

Part 9: Change We Want

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A few months ago my daughter had convinced my son to play dolls with her. My wife saw how well they were getting along and decided to encourage it by asking them about what they were doing. She asked Owen what the name of his baby was. He was quiet for a minute, and then he responded, "Luke." Sarah said, "Oh, that's a great name." And as Owen was walking away he whispered under his breath, "And I'm Darth Vader."

Fortunately for me and Sarah, Owen not only imitates fathers from the dark side, but he also imitates me. What's been interesting to see is that the older Owen gets the more capable he is in imitating me. When he was two I turned around in my office to see him sitting at a box pounding on a book attempting to imitate me as I wrote at my own computer. But now he can actually write, and so he has stolen one of my little notebooks and he himself carries it around making notes in it throughout the day as he has seen me do at various points.

The point of these two examples is that by nature Owen is imitating the influences in his life. My hope is that my influence might be unique in his life not because I'm the only influence, but because his experience with me is unique from his other experiences. He gets to experience me as my son. He experiences my love, my warmth, and my care for him. In other words I would hope that when competing influences provide for him competing options he would side with me because he has experienced me as trustworthy.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul is exhorting true believers in Jesus to live in a manner fitting for their salvation. And in a world full of competing influences, he wants the church to realize the uniquely trustworthy relationship we have with our heavenly Father so that it might be the basis for all of our actions.

Where earthy fathers fail, God as our father is never failing and only good. Paul has been setting this up over the course of the book by talking about God's plan to adopt us as his children through Jesus Christ. And his point is that if we have been made a child of a Father like this, then we have experienced how kind and trustworthy he is. We should by nature want to emulate him in our actions because we know his goodness has no end.

This is where Paul starts our text today: **Ephesians 5:1**. Paul is continuing to write to us so that we might be holy. That is to say that true believers would seek to live less like the world and more like Jesus. And the point we are going to see in this text today is that if you are a believer who doesn't want to change, then you might not be a child of God.

Now I want that statement to sink in for a moment: if you are a believer who doesn't want to change then you might not be a child of God. In other words it is almost not enough to know the Bible commands holiness in believers, or even to know that God wants you to change. True believers should want to change. Paul's very basis for holiness is that we have been made not just children, but beloved children, cherished children.

And by that relationship we now see the beautiful joy that comes in being drawn nearer and nearer, being transformed more and more in the image of this Father. In other words the way in which God saves us in Jesus Christ shows us how wonderfully trustworthy his commands are, and how joyful a life lived in their obedience is.

What does it look like to imitate God? In light of Paul's exhortation to imitate God as beloved children, he provides three ways in which we can do this: **Walk in Love, Walk in Light, and Walk in Wisdom.**

If we want to imitate our Father, we must learn to walk in love. This is Paul's first exhortation for us this morning: **Walk in Love.** Why should we walk in love? Paul says we walk in love because Jesus loved us. Read with me **Ephesians 5:1-8a.**

Now Paul is going to use contrasts all over this passage to drive his point home, and here the contrasts show the beauty of Jesus in contrast to the filth of sin. Specifically he is contrasting the love which we have in Jesus to the categories of sin which seek to hijack our own understanding of love. He's showing how fundamentally different Jesus' love is from the world's love.

Paul holds up the trifold beauty of Jesus: he gave himself for his people, he was a fragrant (or sweet smelling) offering, and he was a sacrifice to God. And then he holds up the trifold stink of sin: sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness (which he later defines as idolatry).

On the cross Jesus gave himself up for you. Now this in and of itself is amazing because he was the King. The whole story of scripture, up until Jesus, ached with the longing for the King who would rule his people in peace.

And finally here he comes. A king who is not only the perfect man, but is God himself. But on the cross he didn't demand tribute from his subjects, instead he came to offer himself for his subjects. In Mark 10:45, Jesus himself says that "The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' love refused to see us as a commodity to be consumed for his own pleasure, but instead he served us in the most costly way. In this way Jesus' love was so opposite the love our world tries to express in sexual immorality.

Where Jesus gave himself for us, the sexually immoral always take for themselves. The word Paul uses here for sexual immorality is the word *porneia* (which is the root for pornography). And this word doesn't just mean sex with someone else outside of marriage. It doesn't just mean adultery inside of marriage. This word is used across scripture to speak to any unlawful sexual activity.

It includes anything outside of the bounds of one husband and one wife in marriage. This includes pornography, whether clearly labeled as such, or on social media, whether visual, written or heard. It includes sex in any homosexual sense, any solo sense, any oral sense, or any other sense you might be able to think of.

And why is this so out of place for a believer? Because it is so opposite Jesus' love for us. Sexual immorality is always, in any way, a means to use people instead of serving people. Porn isn't love. It's empty and flattens real people made in the image of God into selfish gratification at the click of a button. It functionally subjugates.

Sex of any kind outside of marriage says that I don't care about what God says, and I don't care if it causes you to sin in the midst of it, I want this pleasure and I'll use you to get it.

On this point I want to make one thing clear here, if you are with someone who, in the name of love, is calling you, inviting you, pressuring you to do something of this nature with them because "you love each other," God's word is telling you right now that whatever it is you are about to experience it is not love.

Walking in love means we put aside such immorality because we realize true love gives for the good of others. It lays down selfish desires. It doesn't enthrone them.

Paul also said Jesus' love was a fragrant offering. The cross was beautiful. When we look at the cross we see only selfless humility, stunning affection, and perfect pleasure. Though on the surface, the cross seems quite grotesque doesn't it? Yet Paul here says there is nothing unsightly or foul about it. It is beautiful.

In contrast to a fragrant smell, Paul calls us to put away impurity. Many of us may take false comfort in the things we externally abstain from: we don't sleep with people outside of marriage, we don't have homosexual relationships, we don't commit adultery, but our minds are filled with all kinds of impurity.

The heart is the world's worst DVR. Our minds can treasure, replay, and desire all kinds of evil things we think them to look beautiful and attractive, but when pierced it wreaks with the rottenness of our heart. But when Christ was pierced, it looked distasteful, but the result was a beautiful aroma of life.

Christ's sacrifice when made visible was sweet smelling, but our hearts when made visible can easily poison a room. What would those closest to you experience if your heart were to become uncorked in your small group? How much better would it be to recognize this and lean into the cleansing power of Jesus to purify what so easily poisons?

And lastly Jesus' work on the cross to save sinners was a sacrifice which pleased God. Jesus' love gave up. Jesus' greatest joy was in living his life as a sacrifice to God.

This is where the longing of covetousness seems so out of place. It is so hard to live sacrificially, and to love sacrificially when our hearts are greedy for consumption. This is certainly true in sexual issues, but it is true even in how our hearts responded to the simplest desires in life.

I spoke with a sister in Christ this week who said that even though she grew up in the church, she never fully put her trust in Jesus because she said she was scared that following God meant having things taken away from her. What a great gut check for our own hearts! We cannot love without sacrifice. And when our loves refuses to sacrifice for the sake of God, we have quickly begun to sacrifice to another god. That is idolatry.

But now inside of her conversion she realizes that following Jesus costs far more than she ever dreamed. But now it is worth it because she has realized that those things she lost are nothing compared to what she's gained in Jesus.

The world's love is self-centered, toxic and greedy. But Jesus' love is other oriented, pure and fragrant, and a sacrifice of great value.

And the truth is if you have been saved you know the beauty and joy of this kind of love. This is how you were saved. You weren't saved because you did enough to earn heaven. You weren't even saved because of the theology of the atonement. You were saved because Jesus loved you with this kind of love. This love is what you experience when you are made a child of God. This is the measuring stick of love in your life.

Paul is showing how far these sins are from true love. How far? Look at the stunning warning Paul gives: **Ephesians 5:5-6**. A life dominated by these desires is so far removed from the love Jesus provides that if you continue to feed them and follow them it could very well be that you have never experienced the love of Jesus. Because if you've been loved by Jesus, you should see the counterfeit love of sin.

Paul gives here, a warning to self-professing believers, you may be deceived. You may think you can affirm an experience of Jesus' love and still practice these, but Paul wants you to see how impossible this conclusion is.

If your life is typified by sexual immorality, pornography, impurity, sensuality, greed and covetousness you will find yourself outside of God's mercy. The eternal inheritance will be taken from you and the wrath of God will be poured out upon you.

Has that thought been taken into the private corners of your heart? Does it cause you to stand in fear? Does it justify the destruction of your lap tops, the disregard of your phone, the changing of a lifestyle, or even a change in vocation? It should. These issues are that important.

Now what hope should we have in light of such a terminal threat? Look back at what Paul says as he continues to define the fruits of false love: **Ephesians 5:4**.

The innate contrast between a life given over to sin and a life of love in God is one thing: Thankfulness.

The #1 ways to fight sin is to be thankful that in Jesus' love, we have everything we ever hoped to experience in love. If you ever study the men behind most of the philosophical revolutions in our world you will find, almost as a rule, that at some point the private life of those individuals contained unlawful, deviant or incestual sexual immorality.

That's because no God-less philosophy, no matter how accurate in description, can ever tame the craving heart. You see we always participate in these things: lust, impure thoughts and greed because we hope it can solve our hearts. We hope for certainty in them. But Paul says what you know for certain is that it can't. You may be sure of it, he says.

But to engage in a life lived out of the love of Jesus promises, for certain, an inheritance. Remember what Paul already told us, **Ephesians 1:13-14**?

You see if you are a Christian and if you struggle in any of those areas you need to stop, and stop now, but on top of that look at what you already have in Christ. He loves you, you gave himself for you, he has promised good for you, and he has given you access to the very pleasures of God himself.

Last week I shared about the cholera outbreak in 19th Century London. To stop this disease the authorities encouraged people to drink more water not realizing that it was the water from and handful of specific pumps that was causing the disease. The perceived cure was the poison.

However, when one scientist realized this, most people ignored his warnings because the microbes in the water were invisible. So there came a point where the scientist had to go to the town pump and remove the handle from it. He knew the danger, so he knew access had to be revoked if health were to follow.

This is what it means to walk in light. Paul is showing you the biology of sin: it is lethal. So what pump handle might you need to remove in your life? Where do you need to see the light which shows a better water, more satisfying and found in Jesus himself?

Now because we see the dangers of sin, Paul urges us to walk as children of the light. So we walk not only in love but also in light. This is our second point: **Walk in Light**.

Let's continue: **Ephesians 5:8-14**.

What does it look like to walk as children of the light? Paul says two things: try and discern what is pleasing to God, and expose that which is the work of darkness.

I'm going to come back to this idea of discerning in bit, but right now I want us to see that if Jesus has loved you, if the Lord has made you a child of the light, then you not only look to examine and practice what is good, right and true, but you also learn to expose what is false.

It means not only do we cut our partnership with sinful practices, not only do we have nothing to do with them, but we instead expose them. Now that is ominous isn't it? Look at what he says: **Ephesians 5:11-14a**.

Now if there's one thing our world loathes it's this kind of exposure. Jesus himself says so: **John 3:19-20**.

This is really important for us to see, because my guess is that most of us have encountered some darkness in our hearts as we encountered the previous point. We see places in our life where darkness breeds something less than fragrant. Our initial response then is to fear the light.

But inside this passage in Ephesians is the wonderful reality of the gospel at play. As frightening as this process might sound, you should want this kind of light.

You see this passage shows why no other religion has a god as good as our God. What kind of God communicates so clearly how out of place sin is, how damning sin is, how disgusting sin is, but then in the very next breath tells you to bring that sin into his light?

After having a judge read to us how damning an offense is, would we willingly self-identify as having committed the same crime? By worldly standards this is suicide. But by gospel standards this is the beauty of repentance and grace.

When we bring our sins into the light, no matter how secret and filthy, we bring our sins to the only person who can ever expose filth and enliven our hearts. Look at what Paul says here: **Ephesians 5:14**.

Why should we be willing drag our own sin out of darkness and into this light? Why should we help others do the same? Because we want this light. We really do. And so do those around us who are dying in shameful and secret places.

Jesus is the only one who can call us into this light so that our deeds might be fully exposed because it's only Jesus who has promised to do something about them. The light of Christ certainly exposes our sin, but in the light of Christ we also experience the warmth of life.

Light wakes the dead.

This is what I want you to hear today whether you are far from God, or whether you are a believer with sins you fear too deep to let light into, you should want this light. Only Jesus can bring this change, and he has promised to do it. Only our God can give commands to dead men. To really imitate our Father, we should not only want to love of Christ, but we should want the light of Christ.

Lastly Paul says, **Walk in Wisdom**. As Paul is calling us to imitate God he is reminding us of how we have encountered God: Jesus loved us, Jesus has shone on us, and the Holy Spirit has filled us: **Ephesians 5:15-21**.

So we have seen so far that if Jesus has loved us, we ought not lust, if Jesus has shed his light on us we ought not live in secrecy, and if the Holy Spirit has filled us, we ought not live in foolishness or drunkenness.

Now if we are called to imitate God our Father because we are his beloved children, then don't we think that also includes desiring the same things the Father desires?

Twice now, once in verse 10 and here in verse 17, Paul implores us to discern what the will of God is and the pleasure of God is.

This also sounds really ominous doesn't it? Paul isn't imploring us to find out what pleases our spouses, or what your parent's plan for your life is. He's telling you to try and find out what pleases God himself.

This would be a terrifying quest if God hadn't already told us what pleases him. Paul has already told us God's will for all of human history. In Ephesians 1:10, God says his will for the fullness of time is that everything would be united in Jesus. In chapter four Paul says that what pleases God is a church working together to grow in holiness so that we might look more like Christ. What pleases God is his church working for his glory and growing in holiness.

My wife and I love the Food Network and one of the things we often do when we go to a new city is look up if there are any restaurants that have been on *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*. The host of the show is a celebrity chef named Guy Fieri. He spends his life trying out restaurants, and so the way we see it is that if this pastrami sandwich is enough to please Guy Fieri, it's certainly enough to satisfy us.

That's how endorsements work in our culture. If a product is good enough for a celebrity, then it's good enough for you.

Do you view the pleasure of God through the same lens? If we are honest, it's easy to yawn at the idea of living for God's glory as the church and striving for holiness in our life. But these things satisfy the very creator and sustainer of the whole universe.

There is no greater endorsement than that. If God has so revealed to us the source of his joy, then wouldn't we want to set our minds and our lives to the process of discerning how we might live for that more and more!

This is why drunkenness and foolishness have no place in the Christian walk. They make us thoughtless and useless. This not only has a negative effect on those around us, but it actually shortchanges our own joy.

We can live a life that matters, we can live a life laden with the satisfaction of God himself as we live for his glory. Look at **Psalms 16:11**. Now to come full circle from where we started, don't you want that? Wouldn't you say at this point we would give up whatever we need if only to have that?

This is what it means to walk in the Spirit. We seek to make the most of our lives by considering how our lives, how our homes might magnify the God who saved us. But Paul makes it clear that we must walk carefully here. As clear as God's pleasure is, the world offers competing desires.

So where does Paul send us to practice the wonderful filling of the Spirit? He sends us to the church, he sends us to each other. Look again how he closes this passage: **Ephesians 5:19-21**.

Here we see a wonderful picture of what the church does. The church together prepares each other for heaven by reminding us of the inheritance we have in Jesus.

In aimlessness and drunkenness our conversations can be wrought with vanity and vulgarity, but in the church we speak the wonderful weight of salvation to each other which produces once again, thanksgiving.

Do not be deceived dear church: the commands of God will never fail to fill you with the thankfulness of God. Do not be deceived, all the world offers fails, but God our Father has offered us security and joy in a life spent imitating him.

So let us this week put off deceitful desires and put on love, let us come out of the darkness and be robed in Christ's light, and let us put aside vanity and live Spirit-filled lives for his glory.