speech. However, many people abuse this freedom to speak without reverence for God or respect for others. They think this is their human right. It seems that most television shows these days are filled with this

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kind of speech. But this kind of talk carries poison within it. It can damage others' faith and purity. We should not be influenced by the world's language. Colossians 4:6 says, **"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt..."** We should always remember God's grace and be mindful of others when we talk. Thanksgiving should mark our speech (4). Thanksgiving leads to mutual encouragement and the building up of God's community. This honors God.

Verse 5 tells us the serious consequences of living an unholy life: **"For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a person is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."** Living in a world overflowing with these vices, it is easy for us to compromise. But to God, there is no compromise. After mentioning in verse 3 to avoid greed, Paul here points out that a greedy person is an idolater. We must take the greed problem seriously. In truth, greed is at the root of America's present economic crisis. A symptom of greed is obsession. So many people are obsessive for things such as money, power, fame, and so on, and they seek these things blindly instead of seeking God. Such people cannot have any inheritance in the kingdom of God. Many people think that it does not matter that they have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. But this is a very serious matter. Jesus warned again and again in the gospels that such people will be thrown outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk 13:28).

In verse 6 Paul gives another strong warning: **"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."** This is a warning against false teachers. In Paul's day Gnostics deceived people with the idea that the body is evil and the soul is good. They claimed, "It is okay to sin in our bodies, for they are evil anyway. Our souls will still go to heaven." In a similar way, in our time, some teachers deny the guilt of sin by means of science. They may claim that it is very natural to be sexually immoral or greedy as a human being. They even use empty words of praise to honor those who live ungodly lives. We should be aware that Satan is working behind such people. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44). His purpose of deception is destruction. So we should not allow empty words to deceive us. Rather, we must hold the truth of Jesus, which leads us to life, in our hearts. Those who are deceived have no excuse. They are disobedient. God's wrath comes upon them.

As a conclusion, in verse 7, Paul tells us, **"Therefore do not be partners with them."** This does not mean not to associate with unbelievers. If we try to do this, we must go live on a mountainside somewhere. But it does mean not to have

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intimate relationships with ungodly people through which we are badly influenced. To conclude this part on holiness, we Christians live in this world, but we do not belong to the world. We are not to be influenced by the world, but to influence the world as salt and light (Mt 5:13-14).

III. Live as children of light (8-20)

In verses 3-7, Paul gave strong warnings about what not to do. Hearing this may give us a headache. However, in verses 8-20 he gives positive instructions which give us hope and vision. In verses 8-14 Paul reminds us of our new identity and encourages us to wake up and live as children of light. In verses 15-20 he tells us how to live wisely in evil days. To live as children of light we must wake up and live wisely.

First, wake up (8-14). Look at verse 8. **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...”** Paul reminded them that they had been completely changed from children of darkness into children of light. How was it possible? When they were in the darkness they did not know where they came from or where they were going. They lived to gratify the cravings of their flesh and followed its desires and thoughts (2:3). So they were immoral, greedy and unholy. But the light of the gospel shone on them and they became children of light (2 Cor 4:6). So Paul explained that now they should live as children of light, and produce the fruit of light: goodness, righteousness and truth (9). One woman sought secret pleasure through an adulterous lifestyle. But one day, she was caught and exposed publicly. People were ready to stone her to death. At this critical moment Jesus said, **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” He saved her, saying, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”** Then he taught how to live in the light, saying, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).**

Paul teaches us how children of light live. The “light” metaphor describes Christian openness and transparency as we live joyfully in the presence of Christ, with nothing to hide or fear. Look at verse 10. **“...and find out what pleases the Lord.”** The verb “find out” means discovering through practice. Without practice we cannot know what pleases the Lord. When we were in the darkness, our life purpose was to please ourselves. But when we came into the light of Jesus, our life purpose changed to please the Lord.

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When we live as children of light, our light shines and exposes fruitless deeds of darkness and shameful behavior (11-12). Then what happens? Verse 13 says, **“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible--and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.”** This light brings about two good results. **First, the light exposes the ugly realities of evil.** Without exposure, evil remains a hidden poison, like undetected cancer. **Second, the light transforms what it illumines into light.** When Christians live in the light they help to restrain evil, reform evildoers and even transform them. So in verse 14, Paul concluded, **“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”** Joseph Murphy grew up in the turbulent moral climate of the 60's. He lived a carefree life, indulging in all kinds of promiscuity. He thought himself the lowest of the low. One night, as he lay on his bed, he had a dream, in which he was rapidly descending into a bottomless pit; it was hell. For some reason, he cried out, “Jesus.” Then, amazingly, he was rescued and woke up in his bed. After that, he began to study the Bible in order to know Christ who had saved him. Now he is a devout Anglican priest and a successful theology professor. In verses 8-14 Paul reminds us of our new identity and encourages us to wake up and live as children of light.

The America of 1806 was like a newborn child. People were free but poor and the nation was weak. Most young men simply tried to build their own families and live a comfortable life. Yet five students from Williams College in Massachusetts were different: Samuel John Mills, James Richards, Francis L. Robbins, Harvey Loomis, and Byram Green. They had a passion to extend God's kingdom. So they met in a grove of trees and debated the theology of missionary service. They were especially concerned for Asia. Due to a thunderstorm, they took shelter under a haystack, and felt compelled to pray together. The Holy Spirit worked in their hearts and left a deep impression. One later wrote, “The brevity of the shower, the strangeness of the place of refuge, and the peculiarity of our topic of prayer and conference all took hold of our imaginations and memories.” Later this became known as the “Haystack Prayer Meeting.” Many scholars now see it as the seed of a movement which inspired the sending of missionaries through churches, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Student Volunteer Movement and others. When a small group of passionate students prayed together Christ shone on them and they were awakened. Light began to shine which spread to the whole world. Let's hear the word: **“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

Second, live as the wise (15-20). In verses 15-20 Paul teaches us how to live as children of light practically. He begins by saying in verses 15-16, **“Be very**

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careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” We must live as the wise. Generally “wisdom” refers to the function of the mind to discern what is right and wrong, and to choose what is most valuable. This includes the way we use our time. We should not waste time. Everyone has the same amount of time. One difference between the wise and the foolish is how they use their time. Foolish people waste their time. But wise people make the most of every opportunity. Wise people set apart time to meet the Lord every day. They receive God’s wisdom. God’s wisdom is superior to any human wisdom. Wise people try to understand what the Lord’s will is instead of being concerned only about their own desires and pleasures.

People need a kind of joy living in this hard world. The foolish person gets drunk on wine or wasted on marijuana, which leads to debauchery and many miseries. But the wise person is instead filled with the Holy Spirit who gives perfect joy and peace with no bad side effect. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can speak to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. We can sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (19-20). We find here characteristics of Christian fellowship and worship of the Triune God; it is full of songs, full of thanksgiving, full of praise, full of joy, full of life. The Triune God is among us. As we recognize him and worship him, we encounter him. He is our source of happiness, joy and wisdom. This transforms us to grow in his likeness. Vibrant worship is important for us to grow and to shine God’s light into the world. Let’s follow God’s example by walking in love, living as God’s holy people and living as light in the Lord.