

Ephesians Chapter 5:

Introduction

Ephesians 5 continues the practical instruction from the Apostle Paul on how Christians should live in response to their new identity in Christ. Building upon the theological foundation laid in earlier chapters, this chapter emphasizes living out the Christian calling in the realms of personal holiness, relationships, and community life. Paul addresses topics such as imitating God, walking in love, living as children of light, and the relationships between husbands and wives, concluding with a call to mutual submission in the body of Christ. Ephesians 5 is rich with ethical teaching and foundational theology for understanding Christian living in the world.

Historical and Cultural Context

The Epistle to the Ephesians was likely written by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome (c. 60-62 AD), with the aim of encouraging and instructing the Christian community in Ephesus and surrounding regions. Ephesus was a major cultural, political, and religious center in the Roman Empire. It was known for its temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city was steeped in pagan practices, and early Christians in Ephesus faced significant challenges as they navigated a society that was hostile to their faith.

Ephesus had a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, and Paul's letter addresses primarily Gentile converts. The teachings in Ephesians 5 would have been radical in a world that emphasized moral relativism, idolatry, and harsh social hierarchies. The ethical instructions Paul gives were meant to distinguish the Christian way of life from the prevailing Greco-Roman values, highlighting purity, love, and mutual submission as hallmarks of the Christian community.

Structure of Ephesians Chapter 5

Ephesians 5 can be divided into four main sections:

1. **Imitate God and Live in Love (Ephesians 5:1-7)**
2. **Live as Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8-14)**
3. **Living Wisely and Making the Most of Every Opportunity (Ephesians 5:15-21)**
4. **Instructions for Christian Households: Wives, Husbands, and Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33)**

1. Imitate God and Live in Love (Ephesians 5:1-7)

Paul begins chapter 5 with a strong exhortation to “be imitators of God” (v. 1), followed by a command to “live a life of love, just as Christ loved us” (v. 2). This call to imitate God in love, and to live lives of sacrificial love, is rooted in the example of Christ's self-giving sacrifice on the cross.

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Imitators”** (Greek: *mimētai* - μιμηταί): This verb means "to mimic" or "to follow as a model." It implies an active, conscious decision to reflect the character and actions of God, particularly in His love.
- **“Love”** (Greek: *agapē* - ἀγάπη): This is the selfless, sacrificial love that is characterized by giving, as exemplified by Christ's death on the cross. This is not merely an emotion, but a deliberate action that seeks the well-being of others.
- **“Sacrificial offering”** (Greek: *prosphora* - προσφορά): Refers to the offering or sacrifice, particularly the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Christ’s sacrificial love is the ultimate model for how believers are to live.
- **“Immorality”** (Greek: *porneia* - πορνεία): This term refers to sexual immorality in general, which was widespread in the pagan cultures of the Roman Empire. Paul warns believers against engaging in such behaviors, which were contrary to the holiness that reflects God's character.

Theological Concepts:

- **Imitating God's Love:** The command to imitate God is rooted in the concept of divine love as sacrificial and unconditional. Christian love is not dependent on the worthiness of the object but reflects God's love for us in Christ.
- **Holiness and Purity:** Paul calls believers to avoid immorality and greed (v. 3), pointing to the need for ethical purity in the Christian life. These behaviors are incompatible with being an imitator of God, who is holy.

Application for Today:

- **Imitating God’s Love:** In a world that values self-interest, Christians are called to demonstrate selfless, sacrificial love in their relationships, particularly within the community of believers. This love must be practical, acting in the best interest of others without expecting anything in return.
- **Purity in the Christian Life:** The church today is called to stand apart from the world in terms of sexual ethics and personal purity. The pervasive influence of a sexualized culture requires Christians to actively resist temptation and live according to God's standards of holiness.

2. Live as Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8-14)

In this section, Paul contrasts the former darkness of the believer’s life before conversion with the light they now live in as children of God. Paul calls on believers to “live as children of light” (v. 8), which involves moral purity, goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Light”** (Greek: *phōs* - φῶς): Light in the New Testament often symbolizes the presence of God, truth, and moral purity. It contrasts with darkness, which symbolizes sin, ignorance, and evil.

- **“Fruit of the Light”** (Greek: *karpos* - καρπός): The fruit here refers to the visible evidence of a transformed life—goodness, righteousness, and truth. These are the characteristics that should mark the lives of believers who walk in the light of Christ.
- **“Expose”** (Greek: *elegchō* - ἐλέγχω): Paul calls believers to expose the deeds of darkness, not in condemnation, but through their holy lives, which will contrast with the sinful behaviors around them.

Theological Concepts:

- **The Believer’s New Identity in Christ:** The believer is now a child of light, called to reflect God's character in their actions. This new identity demands a break with the old patterns of life, and a commitment to living according to the values of the kingdom of God.
- **The Role of the Church in the World:** Christians are to be a visible witness to the world of God’s holiness and truth. By living in the light, believers expose the darkness, offering a contrast that can lead others to the truth of Christ.

Application for Today:

- **Living as Children of Light:** Christians today are called to reflect the character of God in every area of their lives, especially in a culture that celebrates moral ambiguity. The church must be a light in a dark world, showing the difference that Christ makes in every area of life.
- **Exposing Darkness Through Light:** This doesn’t mean Christians should engage in public shaming, but rather that their lives should be so different from the world’s patterns of sin that others are convicted and drawn to the light of Christ.

3. Living Wisely and Making the Most of Every Opportunity (Ephesians 5:15-21)

Paul exhorts believers to live wisely, making the most of every opportunity, especially in a time of moral and spiritual darkness (v. 16). This includes being filled with the Spirit rather than being drunk on wine (v. 18). Paul emphasizes gratitude, mutual submission, and living in a way that reflects the reality of God’s presence.

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Wise”** (Greek: *sophos* - σοφός): Wisdom here refers to practical living that is aligned with God’s will. It is contrasted with the foolishness of living in ways that ignore God’s commands.
- **“Filled with the Spirit”** (Greek: *plēroō* - πληρώω): To be filled with the Spirit is to be under the Spirit’s influence, which leads to a life of worship, mutual submission, and righteous living.
- **“Submit”** (Greek: *hypotassō* - ὑποτάσσω): This verb refers to a voluntary, loving submission. It is a key Christian virtue that Paul will elaborate on in the next section concerning marriage.

Theological Concepts:

- **Living in the Spirit:** A life filled with the Spirit is marked by spiritual vitality, wisdom, and a transformed approach to daily life. Paul contrasts this with drunkenness, which leads to excess and disorientation.
- **Gratitude and Worship:** The believer's life should be marked by thankfulness, which is expressed through worship and mutual submission. Spirit-filled living naturally results in praise and thanksgiving to God.

Application for Today:

- **Wise Living:** Christians are called to live wisely in the world, making choices that reflect their new identity in Christ. This involves discerning the will of God and avoiding the pitfalls of foolishness and sin.
- **Living in the Spirit:** To be filled with the Spirit is an ongoing process. Christians should seek to cultivate a deep relationship with the Holy Spirit, allowing His presence to guide their actions, relationships, and decisions.

4. Instructions for Christian Households: Wives, Husbands, and Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33)

In this section, Paul addresses the roles of wives and husbands, drawing a parallel between the marital relationship and the relationship between Christ and the Church. Wives are called to submit to their husbands, and husbands are called to love their wives sacrificially, just as Christ loved the Church.

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Submit”** (Greek: *hypotassō* - ὑποτάσσω): As mentioned earlier, this verb denotes voluntary submission. Wives are called to submit to their husbands in a way that honors Christ.
- **“Love”** (Greek: *agapē* - ἀγάπη): The type of love Paul refers to here is self-sacrificial and unconditional, as seen in Christ's love for the Church.
- **“Sanctify”** (Greek: *hagiazō* - ἀγιάζω): Christ sanctifies the Church, meaning He sets it apart, cleanses it, and makes it holy. This is the model for husbands who are to help their wives grow spiritually.

Theological Concepts:

- **Marriage as a Reflection of Christ and the Church:** The marital relationship is not just a societal institution but a picture of Christ's love for His Church. The sacrificial love of husbands and the respectful submission of wives both mirror the relationship between Christ and the Church.
- **Mutual Submission in the Christian Community:** While Paul specifically addresses marriage in this section, the broader principle of mutual submission (5:21) applies to all relationships in the Church. Submission is not about inferiority but about voluntarily placing oneself under the other for the good of the relationship and the glory of God.

Application for Today:

- **Marriage as a Gospel Witness:** Christian marriages should be a living testimony of the gospel. Husbands and wives are called to reflect the self-giving love of Christ and the Church, making their relationship a witness to the world of God's love.
- **Sacrificial Love in Marriage:** Husbands are called to love their wives in a way that is sacrificial and Christlike. Wives are called to respect and submit to their husbands, as an expression of honoring Christ.

Summary

Ephesians 5 is a powerful chapter that instructs believers in how to live out their new identity in Christ. Paul calls Christians to imitate God's love, live as children of light, walk in wisdom, and reflect Christ in their marriages. The chapter emphasizes purity, love, wisdom, and submission, with a focus on living in the Spirit and making the most of every opportunity. The relationships between husbands and wives are presented as a profound reflection of Christ's relationship with the Church. Through the teachings in Ephesians 5, Christians are called to live distinctively in a dark world, reflecting the love, purity, and wisdom of God in all their relationships.

Study Questions Chapter 5:

1. Imitating God and Living in Love (Ephesians 5:1-7)

- What does it mean to “be imitators of God” (v. 1)? How does Christ's example of love shape the way we are called to live?
- Verse 2 talks about Christ's sacrificial love for us. What are some practical ways we can show sacrificial love to others in our daily lives?
- In verses 3-5, Paul gives a list of behaviors to avoid, like immorality, impurity, and greed. What are some of the challenges you face in avoiding these behaviors in today's world?
- Paul says that these behaviors are “incompatible with the saints” (v. 3). How do you think our lives as Christians should contrast with the world around us in terms of morality?
- What does it mean to “let no one deceive you with empty words” (v. 6)? How can we discern truth from deception in our culture today?

2. Living as Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8-14)

- In verses 8-9, Paul describes believers as children of light, living in goodness, righteousness, and truth. What does living as a child of light look like in practical terms?
- Verse 11 says that believers should “expose the deeds of darkness.” How can we “expose” darkness without being judgmental or condemning?
- Paul encourages us to “wake up” and live in the light (v. 14). In what areas of your life might God be calling you to “wake up” and live more fully for Him?
- How can we be an example of light in our workplaces, schools, or communities where darkness often seems overwhelming?

3. Living Wisely and Making the Most of Every Opportunity (Ephesians 5:15-21)

- Verse 15 urges us to live “not as unwise but as wise.” What does wisdom look like in the way we make decisions and live our daily lives?
- Verse 16 calls us to “make the most of every opportunity.” How can we live more intentionally and purposefully with the time we have, especially in a busy world?
- Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit versus being drunk on wine (v. 18). What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit,” and how can we invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us?
- In verses 19-21, Paul speaks of worship through songs, giving thanks, and mutual submission. How can these actions reflect the filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives and relationships?
- What does it look like for you to live a life of “thanksgiving” in all circumstances, as Paul encourages in verse 20?

4. Instructions for Christian Households: Wives, Husbands, and Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33)

- Paul talks about the relationship between wives and husbands, urging wives to submit and husbands to love sacrificially. What does mutual submission look like in a Christian marriage?
- In verse 25, husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. What are some ways that husbands today can demonstrate sacrificial love in their marriages?
- Wives are called to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (v. 22). How can we better understand and practice this submission in a healthy, God-honoring way, especially in a culture that often misunderstands this idea?
- Paul compares the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the Church. How does this comparison help us understand the purpose and depth of Christian marriage?
- How can we as a small group support and encourage marriages within our community to reflect Christ’s sacrificial love and mutual respect?

5. General Reflection and Application

- What stood out to you most in this chapter? Was there a particular verse or section that challenged you or gave you a new perspective?
- How can we as individuals and as a group grow in imitating God’s love and living as children of light?

- **Paul calls Christians to live wisely, make the most of every opportunity, and be filled with the Spirit. How can we cultivate more of this kind of intentional living in our everyday lives?**
- **In what areas of your life do you feel the Holy Spirit is challenging you to live more sacrificially, love more deeply, or make more of an impact for Christ?**
- **How can we apply the principles of mutual submission and sacrificial love in all our relationships—not just in marriage, but also in friendships, family, and church life?**