

Today we are going to do a bit of a Bible study. It would be really helpful if you would make a habit of bringing your Bibles to church. I know we sometimes put scripture on the screens but I still would not want to be without my actual Bible and the ability to make notes as I am prompted to think of and make personal applications.

In Ephesians 5 there is a wonderful passage of scripture that again should be helpful as we launch into this New Year.

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are His dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us^[a] and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

⁶ Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey Him. ⁷ Don't participate in the things these people do. ⁸ For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. ¹³ But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, ¹⁴ for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said,

*“Awake, O sleeper,
rise up from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.”*

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, ¹⁹ singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5: 1-20 NLT

Imitating God! What does it mean to imitate God? How in the world does one imitate God? The fact is that if you are not living to please God outside of church what you do in this room makes no difference in your life. You may feel something in the music, you may cry a little during the sermon but those are just emotions and following Christ and being a Christian is not an emotion. It is a radical life change that comes with challenges, faith and following.

Ephesians 5:1 says, “Be imitators of God. . .” In the Message Bible it says, “Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents.”

1. Living a life of love

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are His dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Ephesians 5:1-2 NLT

“Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that.” Eph. 5:1-2 The Message Bible

You and I have been given the opportunity to express our love to God by doing His will. I love the spirit of these verses as translated in the Message Bible. Jesus loves us extravagantly. He loves us not to get something from us but to demonstrate His incredible devotion and surrender toward doing the Father’s will.

If you want to know what that looks like practically all you have to do is read the rest of this chapter. Paul writes some principles for us to follow that you have to take them seriously enough to work into your life. Listen to some of these as they are written in the Message Bible

- a. *“Don’t allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed.”*
- b. *“Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, Christians have better uses for language than that.”*
- c. *“Don’t talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn’t fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.”*
- d. *“Don’t let yourself get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with Him. Don’t even hang around with people like that.”*

When you truly encounter God He begins to change you from the inside out and if you are serious about it and Him, He will never stop changing you. If you are growing in your relationship with Him you will be constantly evaluating your life and lifestyle choices. You will be reviewing your relationships and conversations in light of the Word of God.

Living a life of Love!

2. Living as people of light

For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹ *For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.* Ephesians 5:8-9 NLT

“You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You’re out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So now no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, then do it.” Eph. 5:8-10 The Message

Again we are looking at how to imitate God. We are to not only live a life of love but we are to live as children of light. What does that mean? Again let’s go back to the Bible and see how Paul defined these principles.

- a. *Don’t waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness.*
- b. *Expose these things for the sham they are. It’s a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.*

We are to live as children of light. We live in a world of darkness and people who will do all kinds of things to satisfy their search for light. When you live as children of light you will engage other people. Some of them need to be people of light just like yourself but you are also called to shine your light in a dark world.

Jesus uses this metaphor. We are like lights or candles in a world of darkness.

3. It matters: Living the Christ-first life.

¹⁵ *So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise.* ¹⁶ *Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.* ¹⁷ *Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.* Ephesians 5:15-17 NLT

“So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.” Eph. 5:15-17 The Message

- a. *Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,* Ephesians 5:18 NLT

- b. ¹⁹ *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.* ²⁰ *And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Ephesians 19-20 NLT

Our lifestyle will have a huge impact on other people. It will impact them for good or for evil. It is not easy especially when it seems that everyone else is going a different direction. Our goal is to live so consistently that there is never a question or never a doubt as to where we are headed and to whom we pledge our lives and allegiance.

Three young people in Florida, barely out of their teens, were sentenced to fifteen years each for removing a stop sign from an intersection. The defendants cried, and even the judge expressed regret, but everyone seems to agree that stealing stop signs is a particularly heinous prank. In this case, three other young people were killed when they drove through the sign-less intersection into an eight-ton Mack truck.

Our lives ought to be giving off clear signals for others to follow. There should be no doubt. You don't get to "move the signs around" to suit your own lifestyle. In other words you don't get to be a Christian on Sunday mornings or Saturday nights during church and then live however you want the rest of the week.

You have to build a real and genuine relationship with God to be able to imitate Him. You have to get close to Him to be able to imitate Him.

Former Notre Dame Coach, Lou Holtz, is a sought-after motivational speaker. His most famous address is entitled "Do Right." In this speech he says describes the three most important questions people want to know about us:

Can I trust you?
Are you committed?
Do you care?

The pastor of an underground Chinese church told a group of Southern Baptists about the precautions they must take to avoid government persecution. Each time their church reaches ten to fifteen members, they split to reduce attention. They also alternate meeting places for the same reason. Because phone lines are monitored, members meet with a volunteer on a downtown street to find out where the church will meet next. One such volunteer was discovered by the government, arrested, beaten, and put in prison. He lost his job, house, and medical benefits. Another man stepped in and took his place and he too suffered the same fate. One of the visitors said, "I suppose you have difficulty filling that job." The Chinese pastor replied, "No. We have a waiting list." *Your Church on Mission with God, Nov. 12, 1999, p. 1*

Here's the deal. You can have as much of God as you want. The question is how much do you want? We're going to go through an exercise that will enable us to be reflective and honestly seek to find areas in our lives that we can express our love to Him. There's an old saying that says imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. In our case we are not trying to flatter God we are trying to express our love to Him.

Rick Warren said it best: “We will not be in heaven two seconds before we cry out: “Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary?”

In this new year why not absolutely commit yourself to following God 100%. Don’t hold back anything but surrender it all. Your personal life, your marriage, your singleness, your job, your entertainment, your relationships, and anything else that might come up.

Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that.

³⁻⁴ Don’t allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed. Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don’t talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn’t fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.

⁵ You can be sure that using people or religion or things just for what you can get out of them—the usual variations on idolatry—will get you nowhere, and certainly nowhere near the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.

⁶⁻⁷ Don’t let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with Him. Don’t even hang around people like that.

⁸⁻¹⁰ You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You’re out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.

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*Wake up from your sleep,
Climb out of your coffins;
Christ will show you the light!*

So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

¹⁷ Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.

18-20 Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of Him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.