

## X. Lesson 10 Be Imitators of God – Ephesians 5:1-21

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Stuart chapter 10

**Aim:** To walk in love, in light, and in wisdom.

Paul's prescription for a higher standard of living is actually quite profound, as a careful reading of Ephesians 4 and 5 shows. It involves three things: 1) what we are; 2) how we think; and 3) the way we act. Each is necessary. The theme of these chapters is the integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe), and Christian ethics (how we behave). They emphasize that being, thought, and action belong together and must never be separated. For what we are governs how we think, and how we think determines how we act. We are God's new society, a people who have put off the old life and put on the new; that is what He has made us.

In this section, Paul is describing the Christian life as a *walk*. Paul instructs his readers to 'walk in love' (5:2), to 'walk as children of light' (5:8), and to 'walk circumspectly' in wisdom (5:15).

### A. Walk in Love (Eph. 5:1-7)

#### 1. Sixth Commandment – Cont'd (5:1-2)

- *How does Paul say we should imitate God (5:1) in 5:2?*

Remember, our study last time starting in 4:25 outlined Paul's teaching in this section as a re-exposition of the second table of the Ten Commandments. Paul is teaching us how we should live as Christians, putting off the old man and his deeds, and putting on the new man, to live in righteousness and holiness. Paul's focus in this exposition, which continues to 5:7, is on the tongue. We've already looked at the Ninth, Eighth, and Sixth Commandments. Paul begins his exposition of the Sixth Commandment – 'You shall not kill' – in 4:31. He gives several antidotes for murderous sins of the tongue under the Sixth Commandment. The first is in 4:32, where we are to forgive others, because Christ forgave us.

But this is hard to do in itself, so Paul goes on in verses 1-2 of chapter 5. How do you overcome the tendency to kill other people? You kill yourself. The way Christ shows us is the way of sacrifice. The opposite of you shall not kill is to become a sacrifice. We are supposed to become sacrifices, living a sacrificial lifestyle, putting to death ourselves, we will not be filled with bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

#### a) *Imitators (5:1)*

We are to imitate God 'as dearly loved children.' Just as a son should imitate a good father (though he is not a father and cannot imitate his father in many respects), so should the children of God imitate God. 'Follow Father', says the apostle Paul. Those two words summarize the whole of verse 1. Those words also summarize the core of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

We are called to be living images that reflect and communicate the character of God Himself. 'Be holy, because I am holy' (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pe. 1:16). That is, our lives are to imitate, to copy, the character of God. An imitation is a copy based upon an authentic original.

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The authentic fountainhead, the original source of righteousness is God Himself, and God's people are called to bear witness to the original and to the authentic.

The word that our text translates 'imitate' or 'imitator' is *mimētai*, from which we get our English word 'mimic.' This word is used a number of times in the New Testament for the following of a human example, but only here of imitating God Himself. 'Mimic' means to copy closely, to repeat another person's speech, actions, or behavior. That is what we are to do with God. We are to repeat His actions, echo His speech, duplicate His behavior. How can we do that if we do not spend time with Him? We cannot, because we will not even know what His behavior is. Spend time with God! Spend time with God in prayer. Spend time with God in Bible study. Spend time with God in worship. It is only by spending time with God that we become like God. We need men and women who are like God today.

### b) *Sacrificial Love (5:2)*

What Paul chiefly has in mind is the imitation of God's love. This is what ties Ephesians 5:1-2 to the preceding paragraph. Love is to characterize the Christian's daily progress along the road of life. What kind of love is this? This love is to be *forgiving*. Since God the Father forgave us through the work of Christ, we are to forgive one another. This is love's nature. If we are not forgiving in our love, we really do not know the extent of God's forgiveness of us. We still consider ourselves to be better than we are. But if we see ourselves as forgiven sinners, then we will be free to love others in imitation of God.

The second thing these verses teach us about the love of God, which we are to imitate, is that it is a *giving* love—not merely forgiving but also giving. Again, God is the model of such love, and the point at which it is most clearly demonstrated is the cross, by following the earthly example of Christ. Jesus' love was a love that manifested itself in self-sacrifice. The word 'love' here is once more the Greek word *agape*. It denotes love which spares no pains to promote the good and well-being of others. It is the self-giving love which Christ had for us and which took Him to the cross. It is a love that serves others. Love is an action, a behavior that emanates in patience and kindness and is not arrogant or unbecoming. The greatest expression of love is not that it gives things or even that it gives up things, but that it gives itself.

The words 'an offering and sacrifice' (*prosphera* and *thysia*), are used together in the Septuagint of Psalm 40:6 (quoted in Heb. 10:5). The former may perhaps be taken to refer to the whole life of obedience, and the latter in particular to His sacrificial death, but this distinction is not always clear in the New Testament. The Old Testament sacrifices were spoken of as a 'sweet savor' to God (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Lev. 1:9, 13, 17). So, by implication the life that those who are in Christ live in sacrificial self-giving to God and to their fellows has a fragrance before God and in the world.

The third thing our text teaches about the love of God which we are to imitate is that it is to be a *living* love: forgiving, giving, but also living. There are two things that a living love suggests. First, it suggests a *practical* or *active* love. To use the outline of the last chapter, it means: 1) to put off lying and speak truthfully; 2) to put off anger; 3) to put off stealing and work for a living instead; 4) to put off unwholesome talk and instead speak to help others; and 5) put off bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice, and instead to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. That is what it means to live a life of love. Second, living love suggests love is made alive by the very life of God and is therefore an *eternal* love, as God is eternal.

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### 2. The Seventh Commandment (5:3-4)

- *How does Paul say we should imitate God (5:1) in 5:3?*

The opposite of love is lust, a sin that seeks to satisfy its own sexual appetites. Paul doesn't say, 'Love God and do as you please.' But he says, 'If you want to know what love demands, then pay attention to what the prime source of love requires. God's law reveals to us what is pleasing to Him.' The point of this passage is that, if we are His children and we want to imitate Him, we must seek to obey His laws.

'Sexual immorality' or 'fornication' is *porneia*, from which we get our English word 'pornography.' It refers to sexual intercourse outside marriage. The positive answer to this vice, Christian marriage, is going to be discussed later in the chapter.

'Impurity' (*akatharsia*) includes the sexual sins first named, but it probably also goes beyond it to embrace particularly defiling practices.

In context, 'greediness' (*pleonexia*) here refers to coveting someone else's body in order to satisfy one's lust. Paul has already used this same term to refer to the sinful lust of the immoral, unconverted person in 4:19. Fornication is associated with impurity and grasping or greed. A man who is satisfied with his wife is not greedy for impurity.

Immorality is uncleanness or impurity because purity means the control and direction of sexual powers and impulses in accordance with the law and purpose of God. It is 'ruthless greed' because it is selfish indulgence at the expense of others. It is incongruous for those who are called to be 'saints' (1:1) to take any pleasure in partaking or talking about such things. Paul says to avoid talking about these things because it stimulates the mind toward impure things.

- *How does Paul say we should imitate God (5:1) in 5:4?*

'Obscenity' or 'filthiness' (*aischrotēs*) refers both to indecent or improper actions. All that is shameless, all that would make a morally sensitive person ashamed must be excluded.

'Foolish talk' – this Greek word is easy to remember, for it is made up of the words 'moron' and *logos* which means 'word': *mōrologia*. It means one who talks like a fool. The concern here is not with intelligence. It is with morals. The word refers to one who makes light of high standards of behavior, thinking that it is somehow funny or sophisticated to tear down anything that is high or praiseworthy or ennobling.

'Coarse joking' (*eutrapelia*) is closely related to obscenity and foolish talk, but with the emphasis on that kind of coarse, vulgar humor which is the lowest form of wit. It is humor that is not fitting but that attacks Biblical standards. Proper humor reinforces Biblical standards. The book of Proverbs laughs at the foolishness of the world.

Paul, as he did in chapter 4, comes back to the importance of the speech of the Christian. Paul is not against the use of witticisms; nor is he against the person who has a fine command and articulation with respect to language. In fact the Scripture has many, many things to say about the beauty inherent in the very function of speech. It is not by accident that God Incarnate is called the 'Word' of God, and His apostles were called ministers of the Word. Words are important.

Paul speaks about a misuse of language; not about joking, but coarse joking. Vulgarity, dirty minds, filthy language, and rude forms of speech are not appropriate to the lifestyle of the

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Christian, for our speech should be appropriate to our relationship with God. Our mouths should be organs of thanksgiving.

With a play on words Paul urges the replacing of *eutrapelia* with *eucharistia* – ‘thanksgiving.’ Got a problem with the tongue? Redirect it by giving thanks. If we use our tongues for what is appropriate, then we will not fall into foul language. Be thankful for what you have, not for what you lust after. Paul does not prudishly forbid speaking about sex, nor austere debar humor, but he would have none of the ‘flippant talk’ that harms the spiritual life. Rather he would demand that if conversation is about sex, or possessions, or people, it should be directed by the spirit of thanksgiving and praise, towards seeing and acknowledging the loveliness and beauty of God’s gifts. If this is the case, then speech will be kept pure and uplifting.

### 3. The Tenth Commandment (5:5)

In the naming of particular sins, we have essentially the same words as in verse 3, and the same connection of the word for ‘covetous’ or ‘greedy’ with sexual immorality. There is, however, the further equation of this sin of ‘greed’ with idolatry (*cp.* Col 3:5). For passion, whether for money or for sexual indulgence, is in effect putting an idol and object of desire and worship before God. This is idolatry, because it means giving these things the place in your life which rightly belongs to God alone. But no one who takes these paths will ever end up in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Covetousness is like idolatry. The covetous man prizes something more than Christ. If I covet something, that means it is more important to me than the whole kingdom of God, which we already have in Christ. It is ridiculous to covet because God has already given us everything important – “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” What is the antidote to covetousness? Remind yourself that you will lose your inheritance in the kingdom of God. If you really believe you have everything, you will not covet. Christ has given us of the riches of His glory; He is able to exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. If you trust in that, you will not covet.

Paul is not saying here that if you were ever guilty of coveting somebody else’s possession that thereby you are eternally disqualified from the kingdom of God. He is talking about a style of life that is characteristic. That is, if the basic characteristic of your life is sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness, then as long as you remain in that state, you remain out of the kingdom of God. One may make a profession of faith in Christ, and then continue in a licentious lifestyle. This would reveal quicker than anything else that the profession of faith is false and the person is not in the kingdom of God.

### 4. Summary of Teaching on the Commandments (5:6-7)

- *How does Paul say we should imitate God (5:1) in 5:6?*

Verse 6 summarizes Paul’s whole treatment of the Ten Commandments. Here, Paul says that God applies the Ten Commandments to the nations. God is the same for all cultures and kingdoms. All those who break His law fall under His wrath. The apostle has made it clear that there is a way for a believer to walk, and there is a way for him *not* to walk. He has also made it clear which is which.

Many commentators believe that Paul is issuing a caveat against a sect of Gnosticism that taught that immorality affected only the physical being and not the spiritual: since the body is not immortal, anything a person does with it is irrelevant to his spiritual well-being. These Gnostics

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said that the sins of the flesh were irrelevant to the spiritual life, thus taking freedom from the law to mean liberty to continue in sin of any kind. Paul warns his readers to be on guard against this false teaching and not become partakers in it.

This passage is a diatribe against any type of Antinomianism that says there is no abiding law which we are required to keep. There is a pernicious doctrine in the evangelical church in our day which says that all a person has to do to be redeemed is to accept Jesus as Savior; he doesn't have to receive him as Lord. This dichotomy between Savior and Lord is the clearest, most blatant form of Antinomianism seen in the church today.

Verse 6 anticipates that it is possible for people to think that they are safely in the kingdom of God because they have been given false assurances by those with glib tongues and smooth talking promises. So if anyone comes and tells you that as a Christian you don't have to be concerned about keeping commandments or obeying the law of God, you are listening to someone who is speaking empty words, words that could deceive you. And Paul says, 'Don't let that happen, don't let anyone deceive you with empty words, for because of this very type of thing, the wrath of God comes upon those who are disobedient.'

### B. Walk in Light (Eph. 5:9-14)

#### 1. Darkness and Light (5:8-10)

Why do unconverted people rush along the road to damnation? It is because they cannot see the danger. They do not see anything in its true light. They are in the dark – about God, about sin and its consequences, about our Lord Jesus Christ, and about salvation. Not only are they in the dark, but they are actually *darkness* (5:8). They cannot see the right way to go and therefore fall to their destruction.

Paul does not merely say that before their conversion Christians were *in* darkness and that now, since their conversion, they are *in* the light, though that is true. He says something more profound. Before they *were* darkness, now they *are* light. He is pointing to a change in *them*, not merely to a change in their surroundings. Their lives, not just their environment, were dark. If it is only a question of seeking the light or living in the light, then Christianity is no different from any other religion or philosophy. But if becoming a Christian involves a change from darkness to light, then the presence of Christians in the world is itself hope as together we stand against the darkness.

Believers simply cannot walk the same way as unconverted people. Those who have found life 'in Christ' are essentially people who have been transferred from the realm of darkness into the realm of light. Since Christians have been taken out of the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13), they now have a responsibility to allow the light of Christ in them to shine forth in the world. We are 'children of light,' and we are to pursue our daily lives in accordance with this new nature given to us in Christ. Everywhere we go we shine out light, because we reflect God. We are 'children of light.' God is the light source; we are children that reflect His light.

The light of God's Spirit has shined in our lives, and the effect on us is as visible as fruit on a tree (5:9). There is no benefit in living in darkness, for the fruit of a godly life cannot ripen without light. All that interests us now is to please the Lord who has saved us (5:10). We want to follow Father, who is perfectly good and right and true. That is the path for us. The light we have received has convinced us of the idiocy of going any other way.

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The fruit of the light (some translations say Spirit, others say light) consists in goodness, righteousness, and truth. So what does it mean to be a child of God? We shoot out rays of light of goodness, righteousness, and truth. We who are children of God push back the dominion of darkness because of the light we have. ‘Goodness’ is kindness, ‘righteousness’ is standing with the law of God, and ‘truth’ is speaking what is accurate. When we do this, we demonstrate what is pleasing to the Lord.

Goodness, righteousness, and truth are the marks and fruit of being children of the light. The participle in verse 10 (*dokimazontes*) is from a verb that sometimes means ‘approving’ but more commonly ‘proving’ for oneself. It indicates the demand for careful thought and discrimination. The light of God is given, but it does not free us from the responsibility of thought and choice. Romans 12:2 is most closely similar to this as it speaks of proving ‘what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.’

### 2. Exposing the Darkness (5:11-13)

- *How does Paul say we should imitate God (5:1) in 5:11?*

The old life that was ‘darkness’ was essentially ‘unfruitful.’ The apostle does not set one kind of fruit over against another. It is a matter of fruit or no fruit in the sight of God.

Paul goes on to say that we should not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but we should expose them. This does not mean to publish or talk about the evil deeds of darkness. It doesn’t change the course of the world to speak of such things. Paul says it is disgraceful to speak of the secret deeds of darkness. Paul does not mean we should be embarrassed to speak of such things, but that there is no grace in these deeds. The Greek word (*aischros*) means stirring up a lot of mud. They are disgraceful, there is no power in these things. So exposing these deeds by talking about them do no good.

On the contrary, darkness is exposed by light. As we go through the world shining light on the world, which is goodness, righteousness, and truth, it has the result that it pushes back darkness. The church needs to shine goodness, righteousness, and truth into the world. When we do that, those who practice darkness will hide, or they will be converted. That’s what Paul means when he says that whatever becomes visible is light. It means they are converted. If they are not converted, they will flee. If we go through the world reflecting the light of God (goodness, righteousness, and truth), then the darkness will flee. We expose the darkness through our morality, not intellectually.

If we see someone going along a path which will kill him, there are a number of things we can do. The best is to shed light on the road that the person is taking, so he can see for himself where it will lead him. No one ever got rid of darkness by talking all night. Only light dispels darkness. The rising sun drives the night away and reveals how dangerous certain ‘safe’ paths really are. This dark world is in need of light and only Christians are able to supply it. They do this when they live lives which are radically different from those around them. A life of wholesome holiness soon makes it clear what a dangerous and unhappy business sin is.

The meaning is that the Christian, by a life so essentially different from those around him, rather than by reproof in speech, is to ‘expose’ (*elenchō*) their sins. Paul’s idea is that of a silent process, comparable to the action of light. As light shows up that which is filth, so the life (and not just the words) of the person who has come to be light in the Lord shows up the barren deeds of darkness for what they are.

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The apostle thinks of the work of grace in the lives of those who do not believe, in three stages – they are exposed, they allow themselves to be manifested, and then they become light. In the beginning their shameful deeds are done in darkness. But then the light of Christ, shining from the lives of those who have come to know Him, breaks in. Such a coming of the light involves a crisis of judgment. If people hate the light, they will try to avoid it, and shun the exposing of their works. But if they allow their lives to be exposed for what they are, they are ‘exposed by the light.’ Their whole lives can then be brought to Christ; and when people are prepared to submit to His scrutiny and dealing, then in His mercy they become ‘light.’ The darkness is swept away, and everything thus illuminated is all light. This is the goal, as verse 8 has put it already – men and women are not only to receive the light, but become luminous. Such is the work of Christian evangelism.

Darkness camouflages the evil within the world. The light flushes evil out and exposes its ugly reality. But if a Christian refuses to be used as God’s vessel to shine the light of Christ, evil will remain hidden in the darkness. Yet, if a Christian chooses to be God’s spotlight, even the darkness may become light. In other words, God may very well use a believer as His instrument to bring a person out of the realm of darkness to experience the joy of eternal light.

Some people have concluded from verses 12-13 that we should never speak against sin. This cannot be a correct understanding, because the apostle Paul is obviously speaking against sin himself. But he is not ranting. Loud tirades against evil never do any good. A life of light is what is required. The Scriptures are calling us here to live so differently from everyone else that it is soon clear to all that all paths are ruinous, except God’s way. One holy life in a factory or office will do more to dispel its darkness than a million words from a person who is no different from the rest.

### 3. The Light of Christ (5:14)

There follows now a relevant quotation, the substance of which is scriptural (*cp.* Is. 9:2; 26:19; 52:1; 60:1), but whose words do not correspond precisely to the Old Testament. However, the apostle is obviously assuming that his readers know these words well. The most likely explanation is that he is quoting a well-known hymn of the early church, probably one which was sung regularly at baptisms, since coming to Christ and being baptized were spoken of as enlightenment (*cp.* Heb. 6:4; 10:32). These are the words which the new Christians would have heard as they came up out of the water after their symbolic burial.

In this hymn, three metaphors for turning to God are linked – awaking from sleep, being raised from the dead, and going out of the darkness into the light. The symbolism of light and darkness is the dominant theme. The verb used here is *epiphaō* used of the sun or moon shining forth. So it is best to take it as ‘Christ will shine on you.’

Conversion is awaking from sleep and arising from the dead because Christ chose to shine His light on us. As people of light, we have participated in a spiritual resurrection. Therefore, our lives cannot be lived as men and women who look for the darkness to do those things that we would be ashamed to do in public.

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### C. Walk in Wisdom (Eph. 5:15-21)

- How does Paul say we should walk as wise men (5:15) in 5:16? 5:17? 5:18? 5:19? 5:20? 5:21?

#### 1. Redeeming the Time (5:15-16)

A cat walking along a wall into which pieces of glass have been embedded is walking ‘circumspectly.’ He is watching where he is putting his feet! Christians are to be equally watchful. They are to tread carefully. They are not to rush foolishly ahead and live as they please, but to wisely consider every step. The Christian life is not that of a carefree, freewheeling attitude, but one that demonstrates sober thinking and careful diligence.

There are three areas in which Paul thinks of the Christian exercising wisdom and the first of these is in his use of time. Most Christians do not consider time as important as it really is. It is one of the two things we have going for us in our calling to serve God: space and time. It is almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of time in biblical religion, because the religion of the Bible is a historical religion and history means time.

The Greek word for time here is not *chromos*, but *kairos*. *Chronos* refers only to the flow of time, the following of one event upon another; it is the idea involved in our word ‘chronology.’ *Kairos* refers to a moment that is especially significant or favorable (e.g., ‘but when the time had fully come ...’ Gal. 4:4-5; cp. Acts 24:25; 1 Pe. 1:11; Mt. 26:18). It is a special or critical epoch or time frame; a fit time or God-given opportunity. What this means is that time is to have this full or meaningful element for the wise Christian. Moreover, he is to redeem it or make the most of it precisely for that reason.

Christians are called to live in a context of spiritual crisis. Evil is rampant in the culture around us. As long as the kingdom of God is in conflict with the powers of darkness, it may be said that the days are ‘evil.’ Evil is all around us, and there is hardly anything that so effectively leads people to commit evil as idleness. Life is full of opportunities to do good, and we should make the most of those opportunities. Christians must not relax but overcome the pressures in their own lives and use every chance to turn others from darkness to light. Time is something to be ‘redeemed’ (*exagorazō*), which literally means ‘buying from’ or ‘buying out of.’ It is highly valued and bought up. Unplanned time means certain sin.

#### 2. Knowing the Will of the Lord (5:17)

The second area in which Paul thinks of the Christian exercising true wisdom is in understanding what the will of the Lord is. Paul contrasts this with a command not to be ‘foolish’ (*aphrones*), a word that suggests not so much a lack of essential wisdom (as does *asophoi* in v. 15) as a moral stupidity in action. Thus, Paul repeatedly presents this seeking to know, understand, and thus to do the will of God as a priority for the Christian’s daily walk.

Usually, when we talk about knowing God’s will, we stress knowing Scripture, for God’s character and precepts are disclosed there as they are disclosed nowhere else. If we want to know what God’s will is, we do not need some special mystical experience or revelation. We can find it by studying the Bible, allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate it to our understanding, and apply it to our hearts and circumstances. If we have no desire to go to His Word or to seek godly counsel based on His Word, we really have no desire to know His will.

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But Paul is also likely saying something like the following: ‘Wisdom consists in perceiving where God is going and then jumping on His bandwagon.’ The fool, with whom he contrasts the man of understanding is being led astray into one ‘promising’ program after another and so dissipates both time and energy. The wise man weighs these programs and strives to set a course through them in the direction he perceives God to be leading.

### 3. Being Filled with the Spirit (5:18-21)

The third area in which Paul encourages the wise Christian to excel is in being filled with the Spirit, which he contrasts with getting drunk on wine. This is an oblique reference to Mt. Sinai and the golden calf.

Paul speaks against the particular sin of drunkenness. The beverage itself is not a sin, but its misuse, or perversion is sinful. Scripture never demands total abstinence from intoxicants (except for those who had taken special vows), but the Bible often speaks against drunkenness. The Christian is always to be in charge of himself. He is never to lose control, because this in turn leads to unrestrained self-indulgence and immorality. To be drunk with wine is to squander one’s life. It is to lose our faculties of consciousness, our clarity of thought, and our ability to function. Some people are ‘drunk’ with the disco beat which blows their minds, causing them to switch off and freak out. Others take drugs. Who can number the commodities and influences which bend the mind? But those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ are never to be numbered with those who no longer have full command of their faculties.

Drunkenness involves ‘dissipation’ or ‘debauchery.’ The word *asōtia* involves not only the uncontrolled action of the drunken man, but also the idea of wastefulness. The corresponding adverb is used in the familiar phrase ‘riotous living’ in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:13). Dissipation is the result of a riotous approach to worship and all of life. We do not want a worship service that is artificially emotionally stimulated. If worship is oriented towards stimulation, you essentially have golden calf worship and it will flow out into life and you won’t accomplish much.

But again the apostle is not merely negative. He does not seek simply to take away joys and pleasures from people’s lives. He would replace them by higher joys and better pleasures. It is no mere coincidence that in Acts 2 also the fullness of wine and the fullness of the Spirit are set side by side. There is the implication there, repeated here, that the Christian knows a better way than by wine of being lifted above the depression and the joyless monotony of life, a better way of removing self-consciousness and quickening thought and word and action than by the use of intoxicants.

Instead, Paul instructs us to be ‘filled with the Spirit.’ In modern English we would translate Paul’s instruction like this: ‘All of you, go on letting yourselves be filled with the Spirit.’ Being ‘filled’ with the Spirit is something that is urged upon Christians. This is not to say we become inebriated with the Spirit of Christ so that we lose control of our faculties. It is just the opposite, for being in the Spirit means we have self-control, the last fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Neither does it concern any special miraculous gifts such as speaking in tongues. Rather, it refers to our being so under the Holy Spirit’s control and leading that our thought and life are entirely taken up with Jesus Christ, to whom it is the Spirit’s chief responsibility to bear witness.

Paul says that the wise man should desire to be so filled with God’s Spirit that he might bear a faithful and effective testimony to Jesus Christ. Quite obviously, this will be a testimony

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conveyed by the upright character of his or her life, which is what Paul has been talking about all along. Also, quite obviously, it will be a testimony conveyed by the content and character of his or her speech.

Paul's use of the Greek language in verses 19-21 reveals that four things happen to those who are filled with the Spirit.

### *a) Fellowship (5:19)*

First, 'they speak to one another.' They enjoy fellowship with each other in an atmosphere of praise. It is fellowship, but not that of the coffee hour. It is that deeper, closer communion Christians have when they worship God together. A wise Christian does not forsake the assembling together. The Spirit does not divide them, but brings them ever closer together.

The *psalms* were originally that which was sung to the harp, and here perhaps includes not only the "Psalms" of the Old Testament but those (like Lk. 1:46-55, 68-79, 2:29-32) which were songs of the New, but in the spirit and manner of the old psalms. The *hymnos* in classical Greek was a festive lyric in praise of a god or hero. We have already seen in this letter possible evidence of early Christian 'hymns' (4:4-6; 5:14), and we may have other such fragments in Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5-6; 6:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Revelation 4:11; 5:13; 7:12. It is doubtful whether we should press a distinction between 'hymns' and 'spiritual songs.'

The Bible itself – its Psalms – is foundation for our understanding of the world, our conversation, and our worship. Paul goes on to add hymns and spiritual songs. Some say these are three divisions in the Psalter. That may be true, but even if it is, it does not mean you can't sing anything else. The one thing that this does say practically is that the Psalter has to be at the center of our worship one way or the other. When Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are ingrained in us, we know how to practice goodness, righteousness, and truth in the world. We are to internalize these Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and sing them with others. It creates wisdom in the world.

### *b) Worship (5:19)*

Second, they 'sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord.' They have great thoughts about the God of Scripture and their hearts go out to Him in joyful worship, using music to bless God. The verbs 'singing' and 'making' seem to refer to both vocal and instrumental music that is directed to the Lord rather than to one another. It is music that comes from the heart and may take a number of different forms.

### *c) Thanks (5:20)*

Third, they 'give thanks' always for all things to God the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul frequently summons us to give thanks (*cp.* Col. 3:15; 1 Th. 5:18). Thanksgiving is a proper outworking of the Holy Spirit in the child of God. Thankfulness signifies contentment. It recognizes the sovereignty of God who provides graciously all our needs. It presupposes a deep underlying faith that God can produce good out of even the most unpromising situation, and that thankfulness, therefore, can be felt because of the confident hope that in some wonderful way God will make even disaster and suffering an occasion for later blessing.

## Ephesians – Lesson 10

### *d) Submission (5:21)*

- *Paul says “Be subject to one another” (5:21). What does subjection mean to you? How do you propose to subject yourself to another believer besides your spouse?*

Fourth, they ‘submit to one another’ out of reverence for God. Each one considers the others to be better than he is. The Greek word *huyotassomenoi* means to voluntarily submit. Submission is an exercise of the will in which a person chooses to become vulnerable, accountable, and surrendered to another.

Pride of position and the authoritarian spirit are destructive to fellowship. The importance to Paul of the whole concept of submission is evident from the use of the word more than twenty times in his letters. He is to apply this in special instances in the next section, but we should note that he first gives it a completely general application. There must be a willingness in the Christian fellowship to serve any, to learn from any, to be corrected by any, regardless of age, sex, class, or any other division.

How does a person get drunk with wine? He drinks and drinks and drinks again, until what he has drunk takes control. The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. We must drink spiritual things until we are under the Spirit’s influence. Being filled with the Spirit is a matter of constantly drinking. We are to go to Christ and to drink of Him. We do this in prayer, listening to biblical preaching, studying God’s Word for ourselves, engaging in Christian fellowship, meeting around the Lord’s Table, and in every form of spiritual and devotional exercise. As the Spirit does His work through these means, we become more spiritual people, with the four results just considered above.

### **D. Application Questions**

- *God wants us to shed our old clothes, which include immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, filthy mouths, coarse jesting, and heavy drinking. If I have a problem with one or more of the above, how do I propose a course of action to conquer this problem?*
- *I understand that I carry the candle of the Lord, and His Light shines through me. I will not be fearful in living for Christ. I will pray that God will arrange the opportunity for me to share my faith with a nonbeliever this week. I will not rationalize my fear by thinking I never had the opportunity or the time.*

For next time: Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and Stuart chapter 11.