

EPHESIANS part XIV; 5:1-21

Focusing on the Greater Family

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter five.

Last week we saw how Paul spoke of the Gentile believers no longer being seen that way by God. Now that they are in the family of God, they have a new identity. But that new identity means that a new lifestyle is to be the norm – a new culture. Paul began to describe what that meant. Remember that Paul is trying to turn the cultural ship, as it were, steering the new believers into a way of life that mirrors/ images the character of God. That is a long row to hoe, or a slow burn as some would say today.

Today we will run across some familiar words and phrases from last week's lesson. That is because from here on out Paul is continually funneling and speaking in a more focused way, becoming more specific as he moves along in how the life of a Christian is to be lived and why it should be that way. He will be contrasting their old way of life using imagery such as light being contrasted with darkness, et al. He also gives them Christian alternatives to the lifestyle they once lived. Please pay careful attention to the language of contrast and comparison as well as the other verbal cues Paul uses in his argument for a new life lived out in the Spirit of God – that of a renewed mind.

Paul seeks here to provide alternatives not only to pagan behavior but also to pagan worship, as we shall see. The contrast between darkness and light, bad behavior and good, is drawn sharply to emphasize the boundary and the need to think always in a Christian manner about such matters, not to suggest cutting off all contact with those outside the Christian community. Instead, this is a sort of compensation for the blurring of the boundaries, (circumcision) that is the experience of a minority community that does not seek to remove itself from social relationships with pagans or from the dominant cultural ethos.

Paul is also concerned about the Christian witness given to the larger culture simply by the Christian community being and appearing to be something distinctive, a city of light set on a hill. The call to wise behavior (5:15–17) is as much outward as inward looking.

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- Therefore – verbal cue; explain.
- 'Imitators of God.' How is that done? Look at the next sentence.

- Walk in love as Christ loved us. This is the standard that frames all that he now says, which is built on the foundation of what he has argued previously.
- Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice to God. We are to live in this manner, being a living sacrifice to God. That is how we imitate God and walk in love as Christ loved us.
- Now Paul will get down to the brass tacks of things. Remember he is turning a ship that has been sailing in a certain manner for a long time. The new believers, for the most part have already heard these things, as we shall see, but Paul now makes a more detailed case of what imitating God means.

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

- But; verbal cue of comparison and example.
- Sexual immorality is a big umbrella.
- It was of course a harder sell when Paul would denounce behavior that was considered acceptable in the larger Greco-Roman culture, such as certain forms of male sexual and social behavior. Here he would need to provide arguments or rationales such as: if you keep behaving this way you will not enter the dominion of God, or if you need an alternative to getting drunk and carousing, try being filled with the Spirit and singing praises and godly songs instead.¹

A. The Non-Jewish World.

I. Usage.

1. *pórnē*; (from *pérnēmi*, “to sell”) literally means “harlot for hire” (Greek harlots were usually slaves).
2. *pórnos* means “whoremonger,” then “male prostitute.”
3. *porneía* means “licentiousness” or “fornication” (rare in classical Greek).
4. *porneúō* means a. “to prostitute” (passive “to prostitute oneself”), and b. “to commit fornication.”
5. *ekporneúō* means “to live licentiously.”

II. Extramarital Intercourse.

1. **Cultic Prostitution.** This includes both the single act and a general state. The former is common in Persia. The latter is widespread in cults of mother deities and in Syria and Egypt. Greece rejects it, but it finds an entrance at Corinth and Athens, probably through trade with the Near East.

2. **Secular Prostitution.** Prostitutes are unknown in the Homeric age, but men often have concubines, e.g., female slaves. Prostitution arises with increasing prosperity. Slaves provide a source, as does depriving alien women of civil rights. The professional “friend” becomes a common figure in Greek society, and since intercourse is regarded as just as natural as eating and drinking, extramarital affairs are permitted for husbands. Yet excess is censured, and Plato defends intercourse with harlots only as long as it is secret and causes no offense. Sparta maintains stronger sexual discipline but is also the home of homosexuality. This becomes widespread, lesbianism less so. Among harlots those in brothels form the lowest class, those

with some artistic skills a higher group, and independent harlots who can command high prices another higher class.²

B. The OT.

I. Usage.

1. The *porneúō* group is mostly used for the root *znh* and has such senses as “to be unfaithful,” “to play the harlot.” It may be used of the prostitute or of the betrothed or married woman who proves unfaithful.³

- Covetousness – extortative, a zealous drive of acquisition. A very modern problem, as is the sexual immorality.
- “The expression ‘as is fitting among saints’ points to the existence of standards: lines separating the pure and holy community from the outside world.” The negative counterpart is in v. 4: “which is inappropriate.”

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

The list of evils continues in v. 4 with three words for sins of speech, all of which occur only here in the NT. The first, *aischrotēs*, “obscenity,” which occurs in Col. 3:8.

The second, *mōrologia*, means literally the words or language of a fool. It refers not to speech that lacks intelligence or education but to speech that lacks wisdom or a godly perspective on life.

The third, *eutrapelia*, had both positive and negative connotations. In a negative context such as here it refers to coarse humor, sexual innuendoes, or even dirty jokes. These are not the kind of things which should come out of Christian mouths, which should rather be used to express thanksgiving.⁴

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.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them;

Paul begins v. 5 by noting that the audience already knows all this. “The author is not correcting believers who lack holiness that they ought to have but is reinforcing an established Christian way of life.” Paul warns clearly that the sexually immoral, the insatiable, will have no inheritance in the dominion of God and Christ (cf. **1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21**). “The apostle is not asserting that the believer who ever falls into these sins is automatically excluded from God’s kingdom. Rather what is envisaged here is the person who has given himself or herself up without shame or repentance to this way of life.” Paul adds that insatiableness, greedy drive to

acquire, an excessive desire to have or to obtain is a form of idolatry. Anything or anyone one desires or loves more than God becomes an idol.

V. 6 indicates that idle words bring the wrath of God on disobedient ones.

Paul says in v. 7 that believers must not share in this horrible fate by sharing in conveying empty words or acting like the sons of disobedience. He is not urging disassociation from pagans altogether, only disassociation from certain kinds of pagan behavior.

⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

- For – verbal cue. A comparison and contrast taking them back to what they once were and making the case as to why they should no longer live in their former manner.
- He reminds the audience that they were once not merely in darkness, but *were* darkness, but now in Christ are light and so must live as light. Paul does not say that they are light in themselves, but that they are light “in the Lord,” through, that is, their connection with Christ. This means living in a way that goodness, righteousness, and truth, which are the fruit of light characterize one’s life.

This does not rule out moral striving, but it makes clear that the power, energy, inclination, and wisdom for virtuous behavior is not self-generated or created by means of mere exhortation. Calling believers “light” also means that as enlightened people they have God’s light within them and so have a guide within themselves in regard to their conduct.

But there is a measure of moral discernment involved: v. 10 speaks about deciding or testing or finding out by experience what pleases the Lord. The Christian life is not all a matter of following preset rules. It also involves using good Christian judgment and character to decide what is and is not “light.”¹⁴³ The works of darkness do not bear good fruit. They are sterile.

¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

V. 11 adds that it is the believer’s job as light to expose such dark deeds. This might be accomplished by prophetic witness or simply by living the kind of life that makes sinners ashamed and reveals them for what they are. “There is no contradiction between the two commands to expose the excesses of paganism and not even to speak of them. The works of

darkness are to be exposed by the light i.e. by what Christians are, not by what they say. They are not being licensed to scold.” Paul reminds the audience that God’s light reveals all that we speak or think. Humans cannot hide, even though Paul knows of the kind of unspeakable things that go on in the dark.

We do not know where the saying in v. 14b comes from. It may be a Christian saying or a fragment from a Christian hymn, but we cannot be sure. In light of what follows in vv. 18–19 it is probably from a Christian song that draws on Isa. 60:1 and possibly Isa. 26:19. Christian living requires care, diligence, and wisdom (v. 15). This is what Paul is speaking of as we move into verse 15.

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

To live as imagers of God requires wisdom and discernment. In some ways we have to live on a case by case basis. Paul is and will continue to give rules whereby we are to live, but there are certain situations that require wisdom because they aren’t simple. That is why we have to look to God and listen to the Spirit as we apply what we know of God’s word. We have to make the best use of our time. Because the days are evil, we can’t take a break when it comes to the dominion mandate/ being an imager.

In verse 17 Paul begins a comparison between typical pagan culture and that of their new identity in Christ. He makes the comparison and contrast between being foolish and understanding the will of God, which is to guide our daily lives. Drunken revelry was a common thing among the pagans as Paul has already alluded earlier. The will of God is not for us to be drunk and rabble-rousing. We are not to live to excess, which leads to all he has outlined thus far. If we are going to filled with anything it isn’t to be alcohol which not only is debauchery but also leads to further debauchery, usually in the area of sexual sin, but we are to be filled with the Spirit of God. This leads not to a drunken party lifestyle, but to addressing each other in spiritual ways. Think of the gas in the tank of a car being what powers a car. Being drunk on alcohol and/ or drugs shouldn’t be what fuels and drives us. It should be the Spirit of God. The contrast is between the drunken revelry and a life that isn’t “happy” because of alcohol and drugs or any other sinful excess, but a joy that comes from the Spirit and being in the will of God as a child of God. This is a totally different scenario for them as well as many of us.

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This verse is a pivot as Paul focuses all these ideas from the Christian community in general into/ inside the Christian home. Read ahead and trace Paul's thinking when it comes to submission and the analogy of the marriage and that of the church.

What we have read today may seem like common sense to many of us. But as I engage with Christians, many of them being younger, from a different time and generation, in many ways they are like Paul's original audience; having to have things defined from a Christian standpoint and then given examples and alternatives because they have only known what they have known.

That means we have to be understanding and patient. We also can't be hypocritical. We have to be consistent as we live our lives in a manner that meets the standards of God's kingdom and God's character. That isn't easy, but it is possible with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.