

**FOLLOWING GOD, WALKING IN LOVE**

Ephesians 5:1-5

**Intro:** This past week I read a quotation from Martin Luther that I want to pass on to you today. I had read it before, but I was glad to be reminded of it again. Luther said, “There are three things that make a preacher: meditation, prayer, and tribulation. I am sure that by meditation he meant *meditation on the Word of God*. We all know what he meant by prayer: *personal communion with God*. By tribulation he meant *trials, testings*. With the Lord’s help, the first two are a preacher’s responsibility. It is up to him to take time for meditation on God’s Word, and it is his responsibility to pray. Tribulations are trials and testings that the Lord brings into our lives. Any preacher who has been busy as the work of preaching for any time at all, knows that trials come of different kinds and of the Lord’s choosing throughout a preacher’s life.

But, as you think about Luther’s comment, the same three things that make a preacher, make a Christian. After all, a preacher is first of all a Christian, and then a preacher, if he has been called of God. But God deals with true preachers of the Word just like He does all Christians. To be what God wants us to be, and this applies to all of us, requires meditation, prayer, and tribulation.

It is probably true that most Christians, and most preachers, don’t take the time to meditate on the Word as much as they should. Or should I say, as much as we should. The same can be said of prayer. Tribulations, even the kind we call frustrations, come to all of us. And it is our failure to meditate on Scripture, and to pray, that often causes failure when the testings of life come upon us from God.

Most Christians seek to be faithful in reading the Word, and most Christians seek to be faithful in praying every day. But taking the time to meditate on what we read, or even to pray over what we read, is where we fail. So what it takes to make a preacher, is what it takes to make a Christian: meditation, prayer, and tribulation.

I couldn’t help but think about our familiarity with Scripture here at Trinity. And we encourage you to do daily Bible reading, so that adds to our contact with Scripture, and through Scripture, to our need to pray. We cover a lot of truth every week, and that is good. But if we just read our Bibles, and listen carefully to the teaching of God’s Word, as impor-

tant as both of those are, we are not going to get the benefit from the Word that we will if in addition to what we read and what we hear, we meditate on what we are reading and hearing. That is, we need to really think about what we read, and seek from God in prayer the wisdom to make God's Word a vital part of our day to day living.

Here in Ephesians there is a lot of truth that we have been covering, but the question for all of us to ask ourselves, is, How much am I meditating on what I am reading, or hearing? How much time do I give to praying that the Lord will help me to understand what I read, and how I can do and be what he wants me to be. We have seen a lot of things in Ephesians that we are not to do, and many other things that we are to do. In Psalm 1 the psalmist follows this same pattern as the way to a truly happy life. But he related it to meditation. Let me remind you of the first three verses of Psalm 1:

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psa. 1:1-3).

When Paul wrote to his younger brother in Christ and fellow servant in the Lord, he told him many things to do and some things not to do. But then he added this word:

15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all (1 Tim. 4:15).

We are not to do what the Lord wants us to do to be "seen of men," but Paul told Timothy that if he would meditate on the Word and give himself wholly to them, that people would notice the difference that it was making in his life. If we are to meditate on the Word "day and night" like the Psalmist said, this means that we ought to have some portion of the Word that we are thinking about through the day and evening as we go about our daily duties. Memorizing Scripture is a great help to meditation.

So remember that it is through meditation on the Word, and regular and fervent prayer to God, and through the testings that the Lord brings our way, that preachers are made, and that Christians are made. If you haven't been doing this, begin today!

Now today we come to Ephesians 5. Paul was very concerned about how the Ephesian believers were doing in their daily lives. And so he continued here along the same line as we have seen in chapter 4. Of course originally there were no chapters 4 and 5, or verse numbers. It was all one continuous letter. So what is chapter 5 in our Bibles originally was a continuation of what we have just been reading in chapter 4.

As we begin looking at these verses, I want to take you back for just a minute or so to the first part of the epistle where Paul reminded the believers at Ephesus why they had been saved. Or to state it another way, why it was that they had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Look at verses 3 and 4. (Read.) *The first and greatest purpose that the Lord had in chosen us, all of us, was “that we should be holy and without blame before Him.”* Ephesians, like every other book in the Bible is a book about holiness, not just what we are to look for in each other, but “before Him,” before the one and only infinitely holy God.

“Holy” for the present does not mean perfect, but it means to be like God. And that is what Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:1 and 2. (Read.)

## **I. FOLLOWERS OF GOD, WALKING IN LOVE (Eph. 5:1-2).**

We know that in the beginning God made Adam and Eve in His own image, and this placed every man, woman, and child who has ever lived on the earth under a divine obligation to become more and more like God. The worst reprobate in any generation is under this obligation from God. But sin stands in the way. However, by the miracle of the new birth which is brought about through the Gospel, those who are saved are delivered from both the penalty and power of sin, and set on the course where this divine purpose is being fulfilled. And such a goal is utterly impossible apart from salvation through Christ.

The Greek word which Paul used here is the word from which we get our English word *mimic*. Today the word has an entirely different meaning. A mimic is an actor, and usually a comedian who impersonates someone else, and most of the time it is to make fun of the person who is being mimicked. But in the Bible it is used in a good sense. It means to seek to be like the person you are mimicking, or following. The Apostle Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he wrote to the believers at Corinth, and said, “Be ye followers (mimics) of me, even as I also am of Christ.” The writer of the book of Hebrews said, “That ye be not slothful,

but followers (mimics) of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10). This same pattern is shown in 1 Thess. 1:5-7:

- 5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.  
6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:  
7 So that ye were ensamples (types) to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Imagine! Paul was telling the Ephesian believers to follow God, to be mimics of God. And the word “be” means *become!* Paul was telling those ancient Christians to become like God. We are to become like God, Who is our heavenly Father, so that we will bear the likeness of members of the family of God. This is all most amazing truth. This is what it means to be holy. It is to be like God, which is also to be like Christ. As we obey God’s Word with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we are becoming more like God. But it is good if you can find a Christian whose life shows divine characteristics, and then seek to follow them as they are following the Lord.

Then Paul said, “as dear children.” It has to mean, as God’s “dear children”! Oh, if you and I only realized how “dear,” how precious we are to God!

How are we going to live if we are seeking to become like God? We are going to be walking in love. God is love. If we are being followers of Him, what will be the dominant character of our lives? “Love.” And what is, or Who is, the Example that we are to follow? It is Christ. Christ is the expression of God’s love for us. God loved us and gave us His Son. But His Son loved us, and the evidence of His love and God’s love is that He, Christ, gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.”

Paul has given us repeated evidence of what we are by nature, and how, if left to our own devices, we will go deeper and deeper into sin and farther and farther away from God. God showed how “dear” we all are to Him because it was His only begotten Son who came to redeem us from our sins, to transform us “dear children” into those who are holy as He is holy.

The love that the Apostle Paul was talking about when He said, “Walk in love,” is agape love, a love which seeks to influence people in such a way that we leave them better than they were when we met them. But it is not only a love which motivates our love among men, human beings, but a love which manifests itself constantly and increasingly toward God and toward Christ and toward the Holy Spirit. It is really impossible for us to understand the emotions that must have filled the heart of God at the Cross where His beloved Son, His only Son, suffered such a terrible death when His soul was made an offering for our sins, so much so that God had to turn away from the Cross, and yet He looked upon it as a sweet savor offering because of what it accomplished for God. Why would God send His Son to die such a death for sinners who cared nothing about Him, who were in fact His enemies, that by the death of His Son those enemies might be reconciled as His dear children? There was just one reason – because He loved us! And let me say what you older ones know to be true, the longer you know the Lord the greater sinner you see yourself to be, and the more you will marvel at the amazing, unchanging love of God for you and me.

But for us it is not as easy as it may sound, is it? There are pitfalls in the way. And remember the warning that Paul sounded in chapter 4, verse 27, “Neither give place to the Devil.”

We hear a lot these days about the need that there is for parents to talk to our kids about the dangers of drugs, and alcohol, and the influence that bad people can have upon them. I am sure that the Apostle Paul would agree. But he would add that we need to talk to ourselves and to each other about the dangers that we as Christians face because of sin.

And so the next three verses introduce a rather long section on:

## **II. THE NEED TO BE CONSTANTLY ON OUR GUARD AGAINST SIN (Eph. 5:3-5).**

Paul begins with “fornication” – “a sin so lightly thought of among the heathen as hardly to be held by them a wrong or shame at all” (Moule, p. 247.) And hasn’t it become like that in America? And we are seeing it in young people and children. Paul did not give any illustrations. And we need to be careful in how we talk about it and how it occupies our minds. We need to remember what Paul wrote a few verses later in verse 12, that “it is a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.”

Talking about the details of sin often leads to committing the things that God has forbidden. “All uncleanness” is anything that departs from the morality that has been written on our hearts, and things that are specifically in contrast with the holiness of God. “Covetousness” has a relationship to sins of the grossest kind as we read in the Law of Moses – “anything that is thy neighbor’s.” This, too, is the basis of business today. The love of money is “the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Then notice how Paul strongly condemns any of these sins with the words, “Let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.” This is the responsibility of every one of us.

In verse 4 Paul spoke again of how we can sin with our tongues. And you will note that he puts them in the same category that it should never be named as becoming to the saints of God. A holy person cannot, and will not, be characterized by these. “Filthiness” is anything that is obscene, that which is offensive to chastity or modesty. “Foolish talking” is that which makes light of, or a joke, of that which is abominable to God. “Jesting” is one who uses offensive language, like telling a dirty story to get a laugh and to belittle that which is good. None of this is acceptable ever. But as a preventive against obscene, degrading, and defiling language, is the praise expressed from a thankful heart, praise to God and thanksgiving to God. It keeps us conscious of the Lord’s presence, and is an illustration of the statement that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). In giving thanks we recognize the goodness of the Lord and His presence with us, and is a safeguard against the sinful use of the tongue.

In verse 5 the Apostle Paul seems to revert to what he had said in verse 3, indicating that the person who is continually behaving in a sinful manner, does not have any part in the kingdom of Christ or of God.

**Concl:** In conclusion we must recognize that the Apostle Paul was insisting on the fact that there is going to be a great and recognizable difference between a person who does not know the Lord as compared with a person who does know the Lord. A Christian can sin, or the Apostle would not have written like he wrote to the church at Ephesus. But the difference is that a true Christian cannot live in sin. His sinning may go on for a matter of years, but eventually he will come out. The person who professes that Christ is his, or her, Savior, but who continues on in a life that is unchanged, is not telling the truth. The Apostle John spoke along this same line in 1 John 3:4-10. He wrote much later than

Eph. 5:1-5 (7)

Paul, and this would show that what was a problem in Paul's day, continued to be a problem thirty or forty years later, and we know that it continues to be a problem today. Listen to the Apostle John's words in 1 John 3:4-10:

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

Even to the church at Corinth which was riddled with problems, the Apostle Paul wrote these words which we find in 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

These are words for all of us to pay attention to. Remember that Christians are made by meditation, prayer, and trials. We all need to make sure that we are saved. And if we don't measure up to what the Word of God teaches, then we need to get saved, to seek the Lord now.

But let me speak as I close to those of you who are parents. Look for the true signs that your children are saved. Can you see evidence in their lives that they know the Lord? They may be seeking to please you now, but can you see evidence in their lives that they really are changed? If not, then you need to continue to pray and to talk to your children about the Gospel, trusting the Lord to do what you cannot do, and that is to turn their hearts in faith to our Lord Jesus Christ.