

Ephesians

5:1-17

Introduction

I like nicknames. So did the writers of the New Testament:

1. James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, two of the original apostles, had a nickname. Do you remember what it was? *The sons of thunder*.
2. In the Book of Acts there's a guy names Joses, but you know him by his nickname, Barnabas, *The son of consolation*.

I'm telling you about Bible nicknames because I see two of them in our text:

1. In verse one Paul says, "be imitators."
2. In verse eight he says you are "light." The word for light means *to shine or make manifest*. We might translate it *illuminate*.

I suggest that these are nicknames that attach to every believer. **You** are *The Imitator*, **you** are *The Illuminator*.

Those of you who are fans of NASCAR racing immediately recognize the nickname *The Intimidator* for Dale Earnhardt. The nickname described his driving style.

That's the idea here in Ephesians, only Paul is describing your **lifestyle**. You are *The Imitator* with a lifestyle of walking in love; you are *The Illuminator* with a lifestyle of walking in light.

We'll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 You Are The Imitator Sharing God's Love With A Selfish World, and #2 You Are The Illuminator Shining God's Light In A Sinful World.

- #1 You Are The Imitator Sharing God's Love
With A Selfish World
(v1-7)

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

Just as children do with their earthly parents, you are to imitate your heavenly Father as His “dear children.” Above all else, you are to imitate God’s love.

We’re going to include the last verse of chapter four in our comments. There are two aspects of God’s love you want to imitate: God’s love is *forgiving*, and God’s love is *giving*.

God’s love is forgiving:

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

What immediately strikes me is the simplicity of this statement. Because of God’s great forgiveness of your sins, you are told to exercise forgiveness towards those who sin against you.

Jesus put this in the form of a parable. There was a man who owed his king an overwhelming debt, calculated at ten thousand talents. It comes to millions of dollars. When brought before his king, the man begged for mercy – promising to eventually repay. His king, moved with pity, forgave him the entire debt – wiped it clean off of the books.

Now this same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a very small sum of money, a hundred pence – just a few dollars. The fellow servant begged for mercy – promising to eventually repay. The servant, instead of being moved with pity, had him thrown into prison until he could pay off the debt.

The king, hearing of this, called the servant to task and delivered him to tormentors. The king said this:

Matthew 18:32 ... ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.
Matthew 18:33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’

Since you have been forgiven much by God, you can forgive others the little they’ve done to you. Whatever anyone has done *to* you or *against* you, it adds up to about one hundred pence. You might have to go to them, trying to reconcile. They might not be able or even

willing to pay up. Whether they do or not, you can relate to them on the basis of how great God's forgiveness of your ten thousand talents was. You can put their offense into perspective and not be overwhelmed by it.

God's love is giving:

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The Old Testament burnt offerings were totally consumed. As they were being consumed by fire, the smoke rose to God as a sweet-smelling aroma.

Jesus gave Himself as an "offering" to God by His "sacrifice" on the Cross. He was looking past the suffering and sorrow and shame to the sweetness of pleasing His Father. The same can be true of us. Love is a decision based on obedience and not feelings. We can look past any suffering or sorrow or shame to the sweetness of pleasing the Lord. You love others for God's sake, looking past them to please Him.

We use the expression, "*That burns me up!*", to describe our attitude toward others who mistreat us. God wants you to be burned-up – not *by* others, but *for* others!

You're *The Imitator* of God's forgiving and giving love in a very selfish world. The selfish world is described in verses three through seven.

Ephesians 5:3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;

Ephesians 5:4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

You are to imitate God's selfless love in a selfish world of lust. "Fornication" and "all uncleanness" together cover **every** kind of sexual sin. They are rooted in "covetousness," the desiring of someone else's body for your own selfish gratification. "Filthiness," "foolish talking," and "coarse jesting" are vulgar forms of thought and speech related to these sexual sins.

Was Paul fascinated with sexual sin? *Not at all!* His culture was – just as our culture is. The Temple of Diana was funded by the work of sacred temple prostitutes. Sexual sin had been elevated to an acceptable practice – even to an act of worship.

These selfish lusts are not “fitting.” Christians should instead have a healthy appreciation for sex, “giving thanks” for it as God’s gift to be exercised and enjoyed within the proper boundaries of a biblical marriage.

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Believers were called God's dear children in verse one. The people described in this verse are "the sons of disobedience" (5:6). They are unbelievers - *not* backslidden Christians.

Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Unbelievers like to defend their sexual sins. They say that they are mature and enlightened. Homosexuality, lesbianism, and even some grosser perversions are presented as normal and desirable. Paul says these are “empty words.” They won't hold any weight when these unbelievers stand before the judgement of God. The “wrath of God” will come upon them for having rejected God's love to walk in their own lusts.

Don't **you** be “deceived” by their empty words. The word “deceived” means *cheated*. Believers do sometimes feel cheated. It seems that everyone else is having all the fun and enjoying all the freedom. God has something better for you than selfish lusts. Your fleshly lusts cheat you from experiencing and expressing God's love.

Ephesians 5:7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.

“Partakers” means *partnership* and *participation*. It is a warning to *not* lapse back into the lusts of the flesh that characterized your life before you were a Christian. Instead, be *The Imitator* of God, walking in His love in a selfish world given over to selfish lust. Conquer lust with love.

#2 You Are The Illuminator Shining God's Light In A Sinful World (v8-17)

You'll notice in these verses that Paul does not say you are "in" the light. He says you **are** light. You radiate light wherever you go; you are *The Illuminator*.

He develops this idea in two ways. He looks first at your *character*, then your *conduct*.

Your character as *The Illuminator*:

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

Ephesians 5:9 (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

Before you got saved you were "darkness." You weren't just *in* the dark; you had no hope of radiating any light. Light is not something you can find within you. It is given to you at salvation.

"Fruit of the Spirit" should be translated "fruit of light." It is a metaphor. Paul is likening "goodness, righteousness, and truth" to a harvest ripening under the sun. Just as sunlight and other natural elements work to ripen a harvest of fruit, so are you ripening supernaturally, producing a ripening spiritual character of "goodness, righteousness, and truth."

1. "Goodness" is to "always seek after that which is good for one another and all men" (1Thessalonians 5:15). It is actively seeking what is best for others.
2. "Righteousness" refers to your growing in sensitivity to what is right.
3. "Truth" is the growing awareness that God's Word is the final standard in all matters of life.

Ripening character leads to fruitful conduct.

You conduct yourself with a new criterion:

Ephesians 5:10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

It's never really difficult to discover how to conduct yourself. Just ask Jesus! Think of Him being with you 24/7 and consult Him on all decisions. That's the criterion by which you walk in the light and illuminate your world.

You conduct yourself with a new conviction:

Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*

“Expose” means *convict*. You bring conviction to others as *The Illuminator*. Conviction has two elements. God's light first reveals the behavior and beliefs of others for what they really are. It reveals that they are in darkness, headed for the wrath of God.

But God's light also reveals the way of escape. Drop down to verses thirteen and fourteen:

Ephesians 5:13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

Ephesians 5:14 Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

When you walk in God's light, and unbelievers get convicted, they also must see that God is calling them out of darkness into His light. Unbelievers are here depicted as both “asleep” and “dead.” “Asleep” has to do with them being in the dark. You go to them and turn on the light – just as if you were trying to awaken someone who was sleeping. “Dead” describes the true spiritual condition they ‘wake-up’ to. They are physically alive, but spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. The conviction is intended to bring them to Christ Who will give them life and bring them into the “light.”

You conduct yourself with a new conversation:

Ephesians 5:12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

We live in the age of shock radio and reality television. Most of the conversations are “shameful,” relating to “secret” things which ought not to be mentioned, let alone glorified.

I'm not here to tell you what to watch or listen to. But this is a solid principle upon which to base your personal choices.

You conduct yourself with a new circumspection:

Ephesians 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

“Circumspectly” means *carefully*. It is a picture of someone being able to walk carefully around obstacles and pitfalls because they are walking in light and not darkness.

It is also the word from which we get our word *circumference*. A circumference is a boundary or a perimeter. In this sense it means that you can see everything within your sphere of life and you thus walk successfully in every area. You have all the light you need to maneuver through every aspect of your life.

You conduct yourself with a new conservation:

Ephesians 5:16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

“Redeeming” means to *rescue from loss* by conservation. In this case, you are conserving “the time.” We all have the same amount of time. We can and should conserve it for spiritual things, knowing that “the days are evil.” There are evil forces working against you, seeking to hinder your spiritual progress.

You conduct yourself with a new comprehension:

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.

“Unwise” means *senseless*. “Understand” means *to comprehend*. Your life is never senseless. You can comprehend that God has a plan and a purpose in all the circumstances of your life, and that He is accomplishing His “will” *in* and *through* them. You might feel like you are in the dark; but you’re *never* in the dark about God’s determination to complete the work He began in you at salvation.

Conclusion

NASCAR drivers, looking in their mirrors, would see *The Intimidator* coming, and they knew what to expect.

People should see you coming and know what to expect:

1. You're *The Imitator*, sharing God's forgiving, giving love.
2. You're *The Illuminator*, shining God's light.