

Walking in Love, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 5:2–7

Code: 1932

REVIEW

Ephesians 4-6 is Paul's discussion of the worthy walk. An important aspect of it is to walk in love (5:2). Walking in love has four elements.

I. THE PLEA (vv. 1-2a)

"Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love."

Children Make the Best Mimics

Notice that verse 1 says we are to be "followers of God, as dear children." The basis for imitating God is that we are His children. First Peter 1:23 says we have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Since God made us His children (Eph. 1:5), we ought to manifest His characteristics. Galatians 3:26 says, "Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." When you put your faith in Christ and received Him as Savior, you became a child of God--you were born again (John 3:3). As a result it would be abnormal for you not to imitate God. In the physical realm, it's normal for a child to be like his parents. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Galatians 4:4-7 says, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." When you were saved you became a child of God--His Spirit is now in you and your life should manifest the life of God.

II. THE PATTERN (v. 2b)

"As Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor."

A. The Characteristics of Christ's Love

When I was a little kid starting out in school, I learned how to draw by tracing bold images on tracing paper. In the same sense Christ is our pattern. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers" (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was to be someone other believers could trace their lives on. If we are to love like God loves, we must be willing to forgive others and love them unconditionally and sacrificially. Jesus met each of those conditions when He died on the cross.

LESSON

B. An Example of Christ's Love

John 13 contains perhaps the most beautiful picture of Christ's love apart from His death on the cross. Here we can see His unconditional, forgiving, and self-sacrificing love in action.

1. The setting

The setting is the Upper Room on the night before Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus was about to be crucified, yet they were

indifferent to what He was about to endure. They didn't realize the sinless, spotless Son of God was about to bear in His body the sins of every person who ever lived in the world. They didn't even care because they were selfish, sinful, and unresponsive to His needs. If they loved Him as they claimed, they would have been comforting and encouraging.

In Jesus' time it was customary for a servant to wash everyone's feet before beginning the meal because the people ate on the floor and one diner's head would be another's feet. Since there was no servant present, it would have been appropriate for one of the disciples to take on the role of a servant and wash the others' feet. But they were too busy arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. So supper began without anyone's feet being washed.

2. The service

Notice what happens in John 13:4-5: "[Jesus] riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments, and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded." Now that's love in action! The disciples were full of pride and very self-centered. They even resented each other, thinking someone else would seek a higher rank. In the midst of that sinful arena, Jesus washed their feet in a kind, tender, and sympathetic act. He didn't even ask for a response from them. What an example of forgiving, unconditional, self-sacrificing love!

3. The sermon

Jesus summed up His example by saying, "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (vv. 13-17).

Later that evening He said to them, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (vv. 34-35). Jesus commanded them to love as He had loved them. And He had just demonstrated forgiving, unconditional, and self-sacrificing love. That's the kind of love we're to have for each other.

III. THE PERVERSION (vv. 3-4)

Whatever God establishes, Satan will counterfeit. In Ephesians 5:3-6 we see how Satan attempts to pervert God's love.

A. The World's Search for Love

The people of the world want love in a bad way. In fact, the only thing they want more than love is money. Loving, being loved, and making love are viewed as the ultimate high. Love is seen as the way to experience emotional extremes: you'll never be as happy nor as sad as when you're in love. Today's music feeds that quest for love. Throughout much of it is the same underlying message: either the fantasy of a love sought or the despair of a love lost. People continue to chase that elusive dream. They base their concept of love on what it does for them. Songs, plays, films, books, and TV programs continually perpetuate the fantasy--the dream of a perfect love perfectly fulfilled. People search for love like Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth. As they look, they give themselves to other people only for what they can get. When they're no longer satisfied, they'll move on and find others who can satisfy them. The world's love is unforgiving, conditional, and self-centered--the very opposite of God's love. People in the world search for love, but it's not true love, it's Satan's perversion.

In Matthew 18 the Lord illustrates the world's love with a parable. Peter came to Christ and asked Him this question: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" (vv. 21-22).

1. The forgiving master

Our Lord then gave the following parable: "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had nothing with which to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" (vv. 23-27). The gracious master represents God and the indebted servant represents sinful man. The sinner comes to God on the basis of his works, claiming he can pay God back for all his sin. In spite of such a foolish claim, God is generous enough to forgive.

2. The unforgiving servant

Verse 28 continues the parable: "But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him an hundred denarii [about three months' wages]; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me! Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the inquisitors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother his trespasses" (vv. 28-35).

God has forgiven the sins of all the ungodly, yet some never appropriate His forgiveness. The evidence against the wicked servant is this: he was never a true believer because he never loved. Instead he responded in the typical fashion of ungodly people: no forgiveness. The world is not forgiving--it bases its responses on certain conditions being met.

B. The World's Type of Love

Ephesians 5:3-4 says, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not fitting; but, rather, giving of thanks." If God's love and the love of His children is forgiving, unconditional, and self-sacrificing, you can be sure Satan will pervert that. Therefore the love of the world tends to be unforgiving, conditional, and self-centered. Worldly love focuses on desire, self-pleasure, and lust. It is shallow, selfish, sensual, and sexual.

Satan has sold that definition of love to the world, and incredible as it seems, many Christians have fallen into the trap of believing it. Divorce and infidelity are rampant in the church today because of an unwillingness to walk in love. In Ephesians 5:1-6 Paul exhorts us to walk in God's love and then warns us about the world's love.

1. Unholy deeds

a) "Fornication" The Greek word translated "fornication" (porneia) appears at least thirty-five times in its noun form in the New Testament. The verb form appears even more than that. So we can conclude that porneia, which refers to sexual sin of any kind, is a big problem. (1) Its antonym The Greek word enkrateia, which means "discipline" or "self-control," was considered a chief virtue in ancient Greek culture. The term, used ten times in the New Testament to refer to self-control or temperance, primarily refers to sexual self-control in secular Greek literature. It was used that way in the New Testament as well. (a) Acts 24:25--When Paul was brought before Felix, the governor of Judea, and Drusilla, the governor's wife, he "reasoned of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come." It was common knowledge that Felix had persuaded Drusilla to leave her first husband and become his third wife. Apparently Paul confronted Felix, who was a living illustration of violating God's righteousness by failing to have sexual self-control. (b) 1 Corinthians 7:9--In reference to the

unmarried and widowed Paul said, "If they cannot have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." If someone has a problem with sexual self-control and they have a strong desire to get married, he or she ought to get married and not claim to have the gift of singleness. While *enkrateia* refers to sexual self-control, *porneia*, its antonym, refers to a lack of sexual self-control.⁽²⁾ Its usage *Porneia* refers to sexual behavior that goes beyond the limits God sets. The term encompasses any kind of sexual sin, and can refer to adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia (sex with children), prostitution, and anything else that exhibits a lack of sexual self-control. The Greek word *graphe*, which means "to write," combined with *porneia* gives us the English word pornography. There's no place for any of those sins in the life of a Christian. Paul said, "Let [them] not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). Paul said to the Corinthian church, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you" (1 Cor. 5:1). Instead of being broken about it, they were "puffed up, and have not rather mourned" (v. 2). Then he said, "Your glorying is not good.... I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat" (vv. 6, 11). Fornicators are to be put out of the church because they don't walk as children of God. Instead they are spots and blemishes on the assembly (2 Pet. 2:12-14). b) "Uncleanness" The Greek word translated "uncleanness" (*akatharsia*) is used eleven times in the New Testament. Jesus used it to refer to the vile, rotten stench that occurs when a body decays (Matt. 23:27). The other ten times it is connected with sexual evil--the vile, rotten stench that accompanies sexual sin. It refers to immoral acts, thoughts, passions, and ideas. The world may view their immorality as love, but Paul accurately defined it "uncleanness." Sexual Immorality in the Church? The contemporary obsession with sex has crept even into the church. I'm shocked and dismayed that some Christian authors have published what amounts to pornography. I've had some books sent to me that I've had to pitch in the trash. The world has sold its immorality so effectively that some associated with the church have bought into it and tried to sanctify it. I've heard of at least one so-called "Christian" counselor who has advised couples to see each other naked before they decide to get married. That's ludicrous! Marriage isn't something clinical that can be dealt with in such a fashion. Some have even suggested that premarital sex would be beneficial for Christians before marriage. We need to remember what Ephesians 5:3 says: as Christians we must avoid any association with sexual sin if we're to be what God wants us to be. c) "Covetousness" The Greek word translated "covetousness" (*pleonexia*) could be translated "greediness." Exodus 20:17 says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ... wife." Men in our society covet other men's wives. They also covet women they see on TV, in movies, ads, magazines, or books. But that is sin, just one part of the world's counterfeit fantasy love. Ironically many movie stars, who fill up the fantasies of so many, can't stay married themselves. *Pleonexia* means "to defraud." It refers to the love of possessing. Some people will sacrifice everything for their lusts, including relationships with their spouses, children, or friends. They'll also destroy their home or their job--all to fulfill a fantasy. But they can't fulfill it because it's Satan's lie. People often seek divorce because they claim to have fallen in love with someone else. But that's not a justification for divorce; it's a condemnation of those who seek it. It simply proves they have sinful hearts. People who divorce for that reason pile one sin onto another: first in not loving their partners as God commanded, and second in coveting what isn't theirs. Remember what happened when David coveted Bathsheba--one sin led to another (2 Sam. 11:1; 12:23). In Ephesians 5:3 Paul says, "Let it not be once named among you as becometh saints [*hagios*, "holy ones"]." How could holy ones be characterized by unholy love--selfish, conditional, and unforgiving love? We are set apart from that. Children of a holy God won't make a habit of doing unholy things.

2. Unholy speech

a) "Filthiness" "Filthiness" refers to general obscenity, or that which is disgraceful. Ephesians 5:12 conveys the same idea: "It is a shame even to speak of things which are done of them in secret."

We're not even to talk about the sexual evil that is fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness refers to. So "filthiness" refers to disgraceful talk. In our day it's difficult to read a book or watch a television program or film without being exposed to the garbage of the world. It's also difficult to hold conversations with certain people. Yet the Bible commands us never to indulge in a filthy conversation or disgraceful talk. We are called to holy conversations. We ought to communicate things from the mind and heart of God, not the filth of the world. b) "Foolish talking" The Greek word translated "foolish talking" (morologia) means "stupid talk." It refers to that which characterizes someone who is intellectually deficient. I call that category of speech "low obscenity." It is low-class, obscene, gutter talk. It is made up of senseless, profitless words with filthy connotations. c) "Jesting" The Greek word translated "jesting" (eutrapelia) means "able to turn easily." This kind of talk I call "high obscenity." A person who jests is able to turn what is said into something dirty. That kind of talk is characteristic of the late-night talk-show host who twists practically everything into filthy innuendo. In contrast Ephesians 5:4 says we are to give thanks. It is the most unselfish thing we can do. Instead of seeking selfish things like sexual fulfillment, give thanks instead. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." When we are thankful for everything, we step outside ourselves because thanksgiving is directed toward God. Express your love to God and to others. Let your life be characterized by thankfulness. Instead of taking from people, love them in a way that communicates thankfulness. Remember, God's love is unselfish and thankful, but the world's love is selfish and thankless.

IV. THE PUNISHMENT (vv. 5-6)

A. The Recipients of Punishment (v. 5)

"This ye know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man (who is an idolater) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

If you live like those people, you're not saved! The lifestyle characteristic of unbelievers is not characteristic of believers. We are the children of God (v. 1), the beloved of Christ (v. 2), holy ones (v. 3), and citizens of the kingdom (v. 5). Therefore we must act consistently with our identity. In verse 5 Paul says, "This ye know." The truth Paul is communicating is no mystery--we know better. Unfortunately some deceive themselves into believing that once someone made a "decision for Christ" he must be saved even if he's living as a fornicator or homosexual. But Scripture says that no fornicator is saved. That's not to say true believers won't fall into the sin of fornication, but that certainly won't be a continual characteristic of his life.

From the time of conversion there must be a change because repentance is essential to salvation. Titus 2:11 says, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age." When we were saved we learned that we couldn't continue to live in lust and ungodliness.

When a Christian is drawn into a sin, such as fornication or filthy talk, the Lord will forgive him (1 John 1:9). But that will not be characteristic of his life.

B. The Reason for Punishment (v. 6)

"Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience."

You shouldn't let anyone convince you that you can practice sin and still be a Christian because God will forgive you. That kind of rhetoric is vain--it's empty, meaningless, and useless. The sins referred to in verses 3-4 are damning. They don't characterize the children of God; they're what mark the children of disobedience. Conclusion

Paul ended this section of Ephesians with a warning: "Be not ye, therefore, partakers [partners] with them" (v. 7). Don't join the world in its evil. The past is the past.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is our basis for imitating God? Explain.
2. What were the disciples doing in the Upper Room the night before Jesus was crucified? What had they not done?
3. What did Jesus do? What did He teach the disciples as a result (John 13:13-17, 34-35)?
4. Describe how people in the world today search for love.
5. How did Christ illustrate the world's love?
6. What is fornication? Contrast it with its antonym.
7. According to 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, how did Paul want the church to deal with fornicators in the church?
8. What does uncleanness refer to?
9. Define and explain the sin of covetousness.
10. What does filthiness refer to?
11. Compare and contrast foolish talking and jesting.
12. According to Ephesians 5:4, what kind of talk should characterize a believer? Explain.
13. What kind of people do not inherit God's kingdom? Explain (Eph. 5:5).

Pondering the Principles

1. Read John 13-17. How many instances can you find where Christ showed His love for the disciples? In what similar ways has Christ shown His love for you? Based on what you have learned about Christ's love for you, what changes do you need to make regarding your love for others?
2. Review the section on the world's type of love (see pp. 5-9). In all honesty, can any of those characteristics be named among you? The action doesn't need to be present for the sin to be active when we let it permeate our thoughts. Examine your thoughts. What do you think about? What kinds of things do you expose your mind to? Make a list of those things. Now read Philippians 4:8. Compare your list to the virtues listed there. Cross out any item that doesn't fulfill the parameters of Philippians 4:8. Now make a commitment to turn from those items you crossed off.

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