

April 7, 2013 - You Live Here

We are picking up again this morning, our series in the Book of Ephesians, but it's been about three weeks since we last were here, so I thought before we dove in, I had better do a really quick recap of where we've come from. So as quickly as we can, hopefully some of this stuff sounds familiar to you.

Paul begins the book and he starts out by saying: You know what you guys, you were a mess; you were broken; you were corrupted; you were basically just a remnant of your original beauty. In Christ, you have become redeemed; you have become restored; you are becoming God's masterpiece. And he says that all of this happens, all of this comes about because of two important things. First of all: Christ's love working in you. And God's power working through you. And so he says, because of this stuff we've just said, he says "Therefore, here is what you need to do. You need to live a life worthy of the calling that you receive and that means: Always be humble and gentle and patient, make allowances for each other's faults, keep united in the Spirit and bind yourselves together with peace." And he says, if you do that what that will mean is the Church will be a united body where each piece fits, each piece has its place, each piece has its function and works together and the whole body works together to create something that is healthy and is growing and is full of love. And so that's what we've come through so far and as we get to where we are this morning, we get another big 'therefore' which means: everything we've said so far, everything that's built up to this point, because of all that stuff we've just talked about, Paul says: "Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children. Live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God."

Okay, so we are all up to speed now as we get to Ephesians, Chapter 5. You may have noticed I brought a little prop up here with me this morning. This is a stand mixer that has been sitting in my garage for a year or two, possibly more, I don't actually remember. It's in my garage because it's broken. It's dead; it's fried; it doesn't work anymore. I don't know what it's doing in my garage, I don't know why it hasn't been gotten rid of yet but it's been sitting in there for some time. The sad thing about it is, this is not the first stand mixer in our household that has been sent off to the stand mixer grave yard. The interesting thing is that it's the same thing every time that fries all of them. It's my wife, but it's not really her fault. At Christmas time, every now and then she get's this kind of urge that she wants to make this special Christmas candy treat thing that she had when she was growing up. So every now and then, when we have a functional stand mixer she decides that she wants to make this happen and so she'll go about it. The problem is that in the process of making this treat, you have to mix it and mix it and as you mix it, it get's kind of thicker and stiffer and you have to keep doing that till it gets to the right stiffness. But the problem is that our stand mixers wear out and die before it gets to that point. I remember the first time we tried this we had a stand mixer and she was getting frustrated cause she was in the kitchen and she was trying to whip this stuff up but the machine wasn't able to keep up. So I went out to see what I could do to help and I noticed there was this little button on it that said something like "turbo".

And I thought “That will work!” So I pressed that button and what do you know the beaters sped up and so I thought “That’s great!” So every time it slowed down I pressed that button and she said “Now, you’re only supposed to hold that for 5 seconds.” And I said “Okay” and I held it for five seconds and then I let go and it would slow down so then I held it. And I held it, and I held it, and I held it, till I smelled burning rubber and then it stopped and it was done. Sometimes we just don’t follow instructions very well and some of us are worse at it than others.

I remember one time I was taking a group down to a youth rally in Oregon and we were in this van that we had borrowed from one of the parents of the teenagers. We were driving along and we were somewhere in Washington when somewhere on my dash this little light came on. I had never seen this light before. My car didn’t have that light at all. And so I got to be just mildly concerned about it and so I did what everyone does, I asked my co-pilot “Look in the glove box, find the manual, look it up and see what this thing is.” And so they kind of dug around in there for a little while and sure enough, no manual. And so, it just so happened that the kid whose parents owned the vehicle, was in the car with us and I was a little bit concerned because anytime you get a light with an exclamation mark in it, to me that says it’s something kind of important and you might want to take note of it. And so, I didn’t know what it was but it kind of looks like a tire and maybe your tire is going to explode or something. I didn’t know but the kid who belonged to the vehicle was in there and I said “Well, do you know what this light is?” And she said “It’s something to do with the tire but I don’t think it’s that important, we usually just drive with it on.” And I’m like mmmm. So that’s what we did. And it turns out, if you’re wondering, it’s the sensor for your tires being low in air pressure. But we managed. We got to a service station and checked everything out and everything was fine. But the bottom line of all that is, when you don’t have the proper instructions, or when you choose not to follow the proper instructions, things usually don’t turn out so well.

Some of you may remember this little slide from earlier this morning, this little experiment we did at the beginning of the class and if I remember right, the winners were Marj and Monica and I think, Ian, were the ones who got in first. Now just by a show of hands if you’re willing to admit to it, how many of you rushed through this thing, trying to do as much as you could and got to that last line that says, “Now that you’ve read through everything, just hand it in” and went grrrrr? How many of you did that? You were on your way, so okay. In the very first set of instructions it said “Read all of the instructions before beginning.” But sometimes we just don’t like to follow instructions. We think we know better; we think we can do it faster; we think we can do it easier. I first encountered that little exercise when I was in Grade 10. I was in Jack Close’s class and he handed it out to all of us. I will tell you, I failed miserably at it. Not only did I overlook the “read all the instructions first” thing, and just kind of dove in and did it all. I went back and looked at it, I still have the paper with me actually, I didn’t even follow the instructions right. So, I failed miserably at it, but I guess the real issue isn’t if you failed, the real issue is will we learn the lesson. The lesson here is that when you don’t follow the instructions there’s usually consequences.

Sometimes we fail to follow the instructions either because we didn't know what the instructions were or maybe we actually did know and we didn't really care about following them that much. Perhaps some of you have failed to follow the instructions on the parking sign and got a lovely little piece of paper stuck under your windshield wiper. Maybe you have failed to follow the instructions when a friend asks you to do something or to not do something and failing to follow those instructions has caused a great deal of stress in your relationship. Maybe you failed to follow the instructions, you completed a school project but you don't meet all the required criteria and so when you hand your paper in and you think you're going to get a great score, you get it back and it's not exactly what you think. Maybe you failed to follow instructions, I won't ask you to admit this, but lots of people have done it, you put your red sock in with your white shirts. And failing to follow those instructions tends to have some consequences to them.

We were in Ecuador in November and Travis was telling us about their speeding laws. They just had new speeding laws added in last summer and the law was: In the City the speed limit is 50 kilometres an hour and that's fairly standard, I think. But here's the catch: If you're going over 60 kilometres an hour and your caught going over 60, the penalty is almost a \$300.00 fine AND 3 days in jail. The catch with Ecuadorian jail is they don't feed you, the only way you get to eat in jail is if your friends and family come and give you food. So if your speeding over 10 clicks in Ecuador, the penalty is \$300.00 fine and 3 days in jail. All of that to say that failing to follow the instructions can be costly; it can be painful; and sometimes it can be even dangerous.

Which brings us back to Ephesians, Chapter 5. The book of Ephesians is kind of divided into halves and in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, Paul talks about who God is and what God has done. And then as he enters Chapters 4, 5 and 6, he starts to talk about how we can respond to who God is and what God has done. And so in other words, Chapters 4, 5, and 6, are, at least to an extent God's instruction manual for our lives, at least what Paul was sending to the Ephesians in this case. And so, in Chapter 4 he talks about how we respond to God as a body and as a body we must be united in love and working together. In Chapter 5 he starts talking about how do you respond to who God is and what He has done as an individual follower, an individual believer. And he begins Chapter 5 by saying to each one of us, he says: "Imitate God therefore in everything you do because you are His dear children. Live a life filled with love following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God." And that's it in a nutshell.

Here's the instructions: Imitate God; Live a life of love; follow the example of Christ. And that pretty much covers what Paul is going to teach us in Ephesians, Chapter 5. Now, the catch is that not all the Ephesians knew what God was like. The Ephesians who were in Church in Ephesus didn't grow up going to church, they didn't go to Sunday school every week as a kid, in fact, they didn't have much reference material. Probably at the time they were first reading Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, probably the only Gospel that had been written was the Gospel of Mark. John definitely not. Matthew and Luke probably still

not written yet and so there is just Mark and there were probably limited copies of that, and so the Ephesian Church had a limited reference base for these things and really, for most of them, their concept of God was mostly based on the worship of Artemis which you remember the City of Ephesus had the great Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. That's kind of where they're coming from and so Paul says, "Here is what I want you to do. I want you to imitate God but knowing where you're coming from, let me give you some examples of what that looks like. Let me give you some illustrations of what imitating God is really about. Let me give you some case studies about how following Christ's example is supposed to play out." And so he gives us this list here in Ephesians Chapter 5, and that list is kind of similar to some of the lists he gives us in other letters. You can find some of the lists in Romans 13; Galatians 5, Colossians 3; Philippians 2; and some other places that he has written. But none of those lists, including here in Ephesians, is meant to be all encompassing. You need to have that in mind as we start in. These are not meant to be complete check lists, they're meant to be simple samplings, if you will. And so, just imagine if you would, that you went to the doctor and the doctor gave you a check-up and said "Now I need you to lay off the caffeine. So, no more Coke; no more going to Tim Horton's; and if you're drinking tea, it's got to be decaf tea." So, you go home and you say, "Well the doctor said no Coke, but I could have Pepsi. The doctor said "don't go to Tim Horton's" and so I won't go to Tim Horton's I'm just going to brew up a big pot here at home for myself." And the doctor said "No decaf tea" but he didn't say non-decaf iced tea, and so I could have that. Well, of course you wouldn't do that, right, because you know that the doctor is just giving you some examples not an exhaustive list. And he expects you to be able to kind of figure out that even though he didn't specifically mention that you shouldn't be eating chocolate covered coffee beans, you shouldn't start popping those back like Tic-Tacs because that's kind of goes against the spirit of what he instructed you to do. So, on this occasion, to the Church in Ephesus, here's what Paul decides to highlight about imitating God's behaviour. Here's what he says in Eph. 5:3-5:

"Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Oscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes--these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world."

So Paul lists really three areas here. Three areas of life that are imitating the heart of God should be applied to. We don't have time to look at each of those three things in detail so we're just going to do a really quick overview of the things he lists for us. Here's the three things that Paul lists:

1. Sex. He says, whether it's sexual activity or the thought. Whether it's the deeds of the hands or the lust of the heart, whether it's sex before marriage or extra-marital affairs; whether it's friends with benefits; late night chat lines; on line porn sites; or those Harlequin Romance novels; whatever it is, Paul instructs us that we must imitate the character and heart

of God when it comes to sex.

2. The second thing he lists is speech. He says: Obscene stories, foolish talk, or course jokes. In the previous Chapter, Chapter 4, he says, don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful so that your words can be an encouragement to those who hear them. So what he's talking about is not just cursing or swearing or foul language, but it's also things like lying and deceitfulness and deception. It's also things like cutting remarks and put-downs and mocking statements. Things like cruel sarcasm and hateful words and gossip. Paul instructs us to imitate the character and heart of God when it comes to our speech.

3. The third thing he lists is our stuff, or more exactly, our desire for stuff. He says, don't get sucked in to that unending desire for more. We call that greed. He says, don't walk around always wishing that you could get what someone else has, we call that envy. He says, don't trade contentment for covetousness. He says, don't place all your hopes for happiness or joy in the basket of accumulation of stuff. More stuff, new stuff, better stuff. Paul instructs us to imitate the character and heart of God when it comes to our stuff.

And again, this isn't meant to be an exhaustive list, it's meant to be exemplar. Paul picks these three things because I think they are three of the things that people struggle with most. In fact, I looked at them this week and I thought "I'm not sure if I can find three things that people wrestle with and struggle with, more than these three things. Sex, and our sex life and our sex thought life; speech, the things we say to each other and the way we talk; and stuff. Our desire for stuff, our desire for more, better and newer stuff. Our desire to have what other people have." And I thought "Man, I don't know if there are three things that people wrestle with more often and more desperately than those three things." There are some others that are up there but those are the three of the biggest things and so that's why Paul picks these things as his example and he says "If you want to imitate God, if you want to follow Christ's example, let's start with these three." And if we get these three, just imagine if everyone in this room, this morning, imagine if we all were able to reflect God's attitude towards sex and Christ's example in speech and if we were able to reflect Godliness in the way that we use and view our stuff. Imagine if we all really go hold of that. Imagine what a different group of people we might be this morning. And so I think that's probably why Paul picks those three because, man, they are probably close to all of our hearts. Anyways, those are the examples he picks.

He goes on to say, "If you are able to do that, if you are able to live this way; if you imitate God, if you follow Christ's example, then what happens is that you become light. He says in Verse 8: "For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." And it's interesting that he doesn't say that you used to walk in darkness, but now you walk in light, although that's a very true and Biblical concept as well. What Paul says here is that, it's more than that, you used to be filled with darkness but now you ARE light. You're not just in the light, you ARE the light. And that brings back to mind other verses in

the Bible that we've looked at quite regularly. Matthew, Chapter 5:14-16 where Jesus tells his followers:

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. You don't put a lamp under a bowl you put it on a stand so everyone can see.”

And then he tells us to live in such a way that people will see the way we live and praise our Father who is in Heaven. In 1John 1:5, John writes that “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” And so, it would make sense that as we more accurately imitate God we become light just as He is light. We become His light in this world which has some fairly dark corners in it.

Paul concludes Chapter 5 by saying this: “So be careful how you live. Don't live as fools but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk on wine because it will ruin your life, instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves and make music to the Lord in your heart. Give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ.” And this is really the how/to section. Paul says if you want to be an imitator of God; if you want to follow the example of Christ; here is how you do it. Make the most of every opportunity, don't be foolish, be wise. Don't waste the chance to imitate the heart and character of God, capitalize on it. Don't walk aimlessly through your day, but walk with a sense of purpose and direction. Enter each day with a mission to follow the example of Christ.” And then he kind of throws out this illustration that seems a little bit like left field and he starts talking about drunkenness and at first you may think that he meant to put that in the earlier list and just forgot so he's tacking it on later. But I think there's actually something else going on here. I think there's another message that Paul is trying to give us. These days when someone drinks too much, we will say that they are 'under the influence', right? And so, when people are under the influence of alcohol, usually under the influence you do dumb things and the alcohol influences you to say some dumb things. Alcohol influences us to agree to some dumb things and probably more than anything, when people drink too much and become under the influence of alcohol, we argue about some really dumb things. And that's what the influence of alcohol does to people and Paul said “instead of being like that, instead of being influenced by that, instead be under the influence of the Spirit. Let the Spirit influence you to do wise things. To say loving things. To act in Godly ways. To think Godly thoughts. Which really brings his whole argument full circle. If you look closely, what you will realize is the instructions given by God through Paul is this: Be imitators of God; Follow Christ's example; and be under the influence of the Spirit.

Now, what we need to realize about God's instructions are this. You would never take the Mona Lisa and hang that up in your sauna. Right? No! You would never do that because the heat and the moisture of the sauna would ruin the picture. You would never take a Faberge egg and go out with your buddies and play some football, right? No! you wouldn't

do it because that would totally destroy this wonderful thing. Well, God's instructions are not meant to be restrictive, they're meant to be protective. You see, Paul starts out by saying: You are God's workmanship. You are God's masterpiece. And more importantly than that, you are God's beloved child. And so his instructions are for your benefit and for your protection and for your well-being. The logic is simply this. You were made in the image of God and then you were corrupted and broken and mutated and scared by a sin-filled world. But when you are in Christ, God is restoring you to your original design and beauty. He is restoring you to His image. Your instructions, therefore, are this: Imitate God. Follow Christ. Be led by the Spirit. That is your assignment as you leave here this morning. Imitate God. Follow Christ. Be led by the Spirit. That's your mission with each decision you make; each word you say; each thought you entertain; each click of the mouse; each action you take; each dollar you spend. Imitate God. Follow Christ. Be led by the Spirit.

Just consider for a moment, how our lives might be different this week, if that goal was fixed in the forefront of our minds. How would our co-workers be a little more pleasant to work with? How might our relationships be a little more deeper? How might our spouse and our children feel a little more valued and a little more loved? How might our minds be a little less cluttered? How might our hearts be a little more pure or our money be used a little more wisely, or our neighbours feel just a little more cared for? And if, as a Church, that was our mission, imagine would the poor in our city have a few fewer needs? Would the hurting in our city feel just a little less hopeless? Would sinners feel welcome? Would the poor feel more accepted? Would the repentant feel our forgiveness? Would the down trodden feel our hand lifting them up? Would the discouraged feel our arms embracing them? Our instructions are very clear: You live here and so, as you live out your life, imitate God in everything you do because you are His dear children. Live a life filled with love; follow the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

Remind you of the challenge we gave you early on in our series. The challenge to read one chapter of Ephesians each day of the week and I said I challenge you to read a different version each week. You may have to start recycling versions at this point and that's okay but still try and keep some variety in that and you'll see different things in the text.