SESSION 10
WALKING IN LOVE

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

1 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. 3 But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. 4 Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. 5 For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. 7 Therefore, do not become their partners. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth— 10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. 13 Everything exposed by the light is made visible, for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A To model our lives after God and His character (Lev. 19:2; 1 Cor. 11:1).
B Since Christians are sons and daughters of God through Jesus, we’re to live like our Father.
C “Value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others” (AMP); “Live a life of love” (NCV).
D Christ’s willingness to offer Himself for our sins honored the Father (Matt. 26:42).
E Refers to any sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19)
F “Covetousness” (ESV)
G Paul called the church to live in line with their status before God.
H Sins of the tongue; Jesus told us what comes out of our mouths reveals our hearts (Matt. 12:34).
I Those who are living the sins in verse 3 are at their hearts idolaters and “cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).
J As a result of their unrepentant sin, they can’t inherit eternal life (Rom. 2:5).
K Referring to those who claimed God won’t punish those living in unrepentant sin (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
L The outcome and proof of being in the light will be a life that reflects Christ (Matt. 12:33-37).
M “Try to learn what pleases the Lord” (NCV)
N A call for repentance: “Christ will show you the light” (The Message; also see Isa. 60:1).
1. IMITATE (Eph. 5:1-2)
   • Paul called for his readers to be imitators of God, just like a child imitates his or her father.
   • This imitation includes expressing God’s sacrificial love to all people.

2. ISOLATE (Eph. 5:3-7)
   • Paul counseled his readers to remove themselves from any activity or group that displays behavior contrary to God’s character.
   • Emphasize the importance of Christian partnerships.

3. ILLUMINATE (Eph. 5:8-14)
   • Paul challenged his readers to live as light in a dark world, producing actions that please God and that expose ungodly actions.
   • Emphasize the importance of humbly and lovingly confronting others about their sinful choices.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.
   • Believers are to be imitators of God, expressing His love to all.
   • Believers are to separate themselves from ungodly behavior.
   • Believers are to humbly expose sin in this world through action and deed in love.
FOCUS ATTENTION

Who has been a great example for you? Why?
• Examples are incredible gifts. We can imitate godly parents, grandparents, and mentors.
• Christ is our only perfect example. When we imitate Christ by walking in love, we become worthy examples for others to follow.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

What’s a believer’s motive for imitating God?
• God loves us dearly. Children who are secure in their parents’ love want to be like them.
• When we behave according to our nature as God’s children, we imitate Him.

What’s our method of imitating God?
• We follow God’s example when we love sacrificially.
• Jesus shows us what the Father is like. We see in Scripture how Jesus responded to situations and people, and we model Him.

EPHESIANS 5:3-7

What’s the opposite of walking in love?
• In total contrast to God’s way of self-sacrificial love is the world’s way of self-indulgent lust.
• The terms Paul used for sexual sins cover every kind of intimacy outside of a marriage between one man and one woman.
• Sexual immorality and innuendos might be culturally acceptable, but they aren’t acceptable for Christians. God’s standard for moral purity is absolute, not relative or debatable.

What kind of talk accompanies a loving walk?
• Believers must avoid crude or vulgar talk. Joking about sexual intimacy degrades what God intended for good. Thanksgiving elevates the worth of all God’s gifts.
• Believers bring glory to God with respectful, positive, uplifting words.

How do people who engage in ungodly behavior try to deceive themselves and others?
• Some say it doesn’t matter what you do with your body, that there’s no accountability or consequences for impure behavior.
• Christians must not be taken in by that deception. God will judge all who lead unholy, self-indulgent lifestyles.
• Paul wasn’t speaking of believers who have a moral lapse and repent, but of unbelievers who revel in immorality with no remorse.

How can believers stay pure in an impure world?
• We imitate how Christ responded to immorality. He was friends with sinners, but He didn’t participate in behavior contrary to God’s character.

• We aren’t to isolate ourselves from the world because God calls us to be salt in it. However, we must isolate ourselves from impure thoughts and behavior.
• We must not partner with people who engage in self-indulgent behavior and speech.
• Believers need to form close partnerships with one another, and provide support and accountability to live by God’s good and holy standards.

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

What was Paul’s rationale for believers avoiding any hint of immorality?
• Believers shouldn’t engage in the world’s immoral practices because we aren’t part of this dark world anymore. Our behavior should reflect our new identity as light in the Lord.
• When we display love “as children of light” (v. 8), we please God with good, right, and true actions and words.
• Since light makes everything visible, believers should live above reproach. When we walk as children of light we have nothing to fear or hide.
• Believers aren’t to engage in sinful practices, but expose them.

How can believers expose sin without being self-righteous or judgmental?
• It’s not easy or comfortable, but there are times we must humbly and lovingly confront others about their sinful choices.
• When we imitate Jesus, we expose sin simply by the contrast of our actions and words to society’s norms.
• Our task is to shine Jesus in this dark world; His Spirit does the convicting.
• We don’t expose sin to denounce people for how bad they are but to show them how much they need Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can we be worthy examples for others to follow?
• Make Christ our standard and model our lives after His example.
• Let love and purity be the guiding principles for all our actions and words.
• Separate from any activity or group, even a “Christian” group, that behaves contrary to Christ’s character.
• Find joy in discerning and doing what pleases God.
• Stay in community with other believers whose goal is to imitate God.

• Personal Challenge: As you walk through this week ask yourself, Who am I imitating? From what am I isolating myself? How am I illuminating Jesus?
REAL AND IMITATION PRODUCTS

Create a display that shows some items that are real and some that are imitation (ex: real lemons and imitation lemon juice, sugar and artificial sweetener, leather and imitation leather, a name-brand handbag and an imitation handbag).

Ask: If you had a choice, which one would you select? Explain. Emphasize that Paul called on believers to imitate Christ.

Ask: What might happen if we choose to imitate an imitation? Point out that we put ourselves at risk when we pattern our lives after cultural icons who are imitations themselves.

Ask: What kind of life might these cultural icons lead us into when we pattern our lifestyle after them? How can we guard ourselves from imitating an imitation?

Call attention to the originals included in the display. Highlight Jesus as the only One worth imitating. Read Ephesians 5:1-2. Ask: What kind of life will Jesus lead us into if we imitate Him? Explain that imitators of God lead a life of sacrificial love that’s expressed in big and small ways. We become godly people by focusing on the daily gestures of being faithful, true, and good. We become like what we choose to worship. Our lives can have an incredible influence when we worship and imitate our incredible Lord.

Close in prayer that believers would faithfully demonstrate Christ’s love and character to the world as we seek to imitate Him.

IMITATE

It’s said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. This statement is often used in a rather derisive way, usually of someone who is ripping off the talents or techniques of another. To copy, in our culture of originality (or at least the desire for it) is a negative. Yet, Paul called the church to imitation.

Two different times Paul implored us to imitate. The first time we see it is in 1 Corinthians 11:1, when he wrote, “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.” Paul’s desire was for the church to follow him, not because he considered himself perfect or because he wanted to make disciples of himself, but because he was wholeheartedly following Christ. The verse was a call to join other believers, so together we’ll all walk with Christ.

The second time we see the call to imitate is in Ephesians 5:1-2, as we’re challenged to be imitators of God. Believers are to reflect God’s character and righteousness, to “be holy” as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; see also Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).

The word imitate has a long history in both Greek and Jewish contexts of describing a deeply personal relationship. “As an expression of the relationship both between teachers and pupils and between a worshiper and his deity, this word has a long history in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.”

ethic and pedagogical theory assumes that learning takes place by imitation of exemplary figures.”

To imitate doesn’t mean to ritualistically copy or blindly mimic. Instead it refers to someone “who actually internalizes and lives out the model that has been set before them.” For Paul, it was clearly the responsibility of Christians to follow Christ. In fact, “follow me” is the very call of Christ to His first disciples (Matt. 4:19) and His last (Matt. 28:18-20).

The reason why Paul’s call to imitate God is so different from the call to imitate other religious figures is the character of whom we’re called to follow. We imitate God because He alone is worthy of it. And we’ve seen exactly what that should look like for Christians in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ.