

## **“Live A Life Of Love”**

27 September 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call To Worship:**

**Hymn of Preparation:** IPH 402 Here Is Love Vast As The Ocean

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession:** Joan Ryan

**Reading:** Ephesians 5:1-7

### **Sermon:**

We last looked at Paul's letter written to the Church in Ephesus in July, so allow me to take you on a whistle-stop tour of the letter.

Paul has clearly outlined in Ch. 1 the blessing of being in Christ (1:3): chosen, redeemed through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, united with God in heaven and sealed with the Holy Spirit. The truth of the gospel is the reality of being in Christ, it is a wonderfully secure place to be; nothing; not even death can separate us from God and his love. Paul is super excited by this reality for the Church in Ephesus that he prays they will see it, with the eyes of faith. (v18) John Stott's summary statement of this section Ch. 1- 2:10 is *New Life*. New life in Christ.

Being in Christ is not just worked out individually, which is strongly counter-intuitive for us in Western thinking, we are incredibly individualistic, but its brilliance is worked and seen in community. The community of the church. John Stott calls this God's *New Society* see 1:22-23 and the big idea within the new society is reconciliation. Jews and Gentiles (pagans) two groups of people who hated one another are brought together through the mediation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (2:14).

Paul is clearly stating here that the Church is the hope of the world, a society of peace and reconciliation, of unity and purpose that stands as a witness for the world. Paul calls it a mystery that has been revealed in Jesus and is the Church. People reconciled to God and with one another who were previous enemies of God and each other as the hope of the world even though they now suffer at the hands of the world (3:10-13 ).A new society rooted and established in the love of God (3:18).

Chapter 4 marks the start of a new section which John Stott calls *New Standards*. The apostle Paul calls on all followers of Jesus to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (4:1) and insists we live this way (4:17) and later he tells us that it pleases the Lord (5:10). The characteristics of this life are humility (v.2), unity (v.3-6), diversity (v.7-12) and maturity (v.13-16) which focused on the idea of truth and love within the Church.

He explores this idea of New Standards appropriate for those who are in Christ in the metaphor of putting off old clothes (as putting off the old life of sin) and putting on new Christ clothes - clean, bright, and beautiful clothes (v.22-24). These are Christian ethics: don't tell lies, speak the truth (v.25), don't lose your temper and be angry but be very careful with anger (v.26-27), don't steal but work and give (v.28), don't speak evil against another, but use your words to build them up (v.29-30), don't be unkind but be kind and compassionate to each other (v.31-32).

It is the theology that drives the ethic. It is because we are *in Christ* and have the seal of the Holy Spirit that we live this way, not by self-effort. This new life in a new society with new standards is a challenge and it is the standard expected of everyone who claims to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Are you challenged and excited about the possibility of such a life within the Church here in ARPC? It is good and it is loving.

One of the questions being asked because of the new reality of COVID-19 is, “will society change?” and that remains to be seen. The question for the Church, and ARPC in particular, is will we seek to be wholehearted, committed and strive to put off the old self and put on the new self of Christ (4:22-24)?

It is into this section concerning Christian ethics (Ch. 4:1-5:20), or how a Christian should live, that we are breaking in and we will look at living a life of love, in contrast to a life of sexual immorality.

### **I. Be Imitators Of God (v.1)**

I am like my father in looks, similar skin tone, hair style, some mannerisms. Occasionally when walking, I will put my hands together behind my back, just as he did. I am like my Dad. In the gospel we have become God's children (1:5; 2:19; 3:14-15) and we are therefore to be like our Father, to imitate Him. *Be imitators of God*. So, what is God like? Paul has picked out His kindness and compassion shown in His forgiveness (4:32) and as we will see, he focuses on two strong aspects of His character for us to copy: His love and His holiness.

- “God is love.” 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16
- “Be holy because I am holy.” Leviticus 19:2

***As dearly loved children.*** It is important to pause with the phrase “dearly loved children.” God is a loving Father, and the Bible tells us God also has all the qualities of a mother’s love. It is a brilliant place to be, secure in the love of parents who are solid, resourceful, caring and concerned for what is right and good for us.

How strongly do we believe that as Christians we are God’s dearly loved children?

By hearing this truth and believing it, taking it to heart, our lives would become better and freer in the security of our position. In Christ, we are dearly loved children. Write that down, meditate upon it and explore what that means for you and for us as a church.

Understanding this would help us deal with issues of anxiety, self-harm, loneliness. Its truth becomes the foundation of living well. This is a huge idea, that being loved is not dependant on your looks, ability, gender, education, ethnicity, but on the reality that God created you, chose you and gave His Son for you. In that, He demonstrates He is love. God is love, and in revealing Himself, giving us His Son as a sweet sacrifice and giving us a deposit of Himself in the Holy Spirit we experience being dearly loved. Grasping this truth is freeing, and gives us the motivation to be like Him. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). This is an amazing change of direction for us. It is a sweet, fragrant, deeply pleasant reality. We are dearly loved children.

### **II. Live a Life Of Love (v.2)**

The overarching ethic of God and the Christian life is love. So to imitate God we love, having understood how much we are loved. What does this life of love look like? Paul gives us important basics!

- A. **Kindness and compassion towards each other (4:32)**. We are to speak kindly, act with compassion towards the other person. If we find our words or actions heading away from kindness and compassion, we are not living a life of love. We should not be hostile, but helpful.
- B. **Forgiveness (4:32)**. We forgive, we don't hold on to hurts and failings caused by others, we forget and leave them behind. It is loving to forgive, to not hold it against a person, to sort out issues, to not gossip or retell the hurt or issue, to move on. Folks, this is a huge topic again and there is more to be said, but the direction of travel is towards forgiveness. We keep short accounts.
- C. **Selfless (5:2)**: We are "other person"-orientated and not selfish. Our model in this is Jesus and His selfless love. He gave Himself up for us. Such love is sacrificial, giving of our life for the life of another and for God.

Everyone knows these things to be good: they are sweet smelling, good and bring joy and comfort. This is the direction of the life of love. To live it we must know we are loved by God, and have experienced His love in forgiveness, and then share that love. It is a worthy life. Paul insists on it and that it pleases God. We can bring pleasure to God by living such a life of love, and that is a great truth.

*Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children and live a life of love.*

### III. Holiness (v.3-4)

God is love and in love He is holy, separated, different, angry at sin, and the ethic of sexual impurity illustrates that for us. Yet the Bible paints a picture of God's holiness as a thing of beauty. We worship God in the beauty of holiness. So what Paul is doing here is setting up a contrast with love, hence his use of the word "but" (v.3). In doing so, he lists **sexual immorality**. The word in Greek is *pornea*, from which we derive pornography, but encompasses a wide range of sexual sins, backed up by the phrase "any kind of impurity, or of greed", most likely in the sense of sexual lust, where we want something that isn't ours. The focus in v.3 is on our actions regarding sexual sin, and in v.4 he lists **sexual talk, joking and innuendo**, again contrasted with the positive **thankfulness** to God for all the good things He has given us.

Note how strongly these things are to be rejected: "not even a hint, any kind of". These are improper for God's holy people: "nor should there be, out of place"!

Such behaviour and speech are not holy and not loving. They are, in fact, the antithesis of love. Sex without wholehearted promised commitment in marriage is not loving; lust is profoundly selfish, using another for your own pleasure; sexual jokes are the opposite of giving thanks for one of God's most precious gifts. If we are to imitate God and be loving and holy, we will not do such things. We must not, because they are not kind, compassionate, loving or holy. They are not of God and we do not imitate Him if we do them.

I realise this is a big subject and a short paragraph cannot deal with the prevalence, seriousness and difficulty in dealing with sexual sin. It appears to be a struggle we face for the entire duration of our lives, the strength of the temptation doesn't appear to ease with time and has been ratcheted up in our permissive society. Don't allow yourself to succumb to this way of thinking and life. Instead, value the object of your desire. See them as a person

to be loved and use the desire positively to appreciate, communicate, serve and genuinely get to know them within the bounds of God's revealed will.

If that isn't possible (usually because it's an image on a screen or page that you are lusting after), realise this is sinful and doesn't please God. Admit that to yourself and possibly another, repent, turn away, stop, don't! It is not loving and doesn't bring life! Find a friend who will support you in this and keep you accountable. Living a life of love is best.

#### **IV. Incentives to live a life of love (v.5-6)**

**Warnings:** Like any good pastor, Paul frames his teaching positively. He wants us to see the contrast between love and holiness and the unloving and unholy sexual impurity as a positive choice in life. However, he also warns that living in sexual impurity is not the behaviour of a child of God and we will not be able to claim the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Such behaviour consistently lived without repentance means we are not God's child and not entitled to inherit.

It also means that such disobedience will be punished by God; the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Sadly for them it is sure and inevitable. The warnings are severe and definite and are given so we would not miss out on the inheritance of all true children of God - eternal life with God in the new heaven and earth - and that we would not be subject to His settled anger at our disobedience.

#### **V. Do not partner with them (v.7)**

Therefore, we "do not partner with them", not in the sense of association but in participation.

Obedient children, dearly loved, are to live a life of love and be blessed in life, now and forever, in the kingdom of God. Disobedient children will not live a life of love but one contrary to love and will be punished with God's wrath and have no inheritance (part) in the kingdom of God.

The contrast is simple and meant to help us choose life and the Christian life of love as those who have experienced the Love of God.

**Hymn of Reflection:** Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God

**Prayers for Others:** Annie Patton

**Closing Praise:** Magnificent, Marvellous, Matchless Love

#### **Announcements**

**Benediction:** "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God, our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 1:24-25)