

Ephesians 5:1-14

Ephesians
Wake Up & Walk In Love

Shortly after it began in 1803, the Long Run Baptist Association, which remains Kentucky's largest Southern Baptist association, experienced an ethical dispute that caused its founding church, the Long Run Baptist Church, to split.

The argument began during an association gathering when someone raised a hypothetical question. They asked would it be right or wrong to tell a lie in order to protect a child hiding from an Indian raiding party.

The meeting took place on the burial site of Abraham Lincoln's grandfather who had been killed in a raid—the same raid that also came close to claiming the life of his son, future father of president Lincoln.

Church members disagreed so sharply over the issue that the association had to become involved by declaring those who would tell the truth regardless of the consequences, the legitimate Long Run church. The others left to form another church about twenty miles away.

Although they named themselves the Flat Rock Baptist Church, they were, for many years, referred to as the "lying Baptists."

One hundred sixty three years later, in 1966, just as our nation was entering into the throws of a cultural revolution. an Episcopal named Joseph Fletcher published his book entitled "Situation Ethics, The New Morality."

His book played right into the emerging drug, Beatles, eastern thought, sexual revolution, do your own thing mentality.

I know for many of you this is like ancient history, but I can't tell you how much these converging ideologies transformed this country.

Everyone of us sitting in this room have been imprinted by this cultural shift.

Fletcher was a key player.

This is what he wrote: "The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same, he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so."

In other words, our ethics aren't determined by truth. They're determined by what we believe is the loving thing to do. If Joseph Fletcher would have been a member of Long Run Baptist Church, he would have been a part of the "lying Baptists."

Fletcher taught Christian Ethics at Harvard Divinity School and was the first professor of medical ethics at the University of Virginia. He eventually gave up his faith and declared himself to be an atheist.

He served as president of the Euthanasia Society of America. He was also a member of the American Eugenics Society. The Eugenics Society believed in discouraging or preventing the "less fit" from reproducing.

The philosophy the Beatles propagated through "All You Need Is Love," Fletcher propagated to the religious community through Situation Ethics. The problem was, Joseph Fletcher didn't take into account a fundamental component of human nature. He didn't see people as selfish sinners.

What a contrast when we read God's word to compare it with our culture's fallible philosophies.

In opposition to our culture with its "shifting sand" approach to life, God says, "There is sin and there is righteousness. There is right and there is wrong. There is godliness and there is ungodliness."

Our study of the book of Ephesians has been zeroing in on what God says is right, and what God says is wrong. We've been seeing the do's and don'ts of the Christian life.

Obviously this isn't the most popular subject with most people today and yet God doesn't pull any punches when it come to ethics. For him there is no situation that justifies sin.

And as believers we are called to abstain from sin; to put off ungodliness and all unrighteousness and to put on the characteristics of God himself.

Today we want to pick up in Chapter 5 (**Open your Bible to Ephesians 5, pg. 1040**) and as we do we come to a challenge to walk in love. We're to walk in love, but it isn't going to be the "Situation Ethics" brand of love.

Love, in the Bible is not sentimentality. Love in the Bible isn't whatever I want it to be. Love is an action word that carries out its responsibilities regardless of feelings. Love is uncompromising and in the first 14 verses of Chapter 5 God tells us 3 things that love does.

These are three characteristics of a person who is really walking in love.

The first one is found in verse one and two.

I. Walking In Love Means Mimicking God **Read vs 1**

Here's the positive side of walking in love. The word translated "followers" is the noun *mimetes*. It's the basis for our English word "to mimic."

That's huge, isn't it? We're commanded to be imitators, or mimics of God.

Now you might say, "Whoa, that's enough to make me throw in the towel before I even get started."

"God are you seriously asking men and women like us, living in a world like this, surrounded by temptations, harassed by the devil, with wrong desires and motives within, to be imitators of God? That sounds impossible."

Of course to really answer that question we have to know what God is like. And fortunately we're not left out in the dark at this point because God has graciously revealed himself in the Bible.

From what we learn about God through His word there are actually 2 distinct sets of characteristics, or attributes of God. Theologians call these two groups, God's communicable and incommunicable attributes.

If your child has a communicable disease they have to stay home from school until their not contagious anymore. Communicable means it can be passed on.

The incommunicable attributes are things that pertain to God and him alone. Things we can't imitate.

For instance, its really tough to imitate omnipresence. Omnipresence is the attribute of God that says he is everywhere at once. That's an incommunicable attribute.

The same is true for omnipotence - all power, omniscience - all knowledge. Those aren't things that we can mimic. Those are attributes of God alone. They make, God, God. They are in God because he is God, and never in the Bible are we told to imitate those incommunicable attributes.

But there are other traits of God which we can imitate. He never says "be omnipresent as I am omnipresent." But God does command "be holy as I am holy."

God's attributes which deal with morality are the ones that we're to imitate.

God is holy, I am to be holy. God is righteous, believers are to be righteous. The same goes for his justice, goodness, love, mercy, compassion, tenderness, patience, kindness, faithfulness, forgiveness. Those are all communicable attributes of God and we are expected to live them out. We're to have them as part of our life.

That's what it means to "be followers of God." We're not just to be good people, or moral individuals. We are to be imitators of God. What a staggering command!

But why? Why are we to be imitators of God? Why are we to be mimics of God in our daily lives?

Read vs 2 Jesus Christ has given himself for us.

Jesus said, *greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

But then He went one step beyond that. Romans chapter 5 explains that God has shown his love toward us in that while we were enemies of God, enemy sinners, Christ died for us.

We love him because he first loved us. It was God who made the move towards us. And notice how Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is compared with the Old Testament "sweet-smelling" sacrifices that were presented at the altar in the temple.

There was a whole system of animal sacrifices which God set up for the Jewish people.

The animal was slaughtered in a certain way and then the fat and unedible parts were burned.

The idea behind "sweet smelling" lies in the concept of God smelling the smoke of an offering made towards him and being well pleased by it.

Now these sacrifices weren't pretty by any means. They were bloody and nasty. They were to drive home the point that the wages of sin is death.

You might wonder, what's with God enjoying blood and death? I thought He was a God of love and grace.

Here's why the sacrifices pleased God. Because His holiness was satisfied.

It pleased Him, not because sin demands death, or that his Son had to die to save lost sinners.

Instead, the reason that the Old Testament sacrifices and the death of Christ were pleasing to God was because God's holiness was satisfied by them.

The smoke of those sacrifices pointed to the cross of calvary which freed the love of God from the confines of his righteousness.

See, God being perfectly holy and just could never overlook or dismiss sin. Whether it was millions of sins or one individual sin, God would be unrighteous if he let sin go unpunished.

But in a sense that limited God's love. God was not free to show his love toward us as long as our sins went unpunished.

But when Christ died (which is what those animal sacrifices foreshadowed) our sins were dealt with. Peter tells us *who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree.*

The price of sin had been paid, Jesus cried “it is finished” and God’s holiness has been satisfied.

His innocent son died in the place of guilty sinners. And through the cross God’s love was freed to be shown to the world. And any one who would receive Jesus Christ as their savior would be forgiven of their sin and be born into the family of God.

We should be imitators of God and walk in love because Jesus Christ gave himself for us. That teaches us what it really means from the positive side to walk in love.

Love in the scriptures is about giving. Christ gave himself for us and so therefore we should give ourselves for others. Our goal as Christians is to be able to serve and to benefit one another.

Jesus said, *“If you love me keep my commandments,”* and then he said *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

So then, walk in love means imitate God.

But now true love can’t just condone that which is wrong. I Corinthians 13:6 says “Love rejoices not in iniquity.” Sometimes love has to say “no.”

I. Walking In Love Means Mimicking God

II. Walking In Love Means Rejecting Ungodliness

It’s not accidental that verse 2 describes the sweet smell of the sacrifice of Christ. The Bible now moves on to say that walking in love means rejecting ungodliness and his implication is clear.

Can we who were made God’s children by the purity of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ live a life that’s reeking and with the vile odor of sin?

Verse 3 - Read

In our confused society we’re told that love makes anything acceptable. Your ethics depend upon your situation and if love is involved it’s possible for some things that might otherwise be wrong, to be considered right.

God never says that.

God says ungodliness and sin have no place in a Christian's life and there are no extenuating circumstances to change that.

Isn't it ironic that those who try to apply the biblical principles of love are often criticized as being unloving because they don't feel free to override biblical prohibitions in the name of love.

So, fornication, greed, and covetous all should be foreign to the life of a Christian.

And notice how the prohibition is worded. God could have simply said, "Don't do it. Stay away from it all." But he uses an even stronger approach.

Let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints. Some see this as an outright prohibition against ever mentioning these sins.

That can't be true or the Bible would be violating its own command. In fact, there are times when sin needs to be called sin.

When I counsel someone involved in sin I get them to identify the sin by its biblical name. You wouldn't believe what an impact it has on people to call sin sin.

Last week Jim Johnson and I just attended a prayer breakfast for Goodnews Jail and Prison ministry in Anne Arundel County.

There were several pastors at the head table who took turns praying for the prisoners, the correctional offices, and for the volunteers who serve them.

The pastor next to me got up and told how he was an inmate and was in the revolving door mode of going in and out of incarceration. Then he met Chaplin Herm Fletcher.

He said, "Herm showed me that I didn't have an addiction problem, I had a sin problem. I didn't need therapy, I needed a Savior."

Today this man is serving God and other people because God gave him a new life.

Get a problem drinker to call himself a drunkard and you are on your way toward resolving his problem. He has to see it as sin with all its ugliness.

We talk about people having “an affair.” How charming. What a whitewash job. They need to see it’s fornication.

It does something for someone to verbalize that they are a “whoremonger” or a “thief.”

It pulls back the veneer that the world tries to use to cover up the ugliness of sin and exposes it. It prohibits people from justifying their sin. And until a sinner admits his sin there’s no hope of change in his life.

So the Bible isn’t telling us here that we can never say the words. In reality we ought to use the words a little more.

The real meaning here is that these sins, are to be so far removed from who we are as Christians that there shouldn’t be even an impression or a suspicion of their presence among us.

The Living Bible paraphrases this “Let no one be able to accuse you of any such thing.”

God forbid that society around us should be able to accuse the people of God of this type of sin.

The trouble is all too often the culture seems to be more aware of what’s out of place for a Christian than Christians are.

And so once again in Ephesians, we find commands to avoid the vilest of sins having to be written to Christians.

Verse 4 hits on our speech. **Read 4**

In this verse we’re warned against sins of the tongue, which in reality are sins of the heart.

Filthiness means “obscenity.”

“Foolish talking” and “course jesting” are joking about obscenity. The word translated “jesting” actually means “easy turning” and it refers to the ability to turn a conversation around to imply immoral meanings. This is quick wit in an immoral sense.

The NKJV says “which are not fitting.” Again God is giving the most powerful reason of all to stay away from sin.

The word “fitting” literally means “to come up.” So things that are “not fitting” all things that don’t measure up for believers. They don’t come up to our level.

We’d say that these things are beneath us. This is always the crux of the Biblical argument when it comes to morality. Immorality and sin, in whatever form, is beneath us as believers. It’s out of character for us.

What is to be coming out of our mouths is the giving of thanks.

Now you might wonder about the contrast here.

We’d expect the Bible to say, don’t let course language come out of your mouth, but instead speak godly words, or righteous words. Instead it says, “No immoral language that’s out of character, but instead the giving of thanks.”

Why thanks?

Sin is all about self. Satan’s counterfeit for walking in love is walking in self-gratification.

The Bible says we are to give thanks. Instead of seeking selfish things like sexual fulfillment outside of marriage, uncleanness and coveting we’re to say “thanks.” Nothing we can do will teach us unselfishness like giving thanks will.

So the Bible’s is telling us express your love to God and other people by saying thanks. Instead of wanting to take, love in a way that says thank you. God’s love is unselfish and thankful. The world’s love is thankless and selfish.

So then Christians are to walk in love and walking in love means rejecting immorality and the strongest reason that the Bible gives is not, “Look at how sin messes up your life, or look how families fall apart, or think about the price your going to have to pay.”

God's approach to personal morality in Christians is to continually confront us with the inconsistency of sin in the life of a child of God. The incompatibility of sin with who and what we are.

See, we could argue with all those other reasons. Don't we just think this way. We think, "They might be true in some cases but not in mine."

But this is the supreme argument for holiness. We can't rationalize this one away. Sin is unbecoming for a Christian. Sin is below the dignity of a child of God.

In fact, **Read vs. 5-7**

These 3 verses seem to really trouble some people. I believe it's usually because they are read out of context. You take these verses out of context and 2 things will happen.

1. You'll come up with an unbiblical view of the doctrine of salvation.

2. You'll completely miss the thrust of Paul's challenge to godliness.

Let me show you what I mean.

There are 2 common false interpretations of these verses and the parallel passages in I Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5.

One line of reasoning goes this way, if an unclean person has no inheritance in God's kingdom and ultimately experiences God's wrath, then even if you have received Christ as Savior you'd better watch it because your sin is going to cause you to lose your salvation.

The problem with that view is obvious. It makes a division of sin into mortal and venial sins.

It says there are some sins that won't condemn you and others that will.

See we all sin. John said, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Sin is missing the mark of God's perfection and we all do that daily. But some people view those as venial sins. They are not right, but they don't keep use out of heaven.

But the biggies - they bring God's judgment. Adultery, fornication, murder, idolatry. Do something really bad and you've blown it, but do something not so bad and your ok.

Well, God doesn't operate that way. Sin is sin. That's why Christ had to die.

The Apostle Paul preached in the synagogue at Antioch and said, *and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.* Acts 13:39

He wrote to Titus and said *"Who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity."* Titus 2:14.

Christ died for all sin and when we put our trust in Him, we're forgiven of all sin. If we weren't we'd all end up in hell. That's why we have to have the righteousness of God imputed to us because God doesn't accept good people, He only accepts perfection.

A second line of reasoning sounds more spiritual then the "loose your salvation" approach but it is just as deadly. This is the one you'll read in 90% of the commentaries you pick up. This view says that the Bible is warning people to examine their lives to see if they are true believers or not. And the argument is, if you really are a Christian you wouldn't ever do these things. If you really, truly are saved you could never be covetous, unclean, or an idolater.

Oh, if that were only true it would make the Christian life a lot easier, wouldn't it? If it were only true that once you became a Christian your life would instantly change and you could never be plagued by sin again.

But that's not the way it is. And because it is not that way is exactly the reason that Paul has had to say - stop stealing, stop lying, stop being defensive, stop grieving the Holy Spirit, stop improper anger and wrath and bitterness and stop sexual immorality.

Like it or not, Christians sin.

Chapters 4, 5 & 6 of this book are all warning after warning to stop sinning. The first 3 chapters tell us what God has done to enable us to stop sinning and the last 3 chapters give us the specifics of what we are to avoid.

Now, please don't misunderstand what I'm trying to say here. I'm not stressing the fact that we all sin, in order to justify sin. Just the opposite. I'm stressing the fact that we all sin so that you understand the Bible's challenge to us. It's not stop sinning so that you can become a Christian. It's stop sinning because you are a Christian!

Look at verse 7 again. *Therefore do not be partakers with them.*

Don't you saints, you children of God, partake in the sins of these children of disobedience who have not obeyed the gospel.

God is going to judge the unsaved world for their sins therefore it is totally out of character for you to be involved in those sins.

"For" Read 8 - 10

Before you were saved you were darkness. Colossians 1 says that God delivered us from the power of darkness. Now you are light. Live as children of light.

God is light and in him is no darkness. We are children of God so we're children of light. The argument hasn't changed. it's still the same - be what you are.

Be filled with the Spirit and your life will be filled with goodness and righteousness and you will demonstrate (prove) what is acceptable to the Lord.

See this is a gripping, compelling, challenge that scripture is giving us here and if we misinterprets what it says, we miss the impact of that challenge.

To be partakers with the sins of the children of darkness is unthinkable in God's mind, and it should be our minds too.

I. Walking In Love Means Mimicking God

II. Walking In Love Means Rejecting Ungodliness

III. Walking In Love Means Exposing Darkness

Read vs. 11 & 12

A couple of observations:

1) We're not to have SOME fellowship with the sins of this world in which we live. But God says we are to have absolutely NO fellowship with them. No playing around with sin.

2) It's not the workers of darkness but it's the works of darkness that we're to avoid.

In Corinthians 5 Paul explains that he had written a previous letter to the church there, warning them not to company with fornicators. He meant people who claim to be Christians but are fornicators, but they took him to mean people in general.

So Paul explains, *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.* I Corinthians 5:10

The only way to get away from all this stuff would be to leave this world, but we are in the world. Not of it but in it, and we're here as lights of the world.

And the children of light are here to expose the works of darkness.

3) Sin never does anybody any good. The reason we sin is because we think we're going to get something out of it. But God says that sin is "unfruitful" and how true that is. Sin promises everything and delivers nothing. It never satisfies.

So God's instructions are clear. The loving thing to do is not to mingle freely with those things that oppose God.

In our contemporary society the loving thing to do is to tolerate everything everybody does on the assumption that everybody's got the right to do as he wishes. To disagree with that "right" is to be a narrow-minded bigot.

And so often our society presents the works of darkness as "works of art" or "freedom of expression" or "freedom of choice," "sexual preference" These are all camouflages. We're to expose the works of darkness.

But, how do we do that?

Do we become a bunch of Pharisees denouncing everyone around us and praying “God thank you I’m not a sinner like other men.” Do we set ourselves up as judges for everybody else’s life?

The answer is in vs. 13 **Read 13**

If we are mimics of God then we’re living as children of light. We’re chips off the old block. We’re just like our dad! And just as our heavenly father is light, we will be light in the Lord. Light exposes the things of darkness. It makes them evident.

Remember, prostitutes, extortionists, and sinners were attracted to Jesus Christ while he was on earth. They were repelled by the self-righteous religious Pharisees, but were attracted to the true holiness they saw in Christ.

Even though his purity exposed their unrighteousness, they still wanted to be with him because it was obvious that he had something in his life that they all wanted. He had peace. He was genuine.

That’s what it means to expose the works of darkness. It means to live as godly individuals so that through our lives, and our speech, and everything that we are, people are shown the reality of Christ.

See what happens when children of God live as if they still children of darkness. The world goes on groping, unable to find the way. Stumbling through life. Because those who are supposed to be lights are not.

Therefore he says... **Read vs. 14**

Wake up. The people of the world around you are dead in trespasses and sins. Don’t be partakers with them. Don’t have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Stand up from the dead. Walk as children of light.

Get up and let Christ shine on you so that you can reflect his light to others.

There’s a lot of sleeping Christians in the world today. A lot of Christians who should be walking in love but instead their blending right in with the darkness,

living unproductive lives, while the world around them stumbles blindly from the kingdom of darkness into everlasting darkness.

Jesus said.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Are you shining in the world today?

Is your life drawing people, even though it exposes their sin, because it's obvious that your walk with God is real?