

“Election special,” Part ten, “Elected to imitate” (Ephesians 5:1-20) study notes

Introduction

Last week we talked about how Paul wants us to change through the power of Christ to become like Christ, and this week Paul builds on his call for the Ephesians to change and imitate God in their lives and not the world from which God brought them out of. They must imitate God in everything they do because God wants them to be a people, (Christ’s body, His church), which shines brightly in the darkness of the world, and in so doing points out the hopelessness and draws people to God’s family and kingdom. But the church, will only do this if they stick closely to God’s story and live out the Gospel.

Verse by verse study

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

(Ephesians 5:1)

Note:

The Ephesians need to copy God, if they want to grow and become like Him. The one who gives us the best image of life to copy is Jesus Christ, He shows us how to live a Gospel life. Paul in other letters offers his own life as something to be imitated as he has made it his life's goal to copy his Lord, but here the Ephesians don't know Paul's life first hand. What they are to copy in particular is God's forgiveness.

How can you be an “imitator” of God? If you want to imitate God who would you look to in particular?

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

(Ephesians 5:2)

Note:

Jesus' life is the epitome of love; He gave Himself even to the point of death on a cross for us, and so if we want to imitate Jesus and His life of love, we need to imitate His sacrificial life as sweet smelling offering to God. Paul is referring to the type of love he talked about in 4:32 to where he urges the Ephesians to be tender hearted and forgiving.

When it comes to love and forgiveness does you life imitate Jesus?

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

(Ephesians 5:3)

Note:

There are plenty of things in the world we could imitate, but Paul says we should not copy them at all; indeed, we should not even entertain the idea of even naming them. They are completely alien to the new land Christ has brought us.

Why is it so tempting for us to imitate the world around us?

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

(Ephesians 5:34)

Note:

Any talk that does not lead to thanksgiving has no place in God's people. Talk of impurity and materialism just leads to more covetousness and lust, even joking about it put it on our minds and corrupts our thoughts. We imitate what is closest to us.

How does crude talk not lead to thanksgiving but mostly actually lead to complaining and not being satisfied with what we have?

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.

(Ephesians 5:5)

Note:

Worldly imitation has no part in God's kingdom, trusting in idols and believing the lie that God's word is wrong and His work is insufficient keeps us separated from Him. Lust, impurities, and covetousness are sin because they are idolatry and we place them above God. Obviously in God's land there is no place for people who place anything above God as the Israelites found out after they entered the Promised Land and turned aside to idolatry and were eventually exiled. People who persistently sin will not enter the kingdom of heaven whether they call themselves "Christian" or not. This does not mean Christians must keep perfection, but rather, persistent, non-repentant sin is a serious thing.

What is the compatibility issue here?

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

(Ephesians 5:6)

Note:

Empty words are words that do not contain either the truth or love, they are not Gospel words of Good news, but they are the words of bad news and false hope. It is because of this bad news God's judgement has already been triggered and His wrath, which ensues from it, will come. The pervasiveness of culture and what it says is acceptable is all around us, and yet the church must not let that influence it.

⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them;

(Ephesians 5:7)

Note:

The Ephesian Christians cannot be part of any gentile activity that leads to immorality. Light does not have any fellowship with darkness.

When Paul says we shouldn't be partakers, does he mean we have to move out of the world? How can we be in the world and involved as active light and yet not partake with darkness?

⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light

(Ephesians 5:8)

Note:

The Ephesians used to walk in darkness until God shone His light of truth into their lives through Jesus Christ, and now they have received Him and become children of light they must not go back to walking in darkness again, their lives have changed.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you ^has sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on ^{the} day of visitation.

([1 Peter 2:10-12](#)).

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to ^phis own, ² and his own people ³ did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, ^the gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

([John 1:9-13](#)).

Do you have any struggles from your past? How could applying the Gospel help you imitate Christ better and keep you walking in the light? Do you know what your trigger points from your past are and how to stay away from them?

⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)

(Ephesians 5:9)

Note:

We can know a tree by its fruit Jesus says, and good fruit, is made in light not in darkness. It takes the long daylight hours of summer to create good fruit; likewise it takes a life exposed to the light of the Spirit to make good spiritual fruit. The fruit of light, in fact, is identical with the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

(Ephesians 5:10)

Note:

It is up to us with the help of the Holy Spirit to understand and practice what is pleasing to God, and that means spending time in His word and prayer, and in the community of other believers and put into practice what we believe. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" Paul tells the Philippians, there is effort involved on our part, and we should not spare any effort in working out what

pleases God. What pleases God is to live a life which is growing in Christ likeness and which He can use to make disciples.

How do you know what is pleasing to God? What do you think pleases Him the most, and you can you do that with your life, not to earn His kudos but in response to what He has done for you?

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

(Ephesians 5:11)

Note:

What does Paul mean that we are to expose the works of darkness? Are we supposed to be running around undercover, bursting in on unsuspecting people committing acts of darkness? May be, we certainly like to concentrate on exposing the wrongs of others, and there is no doubt evil does need to be exposed, but perhaps Paul has more in mind through our fruit of light and its contrast with the darkness, and how much better the fruit of light is. Only when Christian communities are living in the fullness of Christ for all the world to see is the darkness exposed for what it really is.

Are you tempted to point out people's shortcomings and sin? Does that help draw them to the light or expel them? How could your walking in the light expose darkness?

12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

(Ephesians 5:12)

Note:

Sometimes we like to focus on other people's "sins" so much, and we like to go over and rehash every single detail of their sins. But why? Could it be that we are living vicariously through their sin, secretly enjoying the titillating details? Or perhaps we get some kind of superiority out of comparing their lifestyle to ours? In any event it is always easier to go over the sins of others rather than our failings.

How can our speaking about things of darkness lead us down the wrong path?

13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,

(Ephesians 5:13)

Note:

The ultimate light that will expose everyone's works is God, and in the end even the works done in deepest darkness will be brought to light. God bring us to salvation by exposing our darkness in His light. Darkness and secrecy hide evil and sin.

No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸Take care then how you hear, ⁹for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

([Luke 8:16-18](#)).

*¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

(Ephesians 5:14)

Note:

As the bright light of truth is shone in to a person's life it calls for a response from them to arise from their death in trespasses and sins and turn away from darkness and become children of light.

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

(Ephesians 5:15)

Note:

Paul returns again to the emphasis of watching, and discerning how we live, what we do, what we say, and to be wise and discerning, making sure we are imitating the light and have not reverted back to darkness. God wants to shine His light into the darkness through us, but it's not much good if He can only get a glimmer out of us.

¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

(Ephesians 5:16)

Note:

Do we make the best use of our time in light of the Gospel? Do we live in a way that shines light and exposes evil so God can draw more people to Himself and into the light to escape His wrath? How do we decide what is the best use of our time? Who do we try and imitate? The best use of our time Paul would argue is to spend it being transformed into Christ and allowing our transformation to show through our lives so we can help make disciples. Paul's best use of time was to save as many as he could through the Gospel by any means possible.

What would be the best use of your time? What would you need to adjust in your schedule to make the best use of your time? How difficult would this be for you to do?

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

(Ephesians 5:17)

Note:

Paul's emphasis is again that the Ephesians focus on Jesus' desire for their lives, which is to walk in light as He is in the light, becoming more like Him as they imitate Him and make disciples as they go (bringing in other imitators). The will of the Lord is not hard for us to understand, but it is hard for us to implement because there are many other things, easier things, we might rather imitate.

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

(Ephesians 5:18)

Note:

Being drunk with wine does not lead to light, rather it leads to darkness as self-discipline is eroded and we make ourselves open to doing things we would not do if we were stayed in the light. If we are going to drink, and we should, we need to drink deeply of the Holy Spirit who will lead us in light and to imitate Jesus.

¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,
(Ephesians 5:19)

Note:

The kind of thing often associated with drunkenness are singing songs of debauchery and praising idols not worthy of praise. To the contrary, a Christ follower filled with the Spirit will sing songs of thanksgiving to the Lord.

²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
(Ephesians 5:20–21)

Note:

The singing of spiritual songs and hymns wells up from an underlying attitude of thanksgiving for everything God has provided.