

Sermon: Imitating God and Not the World
Ephesians 5:1-5

Over the last few weeks, our pace has been slow as we have made our way through Ephesians. Today we hope to pick the pace up a bit and cover five verses.

Our study of God's word this morning is on Ephesians 5:1-5.

And in these verses Paul provides us with a summary rule for the Christian life.

Then he goes on to show us, by way of negative example, what it looks like not to walk according to that rule.

So let's read God's word in Ephesians 5:1-5:

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

5:3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Say: This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

Our passage this morning is pretty straightforward:

First we have a "Rule" in verses 1 and 2.

Then in verses 3 through 5, we have a "Prohibition."

Finally, tucked away there in verse 4, we have a positive command.

So, a rule, a prohibition and a command. That's our outline this morning.

I. The Rule: Imitate God and Walk in Love (1-2)

Now, as we begin our study, you will notice that we are entering a new chapter that begins with the word "Therefore..."

What is the "therefore" there for?

Well, towards the end of Chapter 4, Paul was telling us what our lives as Christians ought to look like now that we are new in Christ.

We are to be honest, to be angry and yet not sin, to no longer steal, to speak gracious words and to forgive.

Yet as we come to verse 1 of Chapter 5, Paul gives us a summary command that really functions as a "Rule" for all of the Christian life.

And when I say "Rule", I mean that with a capital R.

In Ephesians 5:1-2, we do not just have a rule.

We have "the Rule."

One of the definitions of the word "Rule" is this:

a code of practice and discipline for a religious order or community

And so we ought to perk up and notice just how summary and important verses 1 and 2 are.

These verses contain, in a very real sense, the summary Rule for how we as Christians are to live. And these verses don't just tell us how we are to live. They also contain the reason for why we are to live that way.

Listen to verses 1 and 2 again and see if you can hear just how all-encompassing these verses are for the Christian life:

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The first thing you will notice is that we are commanded to imitate God.

Now, without a doubt, this is the tallest order in all of Scripture.

There is no other command in scripture that can top this one: Imitate God.

Indeed, this is the only place in all of the bible where we are commanded to explicitly "imitate God."

Yet, there are many places in scripture that point to this same idea.

In both the Old Testament and the New, we are commanded to *Be holy as God is Holy*.

That is in essence the same idea as imitating God.

Additionally, Jesus commands us to take up the cross as he did and follow him. Matthew 16:24.

In John 13, Jesus washed his disciples feet and then he commands them, and us, to serve one another as he has served us.

In I John 3, we are commanded to love as Jesus loved.

Imitation is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple.

I love the German translation of the word

Disciple: Nachfolger.

Literally it means "to follow after."

And so, as Christians, all of us are called to be disciples of Christ.

We are to imitate God and the purest example of what it looks like for a human to imitate God is Jesus Christ.

So this idea of imitating God, while it is a tall order, it is also frequently spoken about in the Bible.

And yet our motivation for doing so here is quite endearing.

We are to imitate God why?

Because we are His beloved children.

We are literally created in his image- and that doubly so.

In Genesis 1, God created male and female in his image.

And then, through Christ, we have been created anew in his image.

Ephesians 4:24 and to put on the new self, **created** after the **likeness** of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We are the children of the heavenly father and so we are to be like him- to imitate him.

And this is a very natural phenomena when you think about it.

Consider it.

Who in this world are you most like?

In most cases, the people we most resemble in this world are our mothers and fathers. The ones who bore us and raised us.

We may even find ourselves, as we grow older, becoming more intentional about being like our parents as we remember them.

My dad loved cars and boats and doing things with tools and machines.

I love all those things as well.

My dad loved grilling and sports and teaching. He had great respect for higher education, humble people and was attracted to compassionate, conservative ideas.

I am the same way. I'm just like my father without even trying.

And God is telling us in Ephesians 5:1, be like me because you are my child. Look at me, learn my ways, love me. Because when you draw near to God and realize that he has re-created you in his image, you will imitate him.

To Love God is to imitate him.

And so let me ask you how much you resemble your heavenly father.? Do you look like him?

Or are you in a period of rebellion as a Christian, where you currently resemble the world more than Him.

If you are a Christian and yet your life resembles the world more than it does your heavenly father, you will be miserable.

And with this verse, God is calling you home: ***be imitators of God, as beloved children.***

Perhaps you are not a child of God. Let me tell you that there is no higher privilege than being a child of God. To know his care and concern for you. To know that no matter what happens in this life, that in God's plan, your life makes sense because he is working all things for good.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Whether you are rich or poor, healthy or sick: no matter your condition.

When you are a child of God, he has his eye on you.

He delights in you, because you are his.

And this is true for those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

We are to imitate God and I believe that when we are intentional about imitating Him, it must bring him such delight to watch us.

When he sees us loving as Christ loved or humbling ourselves and giving ourselves away. It must bring him such delight.

And the reason I think this is because I have children.

Whenever I see my kids imitating their mother or me- IN A GOOD WAY-, In A WAY THAT MAKES US PROUD, I am just beside myself with joy.

How much more must our heavenly father delight when he sees us following Christ?

When following Christ costs us dearly but we do it anyway?

Think of how that must delight our heavenly Father.

In verse 2, following Christ is the concrete example of what imitating God looks like.

He says:

2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This verse is so instructive because it shows us that the love of Christ is our model and motivation for how we are to live.

Love is supposed to be at the foundation of everything we do as believers because love was at the foundation of everything Christ did.

Everything Jesus did, he did because of Love. And not just feelings of love.

The love of Christ was costly and we see that here in this verse:

He gave himself up for us.

He was a sacrificial offering to God.

And so this verses doesn't just point us to the feelings that Christ.

It points to the difficult work that Christ did.

Christ atoned for our sins.

He died as a sacrifice for us, paying the penalty for our sins.

This is love.

Greater love could a no person ever have.

And this sort of **Christ-like, sacrificial, self-unimportant love** is to be at the foundation of everything we do.

What a beautiful command.

Every other detail of Christian morality revolves around this one central truth: the love of God in Christ Jesus.

It's a sacrificial love.

An others-centered love.

A self-unimportant love.

This love is...

1 Corinthians 13:4 ... patient and kind; it does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way

The love of Christ is the highest sort of love that one can conceive of.

And this love is to define us in our every relationship.

Isn't this beautiful?

Isn't this just the sort of command that our world needs to hear and take to heart?

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is "THE RULE" of Christian morality.
Have you made it your Rule?

Now, by way of stark contrast, we move to our second point:

II. The Prohibition: Not Even a Hit of Sexual Immorality or Covetousness (3-5)

In verse 3, Paul writes:

5:3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

What is most striking about this verse is how it contrasts with what came before.
And this is especially obvious in the original.
Because the first word of verse 3 in the original is jarring.
Pornea.

Paul begins with a dirty word: Pornea.
Now in scripture, the word pornea is often translated as sexual immorality.
And this refers to every sexual act that is outside the bounds of a committed marriage relationship.
This includes adultery, pre-marital sex, prostitution, and every other behavior that only rightly belongs in the marriage bed.

Paul wants us to find verse 3 jarring.
It's supposed to jerk us from the beauties of heaven to the sordid consideration of sin on earth.

If verses 1 and 2 are the smell of a kitchen where sumptuous food is being prepared, verse three brings us to the foul stench of a trash can.

You see, in Paul's day, sexual promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality and prostitution were just part of life in the Gentile world.
These things really weren't all that big a deal.
And so we see that the broader Gentile culture of Paul's day was not all that different from our own.

And we know from Paul's letters to the Corinthians that these sins were real temptations for those who claimed to follow Christ.
Paul is not a prude.
He is instead calling Christians to behave sexually in a way that honors Christ.

And I believe it is important for us to see that the days we are currently in, where extra-marital sexual behavior is seen as healthy expression- it's important for us to see that the church has been here before.

And so I'm not going to list for you statistics about how adultery has become more and more common about how web traffic on Porn sites dwarfs everything else

We are not going to focus on those statistics because the simple truth is unchanged:
And that is: The world's standard for what is sexually appropriate has always been vastly different from what God's standard is.

And God tells us that every form of sexual behavior that is outside of marriage between one man and one woman is always wrong.

And Paul's command here for the church is that such sexual immorality or uncleanness not even be named of us.
That means, there shouldn't even be a hint of it among us, as the NIV says.

Interestingly, Paul includes covetousness in this trio of sins:
Sexual immorality, impurity or covetousness.
Clearly the first two sins deal with inappropriate sexual behavior.
Yet covetousness is really a catch all term for any form of materialism.
Covetousness is love of the world and the things of the world.
It's the desire to be rich, to have an abundance of possessions and all of the luxury, status and comfort that comes with them.

Normally in the church we do not place materialism or covetousness on the same level of sin as we do affairs and adultery.
Yet Paul does.
And he does this for two reasons.
First, Sexual immorality and covetousness are sins that are extremely common in every culture in every generation.
And secondly, Sexual immorality and covetousness are **inherently self-serving sins**.

Whenever a person engages in sexual immorality, whether it be having an affair or looking at pornography- whenever that sin is committed, the one committing it is thinking only of themselves.
Sexual immorality is a form of self-love. It's self-centered.
And the same is true with covetousness.

Both of these sins are inherently "taking" in their orientation.
And they stand in stark contrast to the RULE Paul laid out for us in verses 1 and 2.
Because the Love of Christ inclines us to serve, to give and to lay our lives down.
It's sacrificial, self- unimportant and others oriented.
But sexual immorality and covetousness are the exact opposite.
They are consumptive, self-serving and self-glorifying.

They put us at the center of the universe.
And Paul is telling us that such self-centeredness should not even be named among us.
And the reason for this is because we are the children of God.
We are his saints- his holy ones.

So there is not even to be a hint of these sins among us.
Not even the suggestion of them.

And verse 4 instructs us that such holiness is to filter down even into the way we talk.
4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

This means that we don't engage in any kind of risqué speech or suggestive joking.

It means we keep our conversations and humor clean. It also means that we don't seek to be the witty star of any conversation.

It seems that in verse 4, Paul has a social gathering in mind where there is a great deal free-flowing conversation.

And at such gatherings, if you have a quick wit and a desire for attention, there will be the temptation to become the center of attention.

And Paul is telling us that this desire to be the center of attention or to be known as the witty one is out of place for the Christian.

Because the job of a Christian is to serve, to edify and to encourage others.

Not to bring attention to themselves.

In the Roman world, rhetorical skills were gold and the ability to be the life of the party was revered.

Yet in the Kingdom of Christ, the greatest is the one who serves and who edifies others.

So, the love and purity of Christ are to work their way down even into the way we speak.

So is this true of you?

Is your speech edifying and others centered?

Does it draw others to the knowledge of Christ?

Paul wrote in Colossians 4:6:

6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Paul ends this section with a stern warning:

5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

This warning is meant to be like smelling salts for us if we are in Christ.

Paul wants us to wake up and examine ourselves.

He wants us to ask ourselves, do we love the kingdom of this world with its pursuits and conversations more than we love the kingdom of Christ?

The pursuits and conversations of Christ's Kingdom are what we are to be about.

Finally, after having considered the "Rule" of verses 1 and 2

and the prohibition of verses 3-5,

We come to the command which is tucked away in verse 4 and that is

III. The Command: Give Thanks (4)

Paul writes in verse 4:

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Paul isn't calling for Christians to be dull conversationalists.

Instead he wants our speech to be others centered and edifying,

And so he commands us positively to give thanks.

How often do you give thanks to God in your heart throughout the day?

And how often do these thoughts of thanksgiving make their way into words in your conversation?

We have much to be thankful for.

We have all kinds of worldly blessings.

Most of us have relationships that give us life, family and friends who encourage us.

We have ample food to eat and shelter.

We live in a time of great peace and international tranquility.

But it is not for worldly comforts that we are to be most thankful.

Because if we are in Christ, then we have innumerable spiritual blessings.

Remember the words of Ephesians 1:3:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

Every Spiritual Blessing!

We are the children of God.

This thought of thanksgiving is what prompted me to choose the hymn we sang at the beginning of our worship service, "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken".

In that hymn, there is this wonderful stanza:

5. Soul then know thy full salvation, Rise o'er sin and fear and care
Joy to find in every station, Something still to do or bear
Think what Spirit dwells within thee, Think what Father's smiles are thine
Think that Jesus died to win thee, Child of heaven can't thou repine*

The Father smiles upon you as you are in Christ.

He delights in you!

And his greatest desire is that you would live for him by following Christ.

He promises to be with us as we do that.

And his abiding presence, his joy in us, and his plan to bring us to himself in the end should fill us with thanksgiving.

This sort of thanksgiving for God's promises is meant to fill our hearts and our conversations.

And it is the motivation to steer us clear of the worldliness that is all around us and even in us.

We are the children of God and his smile is not something we earn.

His smile is what we have because of Christ's sacrifice for us.

That's something to be thankful for. That's something to talk about.

Let this truth dominate your life and your speech.

Amen.