

## EPHESIANS 5:1-7

### INTRODUCTION

Paul has showed us in chapter 4 how the unbelieving world thinks and lives. He has revealed to us something of the way of the Christian pathway, the conclusion is that we are not like the unbelievers we do not think like them and we therefore do not live like them. I am no good at art so when I was at School and we had to draw something perhaps for history or geography I use to trace my drawing and transpose it into my book.

I had to very carefully and slowly copy the outline of the drawing. But at the end of the day although it took me much longer than the rest of the class it was a better drawing than anything I could do by freehand. I needed to copy something in order to make progress in my homework. Well in the Christian life if we are going to live differently from the unbelieving world around us and if we are going to know how to act and respond in the various situations of life we need someone to copy.

We need to be able to copy someone else's behaviour. Well says Paul copy God.

#### 1. BE IMITATORS OF GOD (v 1)

This is an unusual phrase as often in the New Testament we are called upon to follow others, for example Paul encourages us to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1) or just simply imitate him or his colleagues (1 Corinthians 4:16 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9). It is clear that the early church set a high value on following good examples.

In our day and generation setting a good example is not even thought about for who is it that our media put on a pedestal but people who live lives of immorality these are the ones our children are told to look up too. But in the New Testament a good example of Christian living was very important. Until that time people had never seen what Christian living was all about. The general standard of morality in the first century was generally very low, living lives wholly given over to the Lord was new to many. What did it involve?

They looked at and followed the lives of the Apostles to provide an example as to how to behave in the world and in the church. But now Paul is setting down a much higher standard than just following the example of the Apostles; Paul says imitate God. Paul is not saying live lives that will excel but he is saying live life in the way God would live it. It's good to read Christian biographies and I don't know about you but reading such books leaves me feeling pretty low.

They are so godly people who know God in a way that I can only dream about and I often wish I could be like Hudson Taylor or C. T. Studd or some other great Christian of the past. But Paul is going way beyond that and he is saying to us all imitate God, be like him set your standards high. We are called in the sermon on the Mount to be perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), our heavenly Father is our model we must find out through the Scriptures what God is like and then be like him.

Of course that will involve us in studying what Jesus is like because Jesus is the image of his Father, we need to read how he lived and acted and reacted to the various situations of life. We ought to study the attributes of God and the ones that we can copy we ought to do so with God's help. We cannot be omnipresent but we can be: loving, merciful and gracious just as our God is.

Now I could end the sermon here and that would be enough for us to think about for the next week but Paul gives us a reason why we should imitate God. We are his dearly loved children. Now whether we like it or not our children do look to us and do follow our example. For example when

you hear a young child swearing in the street to his peers where do you think he learnt that language from? Yes from his Parents that's the language of his home.

We all hear our children say things and we see them do things that we know are very familiar because they have copied us. In many cases we don't mind them copying us in fact we expect them to do it for we are the ones that they see every day and therefore they think that the way we act is the way they should act. Well spiritually speaking this should be the case when it comes to our Christian lives.

Yes we will copy other Christians especially our Christian Parents or leaders but ultimately we will want to follow our heavenly Father and act as he acts. Our God always sets us good examples so we want to follow his example. This is natural to us we are his children he is our Father, where else are we going to learn Christian behaviour if not in his family and if not from our Father. You won't learn it at school or through our Government but you will learn it from the church and especially from God himself.

This is what John was thinking about when in 1 John 4:11 he tells us to 'love one another.' Why should we do that? Because God loved us so follow his example of love and love each other? We want now to look at the areas that Paul was thinking about when he urged us to imitate God. We would be overwhelmed with such a statement unless Paul at least pointed out some areas that we need to imitate God in.

## 2. IMITATE GOD IN LOVE (v 2)

The phrase that is translated 'live a life of love' really reads 'walk in love.' It carries the idea that the Christian life is a walk for walking best describes the Christian life. Walking describes for us the making of steady progress, when we walk we usually walk at the same pace and slowly but surely we make headway to our final destination. Its not like a run were you start well but eventually collapse a couple of miles from home, no walking is a steady activity that eventually will bring us to our destination.

Well says Paul as we walk this Christian life do so in love. Paul's point is that if we are going to imitate God then God is love and so our life of service towards God will bring something of the love of God before this world's sinful and restless souls. Now this is something where we clearly can imitate God. God showed his love for us in quite a remarkable way didn't he? God's love for us is so strikingly demonstrated at the cross, what is real love, how are we to love others well look at the cross.

This is a giving love; this is a sacrificial love this is real love. It's a love to the unattractive and undeserving. This is the sort of love that Christians are to copy. We live in a world where generally speaking people like to take advantage of one another wherever they can. We live in a world where love is only shown to those that are attractive in some way to us, where people earn our love where they have appealing qualities. But the Christian who copies God should love with a giving, sacrificial undeserving love to those who do not deserve it which of course means everyone. No one deserved or earned God's love yet he loved us and showed that love by becoming involved with us through the death of his Son.

We are by nature self centred, but by God's grace we are transformed into love centred people so that at home, work, school and at church we are seen to be loving people. This means getting involved with people. It means giving ourselves to them, it means making our resources available to them, and it means putting others before our very selves. That's hard to do and only the grace of God can make us into such people. But of course that does not make us passive; God works in us and we work it out within our own lives.

It involves us putting to death sin and replacing sin with good and godly qualities. That is a constant process and a good test for us to see if we are making progress in the Christian walk. Is this test of love are we imitating God's love as we live and serve him in this world?

A loving person is a selfless person where others are more important than self but a person who does not love like God is selfish and this selfishness is seen in a number of ways. Paul now shows us what it means to be a loving person by showing us what a loving person does not do.

### 3. IMITATE GOD IN PRACTICAL LOVE (v 3)

What lies at the heart of sexual immorality? It is lack of love. People who go out on a Friday night pick up some girl and go to bed with her is showing how little they love that person. They simply use her and she uses him in order to satisfy their sexual appetites. It's the same with someone who is in a more stable relationship and feels its time that they added sex to that relationship but they don't want to get married just yet.

Such an attitude is demonstrating an immense lack of love for their partner. It's all about my desires being satisfied. The Government's safe sex campaigns over the years simply confirm people in their selfishness and loveless lives. For what the Government says by such campaigns is that sex is OK just make sure that you have safe sex. No mention of love, commitment and indeed consequences or responsibility.

Now it was no different in Paul's day it was generally accepted that sex was all right as long as it was not with a married woman, in fact it was thought OK for married men to stray as long as it was not with another married woman. So what Paul is saying here is not a stated moral of the time but something that was distinctly Christian. So it in our day I suggest to you that you are seen as a bit weird if you dare suggest to our young people that sex is best when it takes place within a loving married relationship.

It sounds weird to our young people because sex has been promoted out of its context; it's all about enjoyment pleasure self-satisfaction whereas sex is God's gift to us and can only be enjoyed within a loving married relationship. It is God's gift not for our benefit but for the benefit of our married partner and vice versa. So the Christian imitates God's love for people and demonstrates that love by refusing to adopt the world's moral standards concerning sex.

But we also show our love by refusing to allow ourselves to become involved with impure things. The word that is used 'impurity' covers everything that can defile. It covers all areas of life, but I want to suggest to you one area that is increasing within our society and it does affect the church. It is the area of pornography. I think it was Care who did a survey not so long ago about this problem and they were amazed with the results.

I can't remember the results now but the survey was carried out among church going and Christian people and a high percentage said that they had or did dabble in some form of pornography. The Internet was the main source for feeding their habit. Now even allowing for the fact that some of those who were surveyed would not have been Christian people it is still a worry. Even more worrying is the fact that a high percentage of these people were Vicars and Ministers.

Pornography is freely available to us. You can buy the magazines, you can find the sites on the Internet you can even get pornography channels on your TV now. One day while travelling down the Motorway I stopped at one of these Motorway café's for a rest. I was in the shop looking around when I noticed a man in his 50's well dressed obviously a businessman who bought two pornographic magazines. That's when I realised that this sort of thing is not just what young people do but older people do it as well.

I was on train once when a man and his wife came and sat facing me. She was reading a book and he was looking at a pornographic magazine without embarrassment. In fact every now and again he showed his wife a picture and made some comment. How old was this couple? In their early 50's I guess.

Now how can anyone keep their mind pure whenever we feed it on such rubbish? But the temptation for the Christian is just as real whether at work, at school or wherever, but if we succumb to such temptations then we are showing our lack of love, for we cannot feed our minds on such things and then not act in sinful ways towards others. Is it no wonder that our nation is a sex mad nation when people feed their minds on such impure things?

But the mark of a loving Christian is that we avoid all kinds of impurity. Now with immorality and impurity Paul links greed. Now this might in this context mean something like greedy to have our sexual desires satisfied so that we must have those desires fulfilled even if it means degrading ourselves or someone else in the process. After all greed is all about one's own personal satisfaction being met. A greedy person never thinks of anyone else but himself.

Now Paul is saying that if we are to imitate God's love to our sinful world then true love is truly concerned for others and for God's glory. Therefore a loving Christian will not look to have his own appetites satisfied whether they be sexual or otherwise but will consider others and will therefore not be immoral or involved in any form of impurity and will not be greedy.

Now for some reason and I am not sure why the NIV has left out the phrase 'be even named among you.' I think they have put in that little word 'hint' to try to cover this point but I think the translators have failed to cover what Paul is saying although to be fair the point is made in verse 12. What Paul is **not** saying is that it is wrong even to mention these evils listed by way of denunciation. No!

What Paul is warning against is the tendency to discuss sin that one is not at present committing but to do so in such a way that might entice you into this sin. When I was a teenager the book by Doreen Irvine called from 'Witchcraft to Christ,' which told her conversion story was popular among young people. But that book was so graphic in its description of witchcraft that it was almost enticing. Teenagers were talking about sins that they knew nothing about and had no intention of being involved with.

It's that sort of idea that Paul has in mind here. Be careful how we talk about sexual sins and impure things we might by speaking about such things entice ourselves into the very sins, which we are condemning.

Well says Paul such things are not fitting for or are improper for God's holy people. God through Jesus Christ makes Christians holy; therefore living like the world is not fitting for Christians. We all know that when we hear of a fellow believer straying in the area of sexual sin that it is not fitting for a believer to be doing so. Of course it is never fitting or proper to stray sexually whether believer or unbeliever, but it some how does not shock us when we here of unbelievers doing so somehow we almost expect it but not the Christian. We are saved from such things it simply is not proper not what anyone expects, its like a tramp turning up at a royal dinner party it simply is not proper not fitting.

Therefore as I conclude let us seek to imitate God. How do we do so? By walking in love and following the example of Christ who gave himself willingly and sacrificially for us. What does loving others mean in practise? It means staying pure sexually by refusing to give in to our selfish temptations. It means refusing to give in to our greedy passions. It means seeking to live out holy lives in our sinful world.

Why must we do so things? It is simply not proper for God's holy people not to walk in love and in purity of heart and mind.

Amen