

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians – Chapter 5

Leaving the Darkness, Walk in the Light

Introduction

Question: *Who are you imitating with your life?*

We are shaped daily by what we admire, follow, and look at.

Children imitate parents; students imitate teachers; people imitate leaders, celebrities, influencers.

Paul recognizes this influence but calls the new humanity to a different way:

"¹ Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² 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".

Ephesians 5:1 (NLT)

The Cultural Context

Paul addresses an honour–shame, hierarchical, patriarchal society.

He uses cultural frameworks as tools to explain the new nature in Christ.

Ephesians 5 calls believers to **walk in love, light, and wisdom**—transforming personal lives, relationships, households, and the church.

Walking in Love and Light

Call to avoid:

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Greed
- Foolish talk / coarse jokes

"³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him."

Ephesians 5:3-6 (NLT)

These are counterfeit blessings—self-serving, harming others, unlike God's gifts which give us value and worth. In Paul's day: temple prostitution, religious corruption, exploitation led to idolatrous behaviours.

Live as children of light.

- Light produces what is good, right, and true.
- Expose deeds of darkness; don't walk in it any longer
- Christ gives light to our lives
- New creation: no class, gender, or status divisions.

"7 Don't participate in the things these people do. 8 For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! 9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. 10 Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. 11 Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. 12 It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. 13 But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, 14 for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, 'Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'"

Ephesians 5:7–14 (NLT)

Living in Wisdom

Three contrasts:

- Unwise vs. Wise
- Foolish vs. Discerning
- Drunk with wine vs. Filled with the Spirit
 - Manifestations of Spirit's influence in community:
 - Speaking in songs and theology-rich hymns
 - Singing in the heart to the Lord
 - Giving thanks for all things
 - Submitting to one another in reverence for Christ

"15 So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. 16 Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. 17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. 18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, 19 singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. 20 And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NLT)

Mutual Submission to One Another

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- Flow continues into verses 22–6:9:
 - Wives and husbands
 - Parents and children
 - Slaves and masters
- Scholarly perspectives:
 - **Frank Thielman:** Submission applies within described roles (5:22–6:9).
 - **Stephen Fowler:** Mutual submission relativizes authority structures, echoing Phil 2.
 - **John M. G. Barclay:** Mutuality transforms hierarchy into reciprocal service (cf. Gal. 5:13).
- Paul reframes authority:
 - Husbands: love wives as Christ loved the church (sacrificially).
 - Wives: respect husbands.
 - Parents: nurture children in the Lord.
 - Masters/slaves: mutual accountability before one Master in heaven.
- Radical in context: women, children, and slaves are addressed directly—subverting cultural exclusion.

The New Household

- Spirit-filled relationships within the home and church family.
- Submission redefined as humility, service, and considering others above self.
- Unity through diversity of gifts; building up the Body.

Christ as the Model

- Christ humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, dying on the cross.
- Paul's call: imitate Christ, live in the new nature, walk in light and wisdom.

"6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."

Philippians 2:6–8 (NLT)

Closing Reflection and Call to Action

- We live in the "**now but not yet**" tension of new creation.
- Do not imitate the world; live through the Spirit.
- Walk in love, light, and wisdom.
- Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- Question: Do I think I am superior to someone else? Does this logic make sense in light of the gift of Christ?
- What steps can I take to show reciprocal submission to someone I once thought of as lesser in status?