

Ephesians Series

15 Children of Light

We are people that have been chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, sealed by the Spirit (chapter 1) and saved by grace through faith (2:8-9). So now we walk according to our calling (4:1), become mature in Christ (chapter 4) and in chapter 5 we are urged to be imitators of God.

Why become imitators of God? Last week we considered four reasons from chapters 4 and 5

Imitators of God

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children (Eph 5:1)



We have a new self - because we have been taught in accordance of the truth that is in Jesus



We have the Holy Spirit - so we live in a way that doesn't grieve Him



Christ has loved us - so we are imitators of God and love too



We are children of light - so we live as children of light

We saw that we are new people, we don't live like the Gentiles do. We have the Holy Spirit in residence - so we don't live in a way that grieves Him.

And we saw the way in which we should respond to one another. Verse 31 sums it up well
31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

We realised that we are to rid ourselves of those things that allow the devil to get a foothold - anger and all the bitterness that comes with it. We are people who are called to be kind and compassionate to one another.

Tonight we are going to have a look at the fruit that the presence of the Holy Spirit produces in our lives so I'm not going to explore that anymore than to say, if we have the Holy Spirit within us, rather than grieving Him let's be led by Him and we can obey God and do what He desires.

So let's have a look at point 3

3. Christ has loved us (5:1-2)

We should we do this? . We desire to be like this because of the example of what Christ has done for us. We're going to explore this too a little tonight - so if you want the amplified version then come tonight!!

What did Christ do? Paul explores two themes of Christ-likeness here:

- Forgiveness
- Gave Himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice

Jesus is our example - if He did it then we do it too

- **Forgiveness** - God forgave us so we forgive, because we imitate God when we do that. Forgiveness is something that we are bad at particularly if we are full of bitterness and rage at someone. But we are called to forgive. Note here, that it isn't just the act of forgiveness but the preparedness to forgive. God is prepared to forgive anyone, however grievous our sin - the problem is we are not ready to accept His forgiveness. I was impressed at the way that Stephen Oake's father was prepared to publicly say how he prayed that he could forgive Stephen's killer. We must forgive likewise.
- **Christ gave Himself us as a fragrant offering.** We read how in the Old Testament the burnt offerings were a fragrant aroma to the Lord. They were the best offerings. Jesus' offering for sin was the best offering of all because it was given as a mark of love of us and it was a fragrant one to God the Father. And the same is true of us as we give ourselves in love to one another and we know that pleases God. We had a look at something like this in our New Year service and here it is again with a different spin in Ephesians. He gave Himself for us, therefore we imitate Him. It's a natural progression. But here it is different from Romans 12:1-2. There we were urged to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Again we are to offer ourselves as Christ *loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* He sacrificed His life for our benefit and now we live the same life for one another. I've said a lot about this since I came here. It's the persistent theme of the New Testament. God is love: it speaks of what He is like - His nature. So as imitators it should be our nature too. We live a life that is sacrificial to one another. Wow! I've talked a lot about imitators of God. How can we truly imitate Him? He's omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient. Frankly we aren't and could never be any of those things. But we can imitate Him in the way He does call us to imitate - to LOVE. To give ourselves for one another. Oh how our lives and our church would change if we didn't live for ourselves but for our brothers and sisters in Christ and to reach the lost in Swaffham and beyond.

But there is the fourth point which runs from the third - why do we seek to live our life worthy of our calling? Because we are now children of light.

4. We are children of light

5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Being like Christ means living like Christ. And what does that mean?

Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

And what is Jesus?

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

And Jesus also described his disciples as

Matt 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We were once darkness but now we are light. Let's live like children of light. So what is darkness and what is light?

Darkness is mentioned a lot in the Bible. It means a number of things. Darkness can mean just that - darkness - a state where you can't see anything. That's what happened at Jesus' crucifixion where there was darkness from the 6th to 9th hours.

But there are two other meanings that are always somehow linked, particularly in the New Testament:

- ignorance, particularly spiritual ignorance which means what is done is sinful or evil
- evil activity, particularly associated with satan and his forces.

Here's a few examples to illustrate this:

John 3: 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Eph 6: 12 (C) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Col 1: 13 (C) For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins

Works of darkness are a reflection of those who don't live in God's kingdom but in the dominion of satan. And that is the aspect of darkness Paul explore here. We are imitators of God because we are no longer in darkness, no longer in the state of our own spiritual ignorance, no longer under the dominion of satan. Therefore we should act like children of light as Paul says, we are children of light, so therefore we should find out what pleases God.

So what does please God?

First of all if we no longer do works of darkness

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

You may be thinking that this does not apply to you. Maybe the Ephesians didn't think they applied to them either. The trouble is that immorality, impurity and greed were all part of Ephesian society. Worshipping Greek and Roman gods involved all sorts of moral laxity and it was taken as normal and acceptable. Their language and coarse humour matched.

Paul makes it clear that this is idolatry because it was all part of their world system that was of God but of the idols they worship and for them it was.

And said Paul, people who live in this way have no part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. This doesn't mean as some suggest that if they committed any of these sins, then their salvation was lost; just that anybody who habitually was involved in idolatry and in this morally lax behaviour couldn't possibly be part of the kingdom of God. Why? Because God's people are children of God, in His kingdom, and therefore act as people of the light. If we have understood our salvation, God's grace, the work of Jesus - then there's no WAY we'd desire to live in this way any longer.

The trouble was people were probably doing these things and rationalising them. Well it doesn't matter if we do this or that as it isn't hurting anybody. Paul says *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Strong stuff. Paul had to make clear that this behaviour was not a mark of a child of God.

Why make a fuss about it in 21st century Swaffham? Because our own land has sunk into moral laxity in a way that it never has before. You only have to look at TV, read the papers, listen to the radio to see what we are prepared to accept bad language, overt sexuality, acceptance of non-Christian values as OK. Not only do we accept it we stand to take on those values ourselves.

We accept the lie of Satan, the lie of this generation to accept sin as norm. It is the norm, but we don't have to live it but to be light to show that there is another way - and that it's better. Look at 13 again *But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

As we consider our lives and our actions this morning, are they of the light - or are there things in our lives that are immoral, impure, greedy - and we think that nobody knows about them? We often tolerate darkness in our lives. A habit we have that doesn't honour God, something we see on TV, something we read, things we know don't honour God. We are children of light and as the light shines on it and it becomes visible in our minds this morning we realise that we need to repent of it and walk the way we should. Examine yourselves and meditate on these things before the Lord. We need to be free of these things in our lives.

But there's another aspect. Our witness as the children of light also exposes darkness and shows the light of Christ to a lost world.

Our walk as people of God should be something that encourages and challenges people - as they see us, what do they see? We should be their wake-up call. We are the children of light

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

I have seen many people come to Christ in the last three years, most of them because they had Christian family and friends who stood as testimony to Christ. Let me ask you a question: if people are going to come to Jesus in Swaffham what is going to compel them to become Christians?

Good theological arguments?
Preaching in the streets?
Door to door work?
Leaflets?

They all have some use but let me ask you about real people who live in Swaffham.

What is going to appeal to the single mum suffering from broken relationships and screaming kids?

What's going to help a young man who is in trouble with the police, taking drugs - who can't get a job

For the men and women who have gone through unhappy relationships, through marriages and divorces, yet finding no happiness

For the businessman suffering stress

The battered wife

The lonely widow or widower

How will words help them? How will that convince them of a loving caring God who desires their eternal Sonship? Look at these verses again:

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

We are light. We minister to their felt needs and through bringing their deeds into the light they can know healing and wholeness and accept words of life. Our actions should stand as testimony to God's goodness, righteousness and truth. Not to judge them, not to condemn them but to give them hope, a message of forgiveness - good news.

Prayer:

I believe we need to respond to the Lord's word this morning

To examine our lives and repent for the way that we have allowed the world to be a part of our lives in the way in which we tolerate sexual immorality, in the way we permit impurity to enter our minds and our lives. For the way in which we so often just reflect the greed of the society around us. Let's ask God's forgiveness for the way in which we know they have been wrong but for the way in which we have not removed them from our lives. Let's come in repentance this morning.

But let's also commit ourselves to be light in our community. To live the kind of lives where people see Christ in us and are compelled to become Christians by the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

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Morning Sermon 2/2/2003
Swaffham Baptist Church, Norfolk
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