

Love Letters

Lesson 9: Ephesians 5

As God's children, we are called to behave in our sphere of influence the way He acts in dealing with His universe; demonstrating that we do in fact belong to Him. In Ephesians 5, Paul calls on all believers to live a life that is submissive, so as to walk in love overflowing from the Holy Spirit. In one sublime sentence Paul spells out the answer to every conflict we will ever encounter: *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:21 NIV). We will see Paul apply this same principle over and over in situations involving relationships in the church as well as that of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees.

Read Ephesians 5:1–33.

Day One:

Walk in Love

1. From your initial reading of this chapter, you can hear Paul explaining that the Christian walk is to be lived in love, light, and wisdom for our relationships to be fruitful. As you consider your walk today, how evident are these attributes in your relationships with others?

The King James Version of 5:1 says that we are to be “followers of God, as dear children.” The Revised Standard Version words it with more emphasis: *Be imitators of God, as beloved children*. Since a child will naturally follow the example of the parent, Paul states those of us who are spiritual children should be willing to imitate the example of our heavenly Father.

2. What supreme example do we have of this? v. 2
 - a. Specifically, Paul is talking about following the example of Christ's love. Put v. 2 in your own words.
3. Paul lists some behaviors in Vv. 3–4 that are the opposite of imitating God; what are the things we must not engage in if we are to walk in love?
 - a. Why is it important to avoid such practices? v. 5
4. There are individuals who will try to justify their own immoral behavior and influence others to do the same. What does Paul say about them? Vv. 6–7

The take-away truth here is that Christians are not to participate in these things because we are not in darkness anymore; we are no longer numbered among those who are disobedient, and so should no longer be like them. Simply put—it would be a gross inconsistency for a believer to participate in such outrageous sins!

- a. Rather than engage in obscene language and behavior, what should be our focus? v. 4
How would maintaining this perspective affect your conduct?

Memory verse: Ephesians 5:18b–19 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

. . . Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

Day Two:

Walk in Light

Reread Ephesians 5:8–14.

Paul goes on to further explain the reason why—before meeting Christ—it was easy to participate in obscene works and why that can no longer be the case. The Ephesian Christians were once just like all those who were disobedient—but no longer! The contrast to what was is made clear in the command to *walk as children of light*.

1. What word does Paul use to describe unbelievers? v. 8 Conversely, what are you now?
2. Rather than engaging in impure and immoral acts, children of light engage in acts of what? Vv. 9–10 Give a couple of examples.

Not only should believers not engage in the same acts of those who don't know Christ, Paul makes a startling announcement that believers should *expose* those who do! Whether Paul is speaking of exposing the sins of disobedient Christians within the body or exposing the sins of non-believers in the world is hard to tell. Christians within the church are responsible to hold one another accountable for their lifestyles. If a Christian lives in habitual unrepentant sin, fellow believers are to attempt to get them to turn from their sin.

3. What scriptural direction for this are you given in each of the passages below . . .
 - a. Matthew 18:15–20
 - b. Galatians 6:1
4. What does Paul say about these works of darkness? v. 12
5. Think for a moment about the power light possesses (v. 13) and the mission of the church in the world. Whether we are talking about the people in darkness that are inside or outside the church building, what is the ultimate goal of the body of Christ?

Selah~

As far as dealing with non-believers in the world, their sins are best exposed when a Christian's light shines into the darkness of that lifestyle, which can be done merely by example. Light always exposes and dispels the darkness! And often the silence of one role model can speak volumes at the one running from God. What is the promise for those desiring to get right with God? v. 14

Day Three:

Walk in Wisdom

Reread Ephesians 5:15–21.

It's safe to say that the Christian who walks in love and light also walks in wisdom. This is the model of virtue to which the people of Paul's day aspired—they considered it the upward climb to God. Possessing wisdom is the ability to apply scripture to the “what and where” of everyday life.

God came to us through the “foolishness of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18 and 25). He did so in order to accept, forgive, and enable us to live “not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15). Wisdom allows us to keep our conduct consistent with our faith.

1. Move slowly through the following exercise containing numerous exhortations to walk in wisdom. Put them in your own words . . .
 - a. v. 16
 - b. v. 17
 - c. v. 18
 - d. v. 19
 - e. v. 20
 - f. v. 21

The key to walking in wisdom is found in verse 18: “And do not be drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit.” Remember that Paul was addressing a city known for being the center of pagan worship, idolatry, and drunken orgies. The people in this day mixed these elements together in worship of their god. Paul was instructing them on how to know the one true God; how to serve and obey Him. He contrasted the difference between being filled with wine to serve their god and being filled with the Holy Spirit to serve the God of heaven.

The verb tense of “filled” in verse 18 is present and active and could best be translated: *be being filled*. It means to be directed, influenced, governed by the Holy Spirit, bringing our lives into conformity with the will of God.

Selah~

In verses 19–21, the four participles: *speaking*, *singing*, *giving thanks*, and *submitting*, all modify the verb “be filled” in verse 18. Think about it: speaking and singing suggest the sweetness of music and praise overflowing from the Spirit; while gratitude and submission suggest the heart attitude and humble posture of the one filled with the Spirit. Please share your thoughts.

Day Four:

Walk in Mutual Submission

Reread Ephesians 5:22–33.

In today's world of liberation and liberalism, we must note that no one has done more to advance the cause of women than Jesus Christ! The gospel emancipated everyone—including women. Paul has already emphasized that God's purpose is to reconcile all things in Christ, and that the church is the instrument through which He will accomplish that purpose. We will now look at that idea of reconciliation through the relationship of husband and wife; and then by looking at the family (Ephesians 6).

1. Paul begins by addressing the role of the wife; what does he say? v. 22
 - a. For what reason is the wife called to be in subjection to her husband? v. 23

Her subjection is not a reference to her being inferior to her husband. The Bible teaches that both men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and that in Christ, there is neither "Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). But God has given an order to all things, some having authority, others being in submission. A man and woman can occupy differing roles in life, but in the marriage relationship God has placed the husband as the head over his wife. As the church is subject to Christ (v. 24), so the wife is to be subject to her husband in everything.

2. What does Paul add to the wife's role in verse 33?

The word "respect" literally means *fear*, not a cowardly fear, but rather the *reverence* a person would have putting God first. It is literally a wholesome fear or dread of displeasing him. It is this kind of high regard that a wife is to have toward her husband.

3. Paul then turns to the husbands: "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (v. 25). Put this verse in your own words for emphasis.
 - a. Following the example of Christ, what are some of the practical everyday ways a husband can "give himself up" for his wife?

Paul extends his explanation to include Christ and the church in verses 25–27.

- b. What does Christ do for His bride the church?
- c. What is His ultimate purpose for her?
4. In verses 28–32, Paul returns to the husband-wife relationship. What instruction does he repeat? Why? Vv. 28–29

The husband's body is imperfect, yet he nourishes and cherishes it. God expects him to do likewise for his wife, who is also imperfect. It is God's high standard for the marriage relationship.

Paul concludes this portion of the text by quoting Genesis 2:24: "For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." It is their sacred union that is likened to the one that exists between Christ and the church.

5. Write out the concluding thought in verse 33:
 - a. To the husband—

 - b. To the wife—

 - c. Personal: If married, how are *you* doing? What can you do to make room for improvement?

Selah ~

Let's turn it around and think of it another way . . . If a husband actively loves his wife as Christ loves the church, in what way(s) will she be blessed and reflect God's love?

It is not wrong to set goals for yourself and to desire fulfillment; in fact, God designed us that way. But when two people try to take different paths to achieve the same goal, they often collide with each other creating conflict. A husband and wife may not always be able to agree on their standard of living; children may vie for the love and attention of their parents; and church leaders may differ about how to shepherd the same flock. As each one asserts his or her rights, this spirit of competition may lead to outright war with the result division and disunity. Paul would remind us all that the third party in every relationship is Christ; therefore we should all practice submitting to one another in love.

"In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity [love]."
(St. Augustine)

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: Take the next step of obedience and record the difference it makes in your life.

Prayer Requests ~
