

# Walk in Love

## Ephesians 5:1–6

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#### 1. Love's Goal (5:1a)

- **“Therefore”** → marks a new section in Paul's argumentation. However, there's considerable thematic overlap between 4:17–32 and 5:1–6 which has led numerous authors to link 5:1–2 as the concluding portion of the previous section (e.g., O'Brien, Thielman, etc.).
- **“be imitators of God”** → lit., “become imitators...,” meaning that this isn't an instantaneous process but an ongoing process of change as one becomes more and more like God. This is the only command in the Bible to imitate God, but the idea parallels other commands found both in the OT and NT (Lev. 19:2; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16).

#### 2. Love's Basis (5:1b)

- The basis for our imitating God is found in our status as God's beloved children.
- So just as children who are beloved and close to their parents naturally imitate their character and actions, believers are called to imitate their heavenly father who has adopted them (1:5) and loved them (2:4; 3:17, 19).
- **“beloved”** → used of the Father's love and approval of the Son (Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; 12:6; Luke 3:22; 20:13). This could add an additional level to this imitation, since Paul will next point to the actions of God's “beloved Son” as the supreme example of love and what it means for a “beloved child” to imitate God. Christ is said to reveal God the Father (John 1:12, 18; 14:8; 12:45), and Paul will next exhort believers to “walk in love” as “Christ loved us.”

### 3. Love's Command (5:2a)

- ❑ **“walk in love”** → the third use of the term “walk” (*peripeteo*) in Eph. 4–6, with love being the predominant characteristic in focus. This kind of love (*agape*) refers to a love which is selfless and given “irrespective of merit” and which “seeks the highest good in the one loved” (Hoehner, 646).
- ❑ Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), it only follows that his beloved children imitate him by walking in love, which is demonstrated predominantly in believer’s loving one another (John 13:34).
- ❑ In 1 John 4:7, our love for each other is a test of our genuine faith and relationship to God as one who “has been born of God and knows God,” i.e., his children.

### 4. Love's Example (5:2b)

- ❑ **“just as Christ loved us”** → Christ’s love is the ultimate demonstration of divine love and the standard by which we as God’s children understand how to imitate God. Significantly, believers are the object of Christ’s love, which makes his love more than sentimentality.
- ❑ **“and gave himself up for us”** → Christ “loved us” was seen in an act of self-sacrifice. The emphasis here is on his willingness to offer himself in our place. “For us” could be understood as “for our benefit,” but it could equally be understood as “in our place,” i.e., substitution. Christ offered himself in our place, taking our spot on the cross. Cf. Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:14; John 11:50.
- ❑ **“a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”** → lit., “as an offering and sacrifice to God for a pleasing aroma.” The language is unmistakably drawn from the OT sacrificial system where the burnt offering was offered “as a pleasing aroma to Yahweh,” indicating the full acceptance of the offering and thus the worshipper.
- ❑ This text clearly links Christ’s self-sacrifice with the fulfillment of the OT sacrificial system. High Priests in OT Israel first needed to offer a sacrifice for their own acceptance before they could offer a sacrifice for the people. But Christ, having no need to be cleansed from sin, offered himself as a sacrifice to the people (Heb. 7:26–27). Every sacrifice required under the OT law, whether daily, monthly, or yearly, was satisfied by the one sacrifice of Christ, which he did voluntarily. Cf. Heb. 9:26; 10:10–12.
- ❑ “Here in Eph. 5:2, then, Paul says that Christ stepped forward willingly, out of his love for God’s people, to sacrifice himself and atone for their sins. This, Paul tells his audience, is how they should live in their day-to-day relationships with one another” (Thielman, 322).

## 5. Love's Counterfeit (5:3–4)

- If divine love is selfless, giving, sacrificial, and given regardless of merit, then the world's counterfeit is the opposite: selfish, taking, demanding, and based on performance.
- Paul's concern is that believers can spot the difference between the two and recognize how unfitting this counterfeit is for those who have been called by God to lives of true love and holiness.

### a. In Action (5:3)

- **“sexual immorality”** → *porneia*, from which we get our word “pornography.” It's a broad term that speaks of any sexual activity outside of marriage. It “refers to any illicit sexual intercourse, whether either of the parties is married or not. It is a broad term that includes adultery. *Porneia* also includes incest (involving blood relatives, legal relatives, or children), prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality” (MacArthur, *The Divorce Dilemma*, 96).
- **“all impurity”** → a more general term that can refer to any act which is impure or defiles a person, though it may carry a sexual nuance here. This could be seen as a catch-all term to describe any other kind of sexually-deviant behavior not captured by *porneia*.
- **“covetousness”** → an internal desire which is not satisfied with “enough.” It is “a strong desire to acquire and keep for themselves more and more money and possessions, because they love, trust, and obey wealth rather than God” (Rosner, 129). As a result, such an attitude results in someone's “unwillingness to share one's possessions with the needy” (Thielman, 329). Although it could have a sexual nuance here, e.g., lust, it's probably broader than that. At its heart, greed opposes love by seeking its own good rather than the good of others and so fits well on this list of actions which pervert love.
- **“not even be named among you”** → not to say these things can't be mentioned, but rather that they are not appropriate for believers and as such should be avoided so as to avoid even an association with such practices (“there must not be even a hint...,” NIV).

### b. In Speech (5:4)

- **“filthiness”** → refers to that which causes shame, dishonor, or debases (1 Cor. 11:6; 14:35; Eph. 5:12; Tit. 1:11). Even though it can refer to any kind of ugly or debasing behavior, its association with speech here probably gives this a similar nuance, i.e., “not only obscene behavior but also discussing or singing about ‘ugly’ sexual behavior as a form of entertainment” (Thielman, 330).

- ❑ **“foolish talk”** → lit., “moronic words,” referring to language which is pointless, or detracting from issues of faith and spiritual edification. It’s used outside the NT in connection with drunkenness and social parties and banquets which were common at the time and that would have been part of the overall Gentile culture with which the Ephesian believers would have been familiar.
- ❑ **“crude joking”** → refers to joking which crosses the line. It could be joking of a sexually suggestive nature or even sarcasm which crosses into personal ridicule. In both cases, it involves humor which is taken too far. It describes wit yielded by an individual without self-control and without regard for others.
- ❑ **“but let there be thanksgiving”** → while these vices are not fitting believers, “thanksgiving” is the proper speech to come from the lips of believers. “Whereas sexual impurity and covetousness both express self-centred [*sic*] acquisitiveness, thanksgiving is the exact opposite, and so the antidote required; it is the recognition of God’s generosity” (Houlden, 324). Thanklessness is a characteristic feature of the unbeliever (Rom. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:2) while gratitude is a fundamental attitude of the Christian (Eph. 5:18–20; 1 Thess. 5:18).

## 6. Love’s Warning (5:5–6)

### a. Exclusion from the Kingdom (5:5)

- ❑ **“everyone who is sexually immoral...or who is covetous”** → whereas before, the focus was on the action, now Paul focuses on the person who is characterized by that action. The point is not that believers cannot fall into these sins, but that those whose lives are characterized by these sins cannot be identified as a believer.
  - ▶ Paul warned the Corinthian church not to associate or have fellowship with people who claim to be a believer but is characterized by sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, or swindling (1 Cor. 5:9, 11).
  - ▶ Yet he clarified that believers aren’t to isolate from unbelievers who practice such sins because it would be impossible to do so and yet still carry on the church’s mission (1 Cor. 5:10).
  - ▶ The point is that these sins characterize unbelievers, not believers. When these practices become the lifestyle of a professing Christian, then there is a serious question as to the validity of that person’s faith.
- ❑ **“that is, an idolater”** → Paul is equating greed with the sin of idolatry because it describes “the vice of giving money the love, devotion, confidence, trust, service, and obedience that in the Jewish and early Christian tradition

should belong to God alone. The idea is not simply that ‘love of money leads to idolatry’...but that it *is*, metaphorically speaking, idolatry” (Thielman, 333). Cf. Job 31:24–28; Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13; Col. 3:5.

- ❑ **“has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God”** → those whose lives are patterned after such sins have no assurance that they have an inheritance in God’s kingdom.
  - ▶ Believers have an eternal inheritance in the coming kingdom of God, including salvation, righteousness, blessing, and the joy of reigning and ruling with Christ (Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:14; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4). This inheritance was secured at Christ’s death and sealed by the Holy Spirit at the believer’s conversion. He is being daily prepared for this inheritance, which is both his now and yet still in the future.
  - ▶ The kingdom of Christ and God “refers to the sphere of salvation, the community of the redeemed, and the place of eternal glory” (MacArthur, 202). Those whose inheritance resides in this kingdom exhibit the fruit of God’s nature made manifest in them (Tit. 2:11–12; 1 John 3:9–10).
  - ▶ Similar warnings appear elsewhere in the NT the remind Christians to examine themselves and to not give false assurance to those whose lives exhibit the fruit of someone still held captive by sin and worldly thinking (1 Cor. 6:9; Col. 3:5; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:10).

#### **b. Experience of Divine Wrath (5:6)**

- ❑ **“Let no one deceive you with empty words”** → Paul could have in mind either people outside (unbelievers) or inside the church (false teachers). Regardless, their message is that there is no consequence for sinful living. Paul’s warning is to beware of those who encourage licentiousness based on a false understanding of divine grace (cf. 2 Pet. 2–3; Jude).
- ❑ **“the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”** → while unbelievers have no inheritance in God’s kingdom, they should expect God’s wrath upon them because of these sins.
  - ▶ “The forceful expression ‘sons of disobedience’ points not to those who commit the occasional act of disobedience but to men and women whose lives are characterized by disobedience. They do not submit to God’s authority; instead, they prefer to rule their own lives and go their own way” (O’Brien, 365).
  - ▶ Believers were once counted among the “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), who are under the influence of the world and Satan. But now, believers have been adopted by God and are called as “obedient children” to be holy and imitate God through selfless love (1 Pet. 1:14; Eph. 5:1–2).