Opening Words

You and I have such a high and noble calling. We have such a destiny in front of us that sinful behavior is out of character for us. It is unworthy of who Christ is, and unworthy of who we are as his people.

175 Eph Six Ways to Live as a New Man 6 – Sexual Immorality

We have been looking at Paul's practical instruction, the steps or guidelines he gives us in Ephesians 4:25-5:4 showing us how to live the reality of our new status in Jesus Christ. We have seen that Paul has told us to put aside the lie and embrace the truth and truth telling, we are to get rid of anger and cool down so that we can have righteousness, we are to refrain from stealing and become hard workers and givers, we are to lay aside unwholesome and abusive speech and speak with edification towards others, and we are to put aside all the little acceptable sins such as bitterness, anger, and slander and embrace kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness.

Paul gives us a great reason to live this way. God in Christ has forgiven us; therefore, we should forgive others and then in chapter 5 he throws a rope around all of it and ties it together by saying, "be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

How has God demonstrated these qualities? Let's look at the area of kindness. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 6:35-36: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.[36] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Isn't that good! The kindness of God. I think of Romans 2:4 which says that the kindness of God leads us to repentance. Paul says, "imitate God."

God is tender-hearted. Think of Christ's compassion when he saw the multitudes. Think of his compassion when he approached a village and saw a funeral procession coming out of the city, and a widow was weeping over the loss of her only son. Jesus raised him from the dead.

Listen to these words where God describes his love for his people in Hosea 11:8, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? …My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled."

Amazing! That sounds like a tender lover expressing his love toward his bride. That's the way God is towards us – tender-hearted and Paul tells us to imitate that.

And then forgiving. I so much love the story in John 8 when the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery is thrown at the feet of Jesus. This story has some unique qualities about it because while other sinners found forgiveness with God, they weren't caught in the act of their sin. They had already repented, or were seeking God, or had been touched by hearing Christ teach. I think of the woman who anointed his feet with her costly perfume and then dried his feet with her hair. She did

this, even though she was a great sinner because she had been touched by the love of Christ and she was pouring out her love and worship to Him.

But the woman in John 8 was different. She was caught in her sin, and when she was thrown down at the feet of Jesus there is no evidence of any repentance in her heart. She may have repented, but that is not the point of the story. So, there she was in the midst of her fresh sin, and Jesus has compassion upon her and forgives her. This is the way we are to be – people of forgiveness towards others.

God wants us to imitate his behavior toward us. This is what God is after. God has been infinitely patient with us. God has been tender-hearted toward us in all our woes and problems. God has been kind to us when we needed it most. This is how God has treated us – now reflect his image, show the Church and the world what God is really like by imitating his behavior toward us and toward the whole world. This behavior is summed up in one word – love. Paul, after identifying the one word that should describe us all, goes back to the example motif. We should walk in love because that is how Christ has walked towards us.

Christ loved us and the supreme way he demonstrated his love was by giving himself up for us. Paul pictures Christ's sacrifice as an offering and sacrifice to God, a soothing aroma to Him. My wife and I live close to a restaurant that uses a wood-fired oven and the fragrance of some of their dishes comes out of the restaurant into the neighborhood. I think that's smart of them because it's like free advertising, every time you walk by the restaurant you smell the fragrance and you desire some of their food. Well, transfer that concept to this verse – just as the fragrance of a good meal brings delight to our hungry stomachs as we anticipate eating the meal, in the same way, Christ's actions brought delight to the heart of the Father as he saw his son give himself up to suffering and death. It was a pleasing aroma to God for he saw his own heart toward poor, wretched sinners like you and me. He saw his own heart of love for the world in his own Son.

Paul uses this picture of sacrifice and the pleasing aroma of sacrifice as an example for us, and we can believe that when we walk as Christ walked, our lives are a similar soothing aroma to God. That should be motivation enough to live the way he lives.

We have one more area to cover in these messages where we have been looking at Six Ways to Live as a New Man. And in this sixth area, Paul finally gets to the big, spectacular sins that are the stuff of gossip and slander. Listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 5:3-4.

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

The big sins are sexual sins which are a form of greed. Paul mentions immorality and impurity. Immorality is from the Greek word *porneia* and Paul puts this word with the word impurity to identify every form of sexual sin which occurs when it is experienced outside the boundaries of marriage between one man and one woman. Then he ties greed to it showing it to be one of the most degrading forms of greed. Remember in 4:19 he talked about the lost giving themselves over

to sensuality for the practice of every form of impurity with greediness. Here he talks about impurity and greed again.

Greed is the last of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses, and it is interesting that in that tenth commandment God mentioned coveting another man's wife. Listen to these familiar words, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

Covetousness, greed, immorality – they work together. Paul puts them together in other writings of his – in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10 and Colossians 3:5. I hope you will take time to read them.

But Paul is interested in more than sexual misbehavior. He targets conversation that is like this. There must be no filthiness, silly talk, and coarse jesting about these things. Racy jokes, sexual jokes are not fitting for God's people. Then, Paul, after stating these negative things, these things we must say "no" to, goes back to talk about the positive. Instead of these sins which we act out with our bodies and talk about with our mouths, we must fill our mouths with thanksgiving to God. In context, our gratefulness to God is for our sexuality.

This emphasis helps us to avoid an opposite error and extreme in the area of sexuality – that of having a prudish, Victorian type attitude toward sexuality where everything is hush, hush, and the good gift of sexuality is treated almost as if it is a sin. But God is the one who made it. God is the one who designed the body – male and female with its sexual parts. God is the one who gave the command that the two should become one. Sex is God's idea and his gift to us.

This is what makes sexual sin so sordid – it is taking one of God's most precious and prized gifts and turning it into "the lie," making it the center of our lives and sullying that which was to be beautiful in the eyes of God and man.

These are the six areas. We are to put them all off. The victory over sin is to be so thorough that Paul says they are not even to be named among us. Their occurrence is to be rare to non-existent so that their very words are not even part of our normal conversation. How far the church has fallen in our day. May God help us and have mercy upon us.

Let me close this section by providing two more insights to this passage. In verse 3 Paul says that this immorality, uncleanness, and greed is not proper among the saints of God. Keep in mind that *saints* does not refer to some super spiritual class of Christian but it refers to all God's people as his *set apart ones*. Paul says that these kinds of sins are not proper for us. Then, in verse 4 he says that crude and coarse conversation about these things is not fitting. – Not proper and not fitting. – Do you know what that implies? It implies that you and I have such a high and noble calling, that we have such a destiny in front of us, that such behavior is out of character for us. Not just sexual sin, but all the other sins Paul has mentioned are unworthy, not only of who Christ is, but unworthy of who we are as God's people.

Oh, brothers and sisters, let's put all these things aside, not in a legalistic way as if this were only about rules and lists but in the God ordained way where we recognize that he is renewing us to be in his image and that because of the work of Christ our old life in Adam has been put aside and our new life in Christ has been put on. Let's live out our new status and identity in Jesus Christ.