

# EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: Walk this Way

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SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:1-17

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The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

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Children love to imitate important people. Superheroes, first responders, firefighters, doctors/nurses, etc. Even their parents (yikes!), which is a sobering thought. The apostle Paul knew that we have this tendency to imitate people and behaviors we value, so he wrote to the community of Christ-followers in Ephesus, and he told them; actually, he commanded them, as children of God, "Be imitators of God." Now, telling us to watch our words or deal with our anger is one thing, but imitate God? ...You've got to be kidding. Is that even possible? And if it is, what does that look like? Paul answers that question in Eph5:1-17. But we need to start back in 4:32 to see the trajectory of where he's going with all this. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has also forgiven you" (4:32). "Just as"—that's the key phrase—treat others in the same way—"just as"—Christ treats you—imitate Christ—and Paul expands on that idea in 5:1 where he writes: "Therefore, as beloved children, be imitators of God." And again, we're like, "Really? Me, imitate God?" Here's the thing. That sounds really far-fetched if you look at the Christian life as a life of self-improvement. But God's ultimate agenda for our lives is not to get us to be better versions of ourselves. His agenda for our lives is for us to let his life shine through us. His goal is that you and I reflect his goodness, righteousness, love, grace, and truth in this dark world. This goes back to Genesis, where God says, "Let us make humans in our likeness." (cf Eph4:24). God has always intended to make himself known in this world through people created in his likeness. What does that look like? Paul tells us two things that help us flesh out what it means. First, he says, walk in love—imitating God means walking in love—that's vv2-6. Second, he says, walk in light—imitating God means to walk in light—but he breaks those two things down even more.

Walk in Love (5:2-6) — "Walk in love just as Christ also loved you...." There's the "just as" of imitation again. The bottom line of love is sacrifice. "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a sacrificial offering to God." Love is costly. Love cost God something—his son. Love cost Jesus something—his life. If you love someone, it will cost you something. Imitating God means walking in love—sacrificial love. Now, the opposite of self-sacrifice is self-indulgence, and that's what Paul talks about next—READ vv3-6. In the ancient city of Ephesus, worshipping the idol of Artemis was mixed with gross sexual indulgence. And in one sense, all sexual immorality boils down to the idolatry of self-indulgence. Paul is saying, "Don't imitate the lifestyle of people who don't know God. You did not learn Christ in that way. The way of Jesus does not lead to self-indulgence but self-sacrifice."

Walk in Light (5:7-17) — What does that mean? People of light see things as they are—they see with moral, ethical clarity—people of life see as God sees, and God does not see all the things Paul just mentioned as funny or cool. NO—first of all—Paul says back in v6—It's b/c of these things that the wrath of God 'comes' on the sons of disobedience. Notice the word "comes" is the present tense. In other words, the wrath of God, right now, is coming upon all those who practice these things—How so?—Paul tells us in Rom1:18-32 that the present wrath of God is seen in how he "gives people over to their sin" and their foolish minds get even darker. (3X in Rom1:18-32). The point is, he says, these things characterize people who do not know God—the sons of disobedience—people who have no part in the kingdom of God (v5)—but he says—we are not sons of darkness—we are children of light. And if we are walking in the light, we will SEE these things as God SEES them. We will see them for what they really are, and when we see as God sees, we will do as God says, and our light will shine in the darkness. He says, "Our light will expose the darkness, making the darkness light."

So, Paul says—two things.

1. Don't imitate people who don't know God—he says that twice—"Do not be partners" with them (v7)—"Take no part" in these things with them (v11).
2. Expose the deeds of darkness (vv11 and 13). What does it mean to expose the deeds of darkness?

If you study Paul's ministry carefully—and you look at what he says here with this list of sexually self-indulgent behaviors—and—you also look at a passage like Acts 19 that tells the story of Paul coming to immoral, pagan Ephesus and you look at how Paul conducted himself when he was there—what you find is that Paul did not come right out and directly, angrily condemn the pagan Ephesians and their beliefs. In fact, when a riot broke out in the city because of Paul's preaching—some men said in his defense—"These men have not 'blasphemed our goddess.'" (Acts 19:37)

Paul and his team—Priscilla, Aquila, Onesimus—did not show up and picket the temple of Artemis or stand on street corners, screaming at people to repent lest they go to hell. Paul didn't name names, point fingers, belittle pagan gods even though he taught that gods made with human hands are no gods at all. What Paul did was light a match. He exposed the darkness by teaching and living the truth found in Jesus. And, as he taught people about Jesus—how Jesus lived and died and rose and ascended into heaven—as he told people about Jesus and the life he offers—it became clear to some of the people Jesus was God and Artemis was not. He didn't shine a blinding light of accusation in people's eyes—He just held up a match. And that match drew more and more people to the truth of Jesus. You see, Paul was more concerned with teaching Christ-followers to let their light shine than he was in pointing out how wrong non-believers are. Many Christians think that exposing the darkness means angrily pointing out all the wrong things we see in our culture—shaking our fingers in the faces of people like those Paul describes here. Let them know you don't like their cussing and crude jokes. Let them know you don't like their sex-indulgent lifestyles—point out how offensive their lifestyles are to you. Jesus didn't do that with the people he was trying to reach. He didn't create an US and THEM polarity, and Paul didn't do that either. His approach was not to go around correcting people's language and lifestyles. He just imitated the life of Jesus in front of them—he walked in love, and he shined the light of truth like holding up a match.

Some Christians think that if they come to church and they hear a preacher preach against what's wrong "out there" in the world, they think that they've done something. They think that the way to be light and expose darkness is to get together with other Christians and condemn the darkness. No, Paul is not saying, "Spend your time calling the darkness dark!" No, if you do that, you'll end up looking at the people God wants you to reach as enemies. You will not be light in your workplace and your neighborhood, and your classroom if you react to people whose lifestyles you consider offensive as if they are enemies. God is saying, "you are light," so "be light"—walk in light—shine the light of Jesus, and the darkness will be exposed, and some will be drawn to the light that is in you.

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### ***Community Group Questions***

1. Ask: Why do children and even some of us adults tend to imitate people we think are important or cool? ...What are we really after?
2. When you read here that Paul calls us to "be imitators of God" how does that hit you? ...
3. How do walking love (5:2-6) and walking in light (7-17) help us better understand what it means to "imitate God?" ... Take each one at a time—read 5:2-6 and talk about walking in love—then read 5:7-17 and talk about walking in light.
4. If the essence of biblical love is sacrifice, how then in your relationships, what does "loving" others (spouse, kids, close friends, etc) cost you?
5. Spend some time discussing who it means for Christians (your group) to 'expose deeds of darkness' by 'lighting a match' rather than being a blinding light.