

Ephesians 5:1-21

We've probably all seen the news. Another pastor, this time of an Atlanta mega church, is accused of the worst kind of hypocrisy. Several young men are speaking out, calling him a sexual predator. Sadly, the alleged victims have just enough credibility to make the whole horrible scenario look factual.

It's no secret that many people who reject Christianity do not reject Christ as much as they reject Christians, who all too often tend to give Christ a bad name. The Bible is very clear about what God expects from us as believers. We need to be just as clear about what we expect from ourselves.

Earlier in Ephesians Paul explained to us our position in Christ – the basis for our understanding of who we are in Him. He also made clear that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is now present and working within us, transforming us into people that will be more like Jesus in character and virtue.

Last week we looked at how that process is supposed to take place. We actively put off our old self and its activities, we then put on our new nature by thinking differently and doing new things – things that are pleasing to God. Finally we put away sin once and for all, never going back to it, treating it like last week's garbage.

In Ephesians 5:1-21 we are firmly into the application section of Paul's letter. There is not much deep theology here. Paul tells us very straightforwardly what is right and what is wrong. The only proper response to this passage is to believe it and act accordingly.

At the end, we'll talk a bit about why Christians so often don't seem to get this right.

**The Bible is very clear about what God expects of Christians. We need to be just as clear about what we expect of ourselves.**

- I. We need to be more like Jesus 5:1-2
- II. We need to be less like the world 5:3-14
- III. We need to take our walk with the Lord more seriously than anything else. 5:15-21

- I. We need to be more like Jesus 5:1-2

A. 5:1 **Be imitators of God**

- i. God wants us to consciously imitate Him, just as children naturally imitate their parents. My wife is very caring and compassionate; I sort of "balance her out" through a mere lack of those qualities. I want my kids to turn out like her, but so far the jury is still out; they may end up like me instead.
- ii. The fact is Jesus has set us the best example imaginable.
- iii. So how will that look? Psalm 103 is a good place to start:

*Psa 103:8 NKJV The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.*

- iv. Imitating God, by following the clear example of Jesus Christ, will make us gracious, merciful, slow to anger and self-sacrificing people. That is how Christians are supposed to act.

**The Bible is very clear about what God expects of Christians. We need to be just as clear about what we expect of ourselves.**

II. We need to be less like the world

5:3-14

- A. First of all, let's remember that we are **saints**. Look back at **Eph 1:1**. That greeting can just as easily apply to us. Now look at the verses that follow, **Eph 1:3-4**.
- B. 5:3 Paul reminds us again that we are **saints**, or "holy ones". We need to act like it.
- C. As for **covetousness**, if we look at the context here, I think Paul means covetousness in an inappropriate sexual sense. In **Deut 5**, the first thing mentioned in the tenth commandment, the one regarding covetousness, has to do with "your neighbor's wife."

**Deut 5:21 NKJV** *'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.'*

- A. The ancient world in which Paul was writing was very impure – much like the world we live in today.
  - i. Most of us know people who can take any conversation about any subject and immediately make it sexual.
  - ii. Sigmund Freud was the father of psychoanalysis. If you've ever been unfortunate enough to study any Freudian psychology, you learned that sexual desire is the chief motivational force of human life.
    - 1. That may or may not tell us much about the human life, but it certainly tells us something about Freud.
    - 2. Someone with nothing better to do should write a book, and I'll give him the title: *Psychanalyzing Freud*. It would go through all of his main ideas and use them to tell us about the man who concocted this stuff.
    - 3. Still, he was on to something: The world is indeed fixated on all that is sensual or sexual, but this is what our passage is telling us to reject.
- B. If we read this section again, thinking of the word covetousness as having a clear sexual connotation, we'll find that Paul is speaking throughout this section about us rejecting a world that is utterly sold out to idolatry of a sexual nature. **Read 5:3-14 again.**
- C. God wants us to be the world's ultimate example of holiness and purity in both speech and behavior. That does not mean we are examples of self-righteousness, just an easy-going, almost natural or unconscious purity.

**The Bible is very clear about what God expects of Christians. We need to be just as clear about what we expect of ourselves.**

III. We need to take our walk with the Lord more seriously than anything else. 5:15-21

- A. 5:15 **Walk circumspectly** Be careful how you conduct your life.
- B. 5:16 **Redeeming the time** “Making the most of every opportunity” (NLT)
- C. 5:15-17 All of this points to the fact that we need wisdom: The book of Proverbs is the best place to learn about wisdom: the understanding or the ability needed to live life well.

*Prov 1:5 NKJV A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*

*Pr 1:7 ESV The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

*Pr 10:8 ESV The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.*

*Pr 10:19 ESV When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.*

*Pr 11:2 ESV When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.*

- D. 5:18 **Be filled with the Spirit** More explicitly, “be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit” (Grudem). This means not a onetime “filling” but a regular pattern of life.
- E. 15:19-21 This is all behavior that is consistent with the Spirit-filled life – including **giving thanks always for all things**. Now that can be a challenge, but that’s the goal.

## Conclusions:

**The Bible is very clear about what God expects of Christians. We need to be just as clear about what we expect of ourselves.**

Is there anything here that is all that difficult to grasp? Not really. So why don't Christians seem to always get this? Why do we see, at times, the worst sort of hypocrisy, not just among occasional church attenders, but even among pastors or people with high-profile ministries?

Several reasons, which we will do well to understand:

1. Sometimes these guys are just phonies, so we might as well prepare ourselves for them.

**2 Cor 11:13-15 NKJV** <sup>13</sup>*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup>And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

**Revelation 2:2 NKJV** *"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;*

2. Sometimes people consider themselves Christians, but really don't even know why. On top of that people all have family, friends and cultural issues that affect why they live the way they do. So we've got Christians that are overly influenced by the world and worldlings who somehow feel that they are Christians, when they really don't adhere closely to any of the beliefs or ethical standards of the Bible.
3. Sometimes they may be sincere, but they've been caught in one of the enemy's many traps.

**First Peter 5:8-9 NKJV** <sup>8</sup>*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

**Jms 4:7-8 NKJV** <sup>7</sup>*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

4. In the area of our sanctification – that process by which we all become holy – God does not promise to make us instantly perfect, but He will make us progressively better. What we have in the church is a bunch of people all starting at different places, and moving at different rates, but who are all slowly but surely travelling the road to a holy life. The degree of visible holiness we observe in a given life can vary widely.
5. Finally, God is working with real human beings, not robots, not dolls, not characters in a novel. We can read in the Bible the kind of things that we read here, and agree or disagree. We can, in theory, walk out the door and choose disobedience. I don't recommend it, but we can do that.
6. Let's instead deliberately choose holiness and the fear of God.