

The Book of Ephesians

Week 11: Walking in Love (5:1-21)

Overview

It is no coincidence that Paul speaks of “walking in love” in conjunction with refraining from various sexual immoralities. To love one’s neighbor means not to abuse him or her in any way, which obviously includes abuse of a sexual nature. To live in sexual immorality is to divorce sexuality from its natural and revealed purpose of procreation and relational intimacy between the fundamental unit of families, a husband and wife. Put simply, sexual immorality harms one’s neighbor because it is by its very nature selfish inwardly focused. Motivation behind it lies in self-gratification, not duty towards one’s neighbor. That being said, there is no such thing as a victimless sexual sin. One or both parties are emotionally and spiritually hurt by the flippant or transient nature of the act, as will be any offspring that are produced out of such a non-committed union (assuming they aren’t terminated in their pregnancy). Because sex is the foundation of human existence, it is imperative to heed our Creator’s purpose and design for sexuality. Paul will go into further detail on this subject when he discusses marriage in the second half of chapter 5.

The Abstract: Be Christ-like (5:1-2)

The first two verses of the 5th chapter serve as much as a summary for the preceding chapter as they do as a preview for chapter 5**. Ephesians 4:32 ends with the admonition to live in kindness and forgiveness, following the example of God in Christ. In this way, we have the model of how to be “imitators of God” and how to “walk in love” as we sacrifice ourselves and our own wellbeing for others. (cf. 1 John 4:7-19)

(**Chapters and verses are relatively recent additions to the biblical text; for that reason, continuity of thought generally isn’t evenly divided along chapter lines as it is in modern compositions.)

Darkness of Sexual Immorality (5:3-14)

Sexual immorality was closely connected with idolatry in the First Century Greco-Roman world. Union with temple prostitutes was a common occurrence among the various pagan religions of the day. Such union betrayed a two-fold idolatry: in the first place, union with the temple prostitute implied communion with the god of that temple, and secondly, and it was a basic idolatry of one’s own flesh found in personal gratification. Either way, the true God’s name was profaned when such unions took place, hence Paul’s polemical discourse against it here. He minces no words as he indicates that those who openly and

unapologetically practice sexual immorality will have “no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (v. 5). This warning is coupled with another warning in the following verse which advises the Ephesians not to be misled by claims that such sins are not so bad or are not even sins (Sound familiar?); teaching and belief to the contrary of what the law says does not change the reality, as “the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” regardless. To be partakers with those who are sexually immoral is to have fellowship with them, and one cannot have fellowship at the both the table of God and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21). Paul echoes Jesus’ own words when he speaks about the type of fruit that a person produces (John 15:1-8)---good fruit comes from a good tree, bad fruit from a bad tree. Understanding this, the perpetual question for the Christian is that of verse 10: “What is pleasing to the Lord?” In discerning the answer to this questions by the Scriptures, one sheds light on the situation, seeing good and bad fruit for what they are.

It is not enough to weed a garden; plants which produce good fruit must be nurtured:

*“The negative designation, ‘unfruitful,’ emphasizes all the more sharply the abominable nature of sin with an expression corresponding to the gospel. **The Savior did not sacrifice his life in order that a mataioths (an emptiness, a vacuum, a mere nothing) come into being, but he looked for life and fruit, for something that would redound to a sweet savor for God and to a joy for men.** The utter incompetency of the world---which produces in place of these things not only nothing at all, but the opposite of life, namely, death, ruin, decay, rottenness, stench---cannot belong to the community of God’s children, but must receive their condemnation; a condemnation proceeding, as appears later, from love to the lost, with whom we by nature are equally guilty.” Koehler, 462*

A Positive Admonition (5:15-21)

As bad fruit is to be rooted out and replaced with good, negative commands are followed by positive commands as Paul closes this short discourse. He exhorts the Ephesians to walk wisely, and implies that feigned ignorance does not remove oneself from the will and word of God (vs. 17). The foolish talk and crude joking of verse 4 are given the alternative of the saints addressing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in verse 19. And, finally, he caps off the section of Christians relating to one another and previews the next section talking about Christian marriage by encouraging the members of the church to submit to one another. That is, they should subvert their own desires and wellbeing in favor of their brothers’.