

Chapter Five

commentary

1–2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

A question that we might first ask is whether these opening two verses of our chapter initiate a new paragraph or if they form a fitting conclusion to the previous paragraph which begins in 4:17. Apparently the chapter division as established by the Geneva Bible of 1560 CE, which became the standard for later English translations such as the KJV of 1611, considered these verses to introduce a new section of the epistle, and thus the beginning of a new chapter. It is most likely that this decision was based upon the fact that 5:1 begins with “Therefore” (οὖν, *oun*) which in the previous chapter seems clearly to mark a new section or paragraph (e.g., 4:1, 17).

While it seems clear that these opening verses of chapter five offer Paul’s conclusion to 4:17–32, they also move us forward as Paul explains what it means to be “imitators of God” and he does so both by pointing out significant positive characteristics of a believer’s life as well as those negative things which are clearly antithetical to the life of one who is truly a child of God. In fact, the remainder of Ephesians (chapters 5 and 6) focus upon how we are to “walk” in our faith as those who are children in God’s family and who would therefore mimic their Father.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children... – At first we may wonder how Paul could admonish his readers and us to be “imitators of God,” for surely God is infinite in all of His attributes and we are surely finite and therefore greatly lacking to imitate Him. When we even seek to contemplate the greatness of God, we sympathize with the words of Zophar HaNa’amitee as recorded in Job 11:7–8.

Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? (Job 11:7–8)

Or we may remember the words of Isaiah when he was given a vision of ADONAI “sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, with the train of His

robe filling the temple” (Is 6:1), and the Seraphim calling out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” (Is 6:3). Surely we resonate with the response of Isaiah when he cries out:

Woe is me, for I am ruined!
 Because I am a man of unclean lips,
 And I live among a people of unclean lips;
 For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (Is 6:5)

What then does Paul mean by admonishing us to be “imitators of God”? It is when we first come to recognize that in our own strength or by our own finite abilities we could never become “imitators of God” that we affirm that only by the power of the Ruach are we enabled to “put off the old man” and to continue to “put on the new man” as Paul instructed in the previous chapter (4:22-24). Note the picture given to us by John in Revelation.

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. (Rev 1:17-18)

It is when we fully recognized our own weakness and inabilities, and then resolve to seek God’s strength and the empowering of the Ruach, that we gain both the resolve and the ability to become “imitators of God.”

The very idea of “imitating” (*μιμέομαι*, *mimēomai*) is that of “emulating” or “seeking to be like” someone. It means to have as a primary goal to become more and more like Yeshua in all aspects of life. And we know that we have been given the ability to increasingly become more like Him because

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:5-6)

Even as in the natural world children are born with certain characteristics of their father, so we who are “beloved children,” having been born again by God’s grace to be His own children, likewise are given both the ability and desire to become more and more like our heavenly

Father. This is a cooperative work in which the believer willfully submits to the Ruach and in the strength He provides, to “say no” to the flesh and to live in a way that pleases the Lord.

...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Yeshua His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:7)

...and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved you – Paul uses the all encompassing aspect of “love” to gather together the various admonitions in the final verses of the previous chapter. These were speaking the truth (4:25), working in order to have something to give to those in need (4:28), being careful to let our words be that which edifies others in the grace of God (4:29), and to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving toward one another (4:32). Now Paul makes it clear that these actions are the fruit of genuine love, the kind of love demonstrated by Yeshua Himself, Who “gave Himself up for us.”

Paul uses the verb “to walk” (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) to describe “how a person lives,” answering to the Hebrew verb הָלַךְ (*halak*, “to walk”) and its later associated noun, הַלְכָה (*halākāh*, “the way one is to walk”).¹ He uses this verb “to walk” eight times in Ephesians, both to describe the life of sin by which the unbeliever is characterized (2:2; 4:17x2) as well as to describe the life of the believer who is characterized by good works as ordained by God (2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15).

To “walk in love” is a phrase that describes a foundational aspect of what it means to be “imitators of God,” for it describes a life characterized by love, the same kind of love which Yeshua had for the elect as He faced the cross, for it was the eternal joy of saving those given to Him by the Father that was His focus as He undertook to pay the price of our redemption. The words of Hebrews make this clear:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2)

The Greek of our text is very clear. The way we are to love is καθώς

1 The noun הַלְכָה is not found in the Tanach

καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, “in the same way (καθὼς, *kathōs*) the Messiah loved us.” Thus, our love for each other, and even for those who act as enemies toward us, is to be a love that is self-giving and done for God’s glory and honor, not motivated by self-gain or self-aggrandizement. For Yeshua, the Owner of everything, needed nothing yet gave Himself for those whom He would save. His love for all who would be saved was itself the fountain of joy which flowed from His love. Thus, if we are to love others as He loved us, we must do so in a way that pleases our Lord and finds favor in His eyes. And that must be the joy which strengthens us, even to love our enemies. For in loving as Yeshua has loved us, we show ourselves to be children in the family of God, honoring the Father and the Son through the power of the Ruach.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
(Matt 5:44–45)

... *and gave Himself up for us* – Here, as often in the Scriptures, the self-sacrifice of God’s Son, Yeshua, is spoken of as definite payment for the sins of those He would save. The Greek of this phrase is very clear on this matter: καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, “and offered Himself [as a sacrifice] for us.” In the days of the Tabernacle and Temples, a person who brought a sacrifice laid his hands upon the head of the animal to indicate that the animal was being sacrificed for him. If it was a guilt offering, then the sacrifice expunged the guilt of the one who had laid his hands upon the head of the sacrifice.

This is the language Paul is using here: a one-to-one correspondence between Yeshua and those for whom He died. He gave Himself up “for us,” where Paul clearly includes himself by switching to the first-person plural “us” when previously he used the second-person plural when stating that “Messiah also loved you.” The primary point to be made is this: Yeshua’s death on the cross actually paid for sin. It was not a “potential” payment or a payment to which something more needed to be added or to be accomplished. In this regard, note Paul’s words in the sister-epistle to Ephesians, i.e., Colossians.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the

way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14)

The final phrase of Col 2:14, "having nailed it to the cross," clearly indicates that the "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us" was that which was "nailed to the cross." The only meaning this text could have is that the decree that condemned the sinner, i.e., the penalty of sin being death, was completely nullified and destroyed for all the elect through the death of Yeshua. Yeshua's death did not make salvation possible, it made salvation inevitable for all those whom He would save.

... *an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.* – The death of Yeshua for all those whom He would save is the reality of which the sacrificial system was the shadow. The sacrificial system always existed as a foreshadow of the ultimate and real sacrifice of Yeshua Himself. But not only was the death of our Messiah set forth by Paul here as fully efficacious, it also was completely voluntary on Yeshua's behalf. For after stating that He "gave Himself up for us," he adds the words "as an offering" (προσφορά, *prosphora*), the Greek word primarily having the sense of "gift" or that which is given "voluntarily."¹ Thus, it was from His eternal and divine love that He willingly, voluntarily, gave Himself as the required sacrifice to redeem those whom the Father had given Him (cf. John 6:37-39).

And then Paul adds "as a fragrant aroma." This phrase, used in connection with the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, and the sin offering, described God's willing acceptance of the sacrifices given. It is significant that only the guilt offering is not stated to be a "soothing aroma" (ריח הניחוח, *reiyach hanichoach*) to the Lord (Lev 5). The guilt offering (אָשָׁם, *'asham*) was required where a transgression had been committed knowingly, admission of guilt had been forthcoming, and where reparations had been made. While the guilt offering enable the guilty party to be received back into the community in good standing, the Torah never refers to the *'asham* as a "soothing aroma" to God. It may well be that the guilt offering anticipated the full sacrifice of Yeshua for such guilt to be "wiped clean" from the heavenly ledger, for it is by His sacrifice that every sin of the believer is paid for and therefore the one who is "in Messiah" is accepted as completely holy in the eyes of God. While the animal sacrifice which constituted the "guilt offering" enabled the guilty party once again to be accepted in the Israelite community, only the infinite sacrifice of God's Son, Yeshua, could make the necessary payment for the sin that marked the

1 BDAG, "προσφορά," p. 887.

sinner as completely guilty before the three-times holy God. To those who, like Abraham, put their faith in the Coming One, His payment for sin by His death was reckoned to their account.

Thus, God the Father fully accepted the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Yeshua, on behalf of all the elect as full payment for their sins. The proof of such acceptance was the resurrection, for by death Yeshua conquered “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb 2:14).

Thus Yeshua, in willingly giving Himself to save us, stands as the supreme example of love, a love which we are to emulate as we seek to edify each other and to demonstrate to a watching world the power of God in redeeming His people to become more and more like His Son.

In committing ourselves to follow Paul’s inspired admonition and to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,” we are to forgive as God forgave us, emulating the love of God with which we have been loved, a love which the Apostles define in their writings.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1Cor 13:1–7)

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1Pet 4:8)

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions. (Prov 10:12).

“Covering sin” does not mean to pretend it does not exist or to fail to deal with it, but rather to refuse to multiply it through gossip, hatred, or any kind of retaliation, and to follow biblical principles (Matt 5:21–26; 18:15–19).

3–4 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Paul now makes a specific application to the life of the believer of the theological truths he has emphasized in the previous contexts. In the previous chapter he admonishes his readers to live out the new life

they confess to have in Yeshua by no longer living in accordance with the flesh. He admonishes us to “no longer walk as Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,” to cease emulating those who have “given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (4:18–19). He likewise exhorts us to “lay aside the old self,” to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” and to “put on the new self...created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (4:22–23). This means “laying aside falsehood” and each one “speaking the truth with his neighbor” (4:25), no longer stealing but doing honest work so as to have something to help those in need (4:28), doing away with “unwholesome speech” and being intent upon speaking in a way that “is good for edification” (4:29).

Now Paul “zeros in” on three behaviors that should not even be “mentioned” within a community of believers. These are immorality, impurity, and greed. When he writes that these “must not even be named,” he teaches us not only that such things could never characterize a true believer in Yeshua, but also that such things should not be part of normal conversations among community members—they should not even be “named” (*μηδὲ ὀνομαζέσθω, mēde onomazesthō*).

“Immorality” (*πορνεία, porneia*) is a broad term in the Greek which includes all aspects of unlawful sexual relationships and practices and is often used to describe “prostitutes” or “homosexuality.”¹ Sexual deviancy also characterized the pagan religions of the Greco-Roman empire in which sexual activities were a significant element. Thus, in a society where sexual deviancy was common, it is easy to see how the divine standards given in the Scriptures were easily “stretched” to fit the culturally acceptable “norms.” But from the very beginning, God ordained marriage as between one man and one woman, and He Himself demonstrated His purpose by bringing Chavah to Adam as those created in His image and fashioned for each other. To allow immorality to remain within the believing community is to mix things that essentially differ. Therefore Paul warns us not to allow any form of immorality to remain within our communities.

“Impurity” (*ἀκαθαρσία, akatharsia*) has the basic sense of “filthy” or “dirty,” and even “refuse.” It takes on a metaphoric meaning to describe the baseness of sexual deviancy—as that which entirely undermines God’s purpose for marriage. We encountered this same Greek word in 4:19 in the phrase “have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity (*akatharsia*). This term thus

1 Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, “πορνεία, p. 1450.

broadens the concept to include all manner of worldly activities that would promote even thoughts of “immorality” and “fornication.”

“Greed” (πλεονεξία, *pleoneksia*) describes “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due, i.e., greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness.”¹ While *pleoneksia* was often used to describe the “very wealthy,” in our context it seems clear that Paul is describing an insatiable desire for things sexually related.

“Greed” (*pleonexia*), or covetousness in this context of sexual vices (cf. 1Co 5:10–11), may point to an insatiable desire for sexual indulgence. Paul here prohibits the entire range of immoral sexual behavior. In a culture where sexual perversions were rampant and where, for new believers, the lines between proper and sinful activities were difficult to draw, Paul wants to stress that greed for sex is not fitting for saints.²

...as is proper among saints. – That Paul states that such “immorality should not be even named among you” is simply an emphatic way of stating that those who confess Yeshua as their Lord and Savior should show their life of faith in Him through a life that exemplifies His holiness and thus to be utterly different than the society that is characterized as “the world.” The word “saint” (ἅγιος, *hagios*) simply means “holy,” and when applied to believers in Yeshua, it describes those who have been called into the family and kingdom of God through faith in Yeshua and thus are called to be separated from that which God hates.

The application of Paul’s words to our own times and culture is obvious. The biblical norms which give clear guidance regarding what God describes as “moral” and “immoral” continue to be eroded in our day to the point where some who call themselves believers are allowing that which, in previous generations, would have been universally described as immoral. In our global, digital world, the accessibility of immoral, sexually explicit media is available as never before, and sets a very real trap for those who allow themselves to be snared by it. We do well to heed the Apostle’s inspired words and to set the standard high, “that there not be even a hint of sexual immorality”³ in our communities which name Yeshua as Lord and King.

... and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, – “Filthiness” translates the Greek ἀισχρος (*aisxros*), used only here in the Apos-

1 BDAG, “πλεονεξία,” p. 824.

2 Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 134.

3 This is the NIV translation of the phrase in our verse.

tolc Scriptures and in the Lxx of the canonical books, only to describe the “ugly appearance” of the cows who came up out of the Nile in Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41:1-4). The word was used metaphorically to describe that which is “socially or morally unacceptable, shameful, or base.”¹ In our verse the word most likely carries the sense of “vulgar speech.”²

This is paired with “silly talk” (μωρολογία, *mōrologia*), also found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. In this context, the word may carry more meaning than just “uneducated talk” but more than likely also carries with it a sexual aspect. It seems possible that this word may encompass sexually explicit “jokes” or “jests” which might be found in various drink-fests, etc. Thielman makes this suggestion:

In its context here in Ephesians, where talk of sexual immorality and debauchery is in the air, μωρολογία [*mōrologia*] may also carry connotations of the kind of nonsensical talk that emerges from people in attendance at banquets where drunkenness and sexual immorality were common.³

The word translated “course jesting” (εὐτραπελία, *eutrapelia*), once again, found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, describes innuendos which often may carry veiled expressions that are recognized as sexually oriented.

...which are not fitting – All of these are the opposite (literally “out of place”) for what God intends to be the norm for His people, for the goal of our conversations together as believers in Yeshua ought to be for “edification,” i.e., for building each other up in the faith.

but rather giving of thanks. – We must make it our desire to give our Lord and Savior the glory and adoration He deserves by living and communicating in a way that honors Him. This does not mean that we avoid laughter and having a good time together. For surely we find in our mutual faith the very bedrock of what true community is which therefore results in true friendship as we bear each other’s burdens and love one another with the love we have experience from God Himself. This ought to be the norm to which we strive as we glory in the goodness of God and all that He has done and continues to do for us.

1 BDAG, “αἰσχρός,” p. 29.

2 As the NET Bible translates.

3 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 330.