

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. 3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

“Being Followers of God”

As we move on into chapter five of Ephesians we come to that important word ‘therefore’ and thus we should remember some of what Pastor Denna shared with us last week! He stressed that we should not base our thinking on snippets of Scripture and to remember that verses and even chapters are tools added to the text to help us study our Bibles.

- **So here we come to a transition word and a chapter division!**

Obviously, it is important to remember what has come before as we consider our lessons for today. The Apostle has told us to put on the New Man, to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit and to be forgiving others as Christ Jesus has forgiven us! Now the Apostle tells us to “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.”

That will be our focus this morning remembering that verse 2 goes right back to our lesson on forgiveness when Paul says, “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

- **And he then again warns us about things we are to avoid so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit!**

Now what does it mean to be imitators of God? As Mike warned us that I must not tell you what I would like it to mean but rather deal with where the text takes us. When we look at those comparative translations we considered at lunch, we find some saying we are to imitate God and other saying we are to follow God.

- **So which is it some might ask?**

Well, when we look at the context we see that both are implied: As those putting on the New Man we are to both follow God and follow Him in a godly way that imitates His character.

- **We cannot say that we are following God and then act any way we would like to act!**
- **When we put on the new man the new man is, well, a new man, not just a dressed up old man.**

I guess an easy example would be that of a bank robber or thief who comes to Christ and becomes a new man... He or she could not just say, well now I have Jesus as my Savior & then claiming to be one who is following God, keep robbing banks or 7-Elevens. As Paul admonished us in chapter four, they must steal no more and actually become productive so they can help others!

- **So this really comes down to faithful obedience and yes the Apostle will be once again be stepping on our toes I am afraid.**

IF we remember way back to our study of Genesis we learned many lessons from the life of Abraham about obedience and one passage in chapter 17 took us to this morning’s text in Ephesians 5. In verse 22 of chapter 17 we read that, “Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.”

- We saw that this concept or picture of ‘God going up’ gave us both a challenge and great hope for our Christian walk.

We often saw God visiting Abraham but it was only in this case that we were told that He had left! Now of course we know that God is omnipresent and that He is always with His people, including Abraham... So just what does God going up mean?

Now Lord willing we do all have times where there is a special presence of the Lord and our lesson to learn is what do we do when He goes up from meeting with us using the language we see there in Genesis? We all should be able to look back on times where the Lord was dealing with us in a very personal and specific way...

- We should all certainly know that God meets His people in a special way when we gather for covenant renewal worship on the Lord’s Day!

I trust that each of us have a daily time in the Word and prayer where there is a special presence of the Lord as well. These are or should be special times, and yet they come to an end or as we saw with Abraham: God goes up from meeting with us! Now there is certainly no time where God is not with us as our omnipresent Triune Savior... Thus we must not seek only such times & demean the other portions of our life that make up our Christian walk...

- The question we should always be asking is whether those special times where the Lord is close and revealing His will to us actually do have an impact on the rest of our life!

Do they help us to follow and imitate God as we are instructed to do in our morning text?

For example, when we are commissioned at the end of the service, we receive the benediction, sing Simeon’s Prayer & then we move on... If we do so with the attitude of ‘well I have done my duty for this week, now I have to get back to living my ordinary life,’

- We have missed the whole point!

However, I could also go out not caring about what happens during the week & just thinking and meditating and focusing only on how special this time was & focusing on the time that we get to come back into God’s presence...

- We have missed the point as well.

The same applies with our daily devotions as individual or families... We don’t study and pray all day: There comes a time where we close our Bibles or get up off our knees and go about living the Christian life! It is a very important balance to have and what we found with Abraham was be a great example: God goes up from his presence and we immediately saw Abraham obeying: 23 “So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him.”

- Abraham obeyed all that God had said to him and the text points out that he did it on ‘the very same day’!

Our obedience is to be prompt and it is to be complete! And we are not just talking about the easy stuff here, like not robbing a bank or not committing adultery.

- Just consider the task that Abraham set out to obey!

So, the bottom line is this: If God reveals something to us or convicts us of sin in some area of our lives during one of those special times, what should our response be after “God has gone up from us?”

- We should obey!

As most of our ladies have learned about training our covenant children from various teachers ...
Obedience means obeying right away, all the way, and with a cheerful heart.

- In other words, we should do ALL that God has asked as quickly as possible with a smile on our face!

Now comes the place where as a good pastor and I lay out some examples that might be uncomfortable...

But as you think about them, try to remember how difficult it would have been for Abraham to carry out his task right away, all the way and with joy! We can also see Jesus as our example; when we consider that He fully obeyed the will of the Father in going to the cross to save His people from their sin at the appointed time and He did so looking forward to the joy that was set before Him!

- We should obey God quickly, completely and with a cheerful heart because what He asks us to do is always good for us!

We should do all that He asks because He is God and we are not! We should do it without delay because any delay is NOT good for us nor those around us.

Again, the Apostle Paul began chapter five with that pointed reminder about Christ's obedience...
Ephesians 5:1 "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. [there is a LOT of talk about love in Christian circles these days, but it is not often related to the great cost of love that we see in Jesus nor are they willing to apply it as Paul does here.

Paul says Jesus is our example & then talks of how we are to walk in love, 3 "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

Working backwards we see three major areas that call for obedience: The first is VERY relevant for our current age where swearing and crude speech has become popular even in Christian circles because it is 'hip' or makes us somehow 'relevant.'

Where we have laugh tracks to help us laugh at coarse jesting and we see plenty of foolish talking in just about any part of the Internet...So what would being imitators of God look like:

- It would mean no more use of filthy language [*beware of chicken swearing!*].
- It would mean NOT laughing at or participating in coarse jesting.
- It would mean NOT adding to the foolishness that we see around us, not even with a "like" or smiley face.

Of course in their place we would have wise words and good examples IF we obey right away and all the way with a cheerful heart, being thankful as Paul commanded at the end. Not sulking because we can't laugh at the latest dirty joke or crude movie...

- But being thankful for the opportunities that God gives us to be a good witness.

Moving back up in these verses we come to what is another major problem in our prosperous nation: Coveting! The author of Hebrews puts it this way, 13:5 "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

- So how do we avoid the sin of covetousness?

First and foremost we have to be content with what we have! Does this mean we never get to have anything new? Of course not because God loves to bless His people; which is in large part of why we have all the material blessings that we have today!

Our problem is that we are never content with what we have and have very little patience for obtaining new things in appropriate ways...

Being imitators of God would mean saving up for something rather than buying it on credit! It would mean ignoring the constant drumbeat of consumerism! Maybe, just maybe, the latest and greatest phone that I just bought a few months ago really does not have to be replaced with a newer model as soon as it comes out!

And remember that coveting the newest and latest gadget is not just a rich man's sin, envy and coveting are close cousins! So again, we should obey right away, and all the way by being content with what we have TODAY and full of joy that God has so richly blessed us.

- **If any Christian in America struggles with being content, they have a very serious problem with coveting.**

And then the first point which Paul made in this passage, is in an area that can take an entire series of sermons to cover and one that we have devoted many of our family camps to because it is such a challenge for us today.

“3 “But fornication and all uncleanness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints.”

- **Again, obedience is simple, but very challenging!**

If you are single, then imitating God means avoiding all sexual activities: Instead you should be busy preparing yourself for marriage, unless the Lord has given you the gift of celibacy!

If you are married, you must honor the marriage bed which means avoiding all sexual sins with those not your spouse:

- **AND giving yourself to your spouse in such a way that your own marriage bed is a place of great joy and contentment.**

As Pastor Wilkins has often taught us, marriage is NOT for you, it is for the world & we do not demonstrate the love of God by just simply avoiding what is wrong:

- **We must be busy doing what is right and that should include a very healthy sex life!**

Now one would think that this would certainly be a place where all our married folks could obey right away all the way and with great joy...

But it is amazing how many stumbling blocks we manage to put in the way! Why is it tough to obey in any of these areas, and especially here? Sin!

- **We want to laugh at those crude jokes and talk like our friends.**
- **We want more and more stuff to make us happy.**
- **AND we want sex to be about us and not caring about the loving relationships that God intended it to fulfil.**

So, whenever you think God is asking too much of you in any of these important areas, just think back to the example of faithful Abraham and the task that he was given... A task that he did right away, all the way & with a cheerful heart.

- **And may it always be so with us!**

The Apostle Paul underlines the importance of all this when he then says in verse 5, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

- **That truth should take us back a bit and have us thinking like those disciples who said, this seems impossible, so how can anyone be saved and be an imitator of God!**

Here must remember our calls to confession because while we are to be VERY serious about following and imitating God, the more we walk with Him and imitate Him, the more we see the sin we have in our own hearts!

And so we must remember the hope that the Apostle John gives to those he challenged in the same way:

I John 1: “8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

When we are purified from all unrighteousness through such confession then we become that sweet smelling sacrifice as we follow God!

Communion Meditation: Ephesians 5

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”