

STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY FIVE: Ephesians 5:1-33

Study Five, Part One

¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³But 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. ⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For 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.

5:1&2 – You are to imitate God! He is your Father and role model. You are to live a life of love just as Jesus did. Throughout this epistle, Paul skillfully directed attention to Jesus. He is the fullness of God and that fullness dwells in you! Jesus was a fragrant offering. What He did smelled good to God the Father. **Are you a fragrant offering too, pleasing to Him?**

I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (Philippians 4:18).

The flesh has a bad smell to God, no matter how much “perfume” you put on it. When you do something in your own power or for selfish motives, it has the smell of flesh on it. In one house where we lived, we had to tear out part of the wall because of the smell that was coming from inside. When we got in, we found a small lizard that had died in there. Boy did he stink! That is how flesh is to God, but that was not the case with Jesus. He was a fragrant offering.

I also read one time that a biblical sacrifice is not doing or giving something reluctantly. A biblical offering is giving to God what already belongs to Him. When you give your life as a sacrifice, it isn't that you are making a tremendous gift of great price. You are simply surrendering to God what already belongs to Him.

5:3 – Just as Jesus did, Paul went beyond the standard expectation for righteous behavior. The law said don't kill, Jesus said don't even call your brother a fool. Paul taught not just to avoid sexual impurity, but avoid even the hint of it. This is an important message for today's church. Studies show that a large percentage of men in the American church watch and some are addicted to pornography. The computer I am using to write this study can easily be turned into a source of sexual immorality. When will the church awaken to the need to bring help, repentance and forgiveness to a world gone sex crazy? The church must stop being shocked at sin and help people deal with and recover from it.

5:4 – Paul returned to the issue of speech and the tongue and banned obscenity and coarse joking. He did not, however, ban humor altogether. As we saw earlier, it is not enough to stop using the tongue for evil. Inappropriate talk must be replaced by righteous talk, which in this verse is defined as giving thanks. God doesn't want you to stop doing evil only, but to start doing good deeds. **What good can you begin that will replace a bad or sinful habit that you may have?**

5:5 – Immoral, greedy or impure people are idolaters, according to Paul. **What does this mean? How can a greedy person be worshipping false gods? Can you see how important it is to treat problems for what they are?** Greed is symptomatic of a deeper problem and that problem is worshipping another god instead of the true God. My love of sex, money or impurity is an attempt on my part to feed a need for God in my life with something besides God. That is idolatry. **Are you in idolatry in any part of your life?**

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming (Colossians 3:5-6).

Study Five, Part Two

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸For 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) ¹⁰and find out what pleases the Lord.

5:6 – Some may try to gloss problems over with empty words. In this verse, Paul was not trying to be a theologian. He was being a pastor who was helping people face day-to-day, real-life problems. He wasn't addressing great theological issues as some pulpits do. Instead he was instructing people on what to do with their speech and bodies. He was trying to turn believers from disobedience to obedience in the practical affairs of life.

He also wasn't preaching fire, brimstone and condemnation. Paul was establishing an ethical standard for all who called upon the name of the Lord.

5:7 – We must not partner with those who are disobedient. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). He wrote that in the context of teaching on the return of the Lord, so the Corinthians must have been listening to those who were corrupting their understanding of the resurrection. **Are you "hanging around" with anyone who is a bad influence on you? What are you prepared to do about it?** I don't mean to imply that you should never have any relationships with those who don't know the Lord. **Otherwise, how could anyone be led to the Lord if we refuse to have anything to do with them?** Here is what Paul was trying to teach:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

5:8-10 – There is much on the subject of light in the New Testament, starting with Jesus’ words and ministry. In fact, Jesus referred to Himself as the light. And in this verse, we read that *we* are the light of God *in the Lord* (there is that phrase again). If darkness is going to disappear, you must bring the light that you carry to the darkness. You cannot curse the darkness or wish that others would do something about it. You have the answer *in you* for any dark situation. The world will stay a dark place until you and others bring light to it.

Paul instructed them to “find out” what pleases the Lord. What pleases the Lord will differ from person to person to some extent. There are some things that I watch others do that I know if I did them the Lord would not be happy with me. I have heard others say things that I knew the Lord would not want me to say. One simple example is promoting my ministry. I have watched many promote their speaking ministry successfully. I have never been able to call anyone and promote what I do. I have learned that this does not please the Lord where I am concerned, so I cannot do it. And I cannot teach that it is wrong for anyone to do it. It is just wrong for me.

Do you have things similar to that example in your own walk with the Lord or am I the only one?

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:20-23).

Study Five, Part Three

¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

¹²For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for 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."

5:11 – It is not enough to avoid darkness; we must help expose and eradicate it. When you start exposing darkness, however, you uncover where the evil one lives and that can easily lead to a new level of spiritual warfare. When you expose darkness, all the people

and evil spirits living there are blinded by the light and often aren't happy with you, the light bearer. Don't expect a victory parade whenever you expose darkness.

Yet that is the very mission we should have: to take the light all over the world. **Is that your mission?** In order to do that, you cannot be living in any darkness yourself. **Are you walking in the light?**

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

5:12 – The Ephesians had a cultural heritage of secret, evil deeds prior to their conversion. Let's look at Luke's account in [Acts 19:18-19](#):

“Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.”

Paul was urging them not to make this story a one-time experience, but a way of life. He urged them to make the secrets public, to make the darkness light and to turn the evil to good. **Is there anything in your “closet” that you need to get rid of, like books, recordings, artwork?** This is a good time to clean house, so to speak.

5:13&14 – Paul did an interesting thing in these verses. In talking about light, he quoted what seemed to be a verse of Scripture. But this verse does not exist, but is rather a combination of several verses with Paul's own conclusion added to it. **Why is this interesting?** Paul was being led of the Spirit to interpret the Bible for his readers and I doubt if he was aware that this was what he was doing. The Spirit was leading him to make a creative expression out of several verses to enable the reader to understand more fully.

While Paul was free to do that, you and I are not. We must be disciplined that if the Bible doesn't teach something, we must not add to it. I have heard many people say, “The Lord showed me what this verse meant.” They went on to offer a creative interpretation of the verse that came from a special insight that was not supported by the text or the context itself. Be careful not to do this.

For example, don't interpret all the details of a parable unless the Bible itself interprets them. For example, don't interpret the seven churches in Revelation to represent the seven eras of church history. While that sounds spiritual, it is dangerous. You may present those as your *opinion*, but don't present them as revelation from God. Only the writers of the Bible could claim such special revelation.

Yet you know that God does reveal to you the truth of Scripture through His Holy Spirit. And while there is one meaning of a verse or passage, there can be many applications of that truth to your life, work, relationships and ministry.

Study Five, Part Four

¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:15&16 – I want to make the most of every opportunity. I don't want to say "one day" I will do this, only to never see that "one day" come. The days are indeed evil and the previous verses have taught that if evil is going to be overturned, it will be through the actions of light carriers who are in Christ. **What goals can you set for the next 30, 60 or 120 days? For the next five or ten years? What will you do today no matter how busy you get and what opposition you encounter?** You won't any of those things, whether short- or long-term, unless you have some priorities in your life, establishing what is most important for you to do and be regardless of the circumstances?

Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house (Proverbs 24:27).

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).

5:17 – I have known foolish Christians and I have been one myself on many occasions. Paul was writing to educate the Ephesians as to what the Lord's will is that he referred to in this verse. People are always asking about the will of God for their lives. Perhaps they should read Ephesians chapters four through six and they will know what the will of God is. By way of review, let's outline the Lord's will as Paul explained it up to this point in his letter:

1. Put off falsehood; speak truth.
2. Deal quickly with anger
3. Don't steal; work to help meet needs.
4. Get rid of malice; be kind
5. Imitate God with a life of love.
6. Avoid sexual immorality and idolatry
7. Expose darkness.

5:18 – I can understand why anyone would decide not to drink any alcoholic beverages. Alcohol has ruined many families and relationships. I have always said that what alcohol gives to me, I already have in the Spirit. But it is hard to make a case that it is wrong to

drink alcohol by using the Bible. This verse states not to get drunk; it doesn't say anything about not drinking. What's more, Jesus' enemies accused him of drinking too much wine. You don't make that accusation because you have seen someone drinking lemonade. They must have seen Jesus drink wine for them to say that!

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by her actions" (Matthew 11:19).

5:19 –Paul urged the Ephesians to speak to one another through music. He also directed them to make music to the Lord from the fullness of the Spirit. Obviously singing was to be an important part of life and a principle means of communication for the believer, because they were directed to sing to one another. **How much do you sing? Do you sing to others? With others?** There seems to be a distinction between psalms (Scripture), hymns (songs that speak of the greatness and work of God) and spiritual songs (more spontaneous songs that are intimate and directed by the Spirit).

I know I sing when I am happy and full of joy without even thinking about it. **Do you have a song in your heart? If not, why not? What is keeping you from singing your song to the Lord and others? If you aren't singing, are you at least reciting a Bible verse time to time that means something to you and can minister to others?**

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord (Psalm 40:3).

5:20 – Thanksgiving is to be a way of life for the believer. **Are you thankful?** Being thankful cannot go without saying; it must be spoken. Take one minute right now and list the things you are thankful for.

I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving (Psalm 69:30)

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song (Psalm 95:2).

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name (Psalm 100:4).

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Study Five, Part Five

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

5:21 – Paul began his instruction on marriage relationships by directing the believers to submit to one another. This meant that there was to be no hierarchy where one group or sex was always to submit to the other. Leaders and husbands are not to maintain an attitude or develop a system where followers and women are always subservient to them. I try to submit to others especially when they are functioning in their gift or purpose, including my wife. There are times I am a leader and then there are times I am a follower, even when my wife is leading.

I have worked with and for those who felt because they were the leader, they were always to be in command. That is shortsighted and naïve. If you hold the title of leader, you may actually follow more than you lead. That doesn't diminish your leadership, but enhances it instead. A smart leader surrounds him or herself with people who are smarter, more anointed and more gifted than he or she is. That is good both for the organization and the leader.

5:22 – Let's look at this oft-quoted verse (oftentimes quoted by husbands to their wives!). It says for wives to submit as unto the Lord. The Lord never demands submission; it is a freewill offering on the part of those who follow. A husband must never use this verse as a club or weapon. I have always tried to give my wife room to make up her mind to submit, not to the correctness of my decisions, but rather to the Lord's will for her life and our relationship. Yet you cannot escape what this verse states: wives must submit.

At the same time, a submissive wife has a good attitude but may not always have to obey. **What if the husband is directing a wife to do something unbiblical?** Then that wife can submit to the displeasure of her husband (not to be confused with abuse – that is never to be tolerated) while obeying the Lord by not lying, stealing or doing anything that is against God's word or will.

The best example of those who submitted but did not obey were the apostles when they were ordered by their Jewish authorities not to preach any longer about the Lord.

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20).

They disobeyed the authorities and went right on preaching, but they were willing to submit to the punishment that their authorities were ready to inflict if and when they disobeyed.

5:23 – A husband who understands this verse is not a domineering head. **How does Christ lead the husband?** Usually with gentleness and kindness. **How should a husband lead his wife?** The same way! I have heard many messages on rebellious wives and I have known more than a few. I have not always heard messages to husbands who were poor leaders or heads of their homes. There must be balance in this message or else the woman ends up being dominated, which is not Christ's intent.

What's more, the dynamics that were released when Adam and Eve fell opened the door for male domination of women, with the women often cooperating with the process.

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

5:24 – The marriage relationship is a visible expression of the how the Church should relate to Christ. There should be love, sensitivity, obedience, generosity and peace. Wives cannot explain away this verse or instruction. They are to submit to their husbands just as they would to Christ. Submission requires faith, not in the husband, but in God.

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3:1-9).

Study Five, Part Six

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

5:25-27 – There are three verses in this chapter that address the wife's role and nine verses that speak to the husband's role. If we follow this ratio, we should therefore have three times as many messages about being a godly husband as we do about being a godly wife. The husband must give himself up for his wife as Christ did for the Church. Christ made the church holy, cleansed her, presented her as a radiant bride, and made her holy and blameless. That is quite a list of what Christ did. The focus for the husband is not to be his wife's submission; it is to be on his own duties that will bring the same results that Christ's leadership brought to the Church.

A husband should care for his wife as he does his own body – that is the level of loving care the Lord expects from his godly men. If men exercised this kind of care, then

perhaps submission and obedience would not be as difficult as it is for some women. It is fair to say, however, that the fallen nature of mankind causes men to now want to love their wives and women not to want to submit to their husbands.

Proverbs has some things to say about marriage. Here is what it has to say:

A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones (Proverbs 12:4).

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).

A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping (Proverbs 19:13).

Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord (Proverbs 19:14).

Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife (Proverbs 21:9).

5:28 - It is easy to overlook the implications of these verses for men in the first-century church. The concept of treating a woman like an equal was radical for them. Jesus really did come to set all people free, especially women! These Gentile men were used to having multiple concubines and visiting temples where prostitution was practiced. Now they are being told to love their wives just like Christ loved the church, just like they loved their own bodies. This was radical and set them apart from their pagan neighbors.

Study Five, Part Seven

²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

5:29&30 – When I visited Cuba a few years ago, I listened to the preachers and tried to put myself in the place of the Cubans. I heard messages from the pulpit there that reminded me just how radical and revolutionary the Christian message is. Don't misunderstand; there was nothing of a political nature being preached there, just messages from the word of God. There cannot be "business as usual" where the word of God is at work. The Word should always be upsetting the status quo, challenging the thinking of the day.

The Word confronts mankind in their relationships, work ethic, approach to finances, materialism and politics. The Word teaches you not just how to live in church, but how

to live life in every area. As pointed out earlier, Paul's letters tend to teach theology in the first half and then how to apply the theology to everyday life in the second half.

Which makes me wonder which areas of modern culture the word of God is looking to confront and change. I think that is the nature of the prophetic word, which comes to confront and change the spirit of prevailing spirit of any age. If the Word cannot change the spirit of the age, then it must at least change the spirit of the believer! So that begs another questions: **What areas of your life is the Word seeking to confront and change? Where do you need to repent – change your mind and your direction – where your life, actions or thinking are not in line with God's word?**

5:31-33 – Men and women, but especially men, need to leave their birth family and establish their own families. They cannot have a foot in two families, for usually their own wife and children will suffer. I always told couples in premarital and marriage counseling that no matter how big their bed is, there is still only room for two people. So I urged them to leave all their family and past relationships outside the bedroom.

Men cannot live in the expectations of their father or mother, or their family traditions, when it comes to leading their own family. Too many men, I am afraid, are still trying to please their families when they should be pleasing their spouses. This means that a man must deal with the past in order to love his wife as Christ desires. This past may include previous girlfriends, but may also include their attitudes toward their parents and any unresolved hurts or frustrations from growing up.

The marriage relationship provides a practical picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church. When the world looks at a Christian marriage, they should have a sense of the supernatural. **Is that true in your marriage relationship?**

If you are single, it isn't too early to decide what kind of marriage you will have. Read God's word, determine God's will for marriage and visualize now what kind of marriage you will have, how you will act and what your values will be, regardless of how your future spouse responds or acts.