

OCTOBER 27, 2019

WALKING IN LOVE

Ephesians 4:1-14

INTRODUCTION

What would you do for love? This question identifies love as an emotion that every individual stands in need of. While it is true we were made for love I want to pose a different question in light of this section of Ephesians. My revised question is this: What will you do *with* love? In these verses Paul is telling the church how love looks in practice – with one another, the world and in our personal lives before the Lord. Love is an affection but it is much more than this. It is acting in obedience to the Lord with lives yielded fully to Him for His glory and fame calling darkness to light. The love Paul calls us to is redemptive, showing forth the life of the Lord in the Work of Jesus Christ in our lives as a billboard of His grace. This is why we are called to “*Walk in Love.*”

IMITATE (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Having called the Ephesians to be people characterized by a heart of forgiveness and to thereby reflect the gospel through their lives, Paul now turns to the heart of forgiveness: love. As Christians we must see the purpose of our lives as being *imitators of God* (Ephesians 5:1). The word *imitate* means to mimic – literally to live in a way that resembles the sacrificial nature of the love of God for us in Christ (Ephesians 5:2). The sacrificial nature of God’s love had nothing to do with humanity deserving it or even seeking it. Rather, God *chose* to love the unlovely because it was what we needed. In the same way, to imitate God in love means that we should not demand, nor require others to warrant love before we give it. Rather, like God, we love in spite of their actions towards us knowing that love is the ethic of the kingdom of God that alone can transform hearts and overcome sin and division. That we are to love sacrificially means that loving like God will hurt. In fact, it may rightly be said that if in loving we do not feel the pain of sacrifice, it may be that we are not loving like God. Loving those who love us is easy, undemanding and without reward (Matthew 5:48). Gospel love is sacrificial because it calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who treat us with spite and shame (Matthew 5:44; Romans 5:8). To imitate God, then, is to pour ourselves out in love for those who give little care to our sacrifice or our Lord seeking their eternal good.

ISOLATE (Ephesians 5:3-7)

Imitation of God’s love means loving God by isolating ourselves from actions and affections that would contradict God’s character. Paul mentions three specific qualities that must not only be dealt but *should not even be heard among you, as is proper for saints* (Ephesians 5:3). Sexual immorality refers not simply to sex outside of marriage, but sexual perversion of any kind be it physical, cyber, or verbal such as *foolish talk and crude joking* (Ephesians 5:4). Seemingly out of place is the activity Paul’s calls us to in contrast to sexual perversion – *thanksgiving* (Ephesians 5:4). What can be easily missed is that thanksgiving – the continual disposition of being in awe and amazed at the grace of God in our lives, is a significant practice that keeps our minds focused on matters of the kingdom of God and not this world. When I fail to be thankful it is because I have failed to contemplate the wonder of God’s love for me and the danger is that I leave my mind open to the influence of culture and society (being thankful for unworthy things). Paul also mentions *greed* (the act of coveting) as a heart habit to be slayed (Ephesians 5:3). Greed represents more than a desire for money. Biblically greed is the heart hungry for getting what it wants, when it wants it and how it wants it. In a word, it is *idolatry* (Ephesians 5:5) - the heart’s worshipful pursuit of something or someone for satisfaction and pleasure. Another key thought to be

considered is that Paul teaches that isolation from these vices also requires that we isolate ourselves from those who practice, promote and condone them (Ephesians 5:6,7).

ILLUMINATE (Ephesians 5:8-14)

Isolation is an act of refusing to allow certain vices and people to have no sway or space in our hearts, minds and lives. Yet, Paul is not calling us to live holy in this world by simply rejecting or being isolated from sin and those who promote it. That is one side of the coin, but it is not the whole story. In verse 8-14 Paul calls the church to an active, almost militant, posture towards darkness. We are to walk in the light, consciously and with consistency because in Christ the darkness of sin has been eclipsed and banished by the light of truth and the love of God (Ephesians 5:8). In this way, we are to always seek to know (spiritually discern) in every aspect, decision, relationship, etc., *what the will of the Lord is* (Ephesians 5:10). Our lives, in imitation of God, must be so distinct from the world that they expose darkness - make it visible – by the light of our lives (Ephesians 5:13). Our lives preach the gospel as we obey the Lord and this obedience *will* bring light that exposes and awakens the spiritually sleepy (even within the church) to see that the light of God's character in our lives. The gospel preached with our lives can be used powerfully to open eyes to the beauty, truth and reality of God (Ephesians 5:14, Matthew 5:16).