

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for October 31: Being pure**

October 13, 2010

In my formative years, I had heroes. In some ways, I still do. In my younger days of playing sports, I worked hard to develop the skills and abilities needed to be as accomplished as my heroes were. I worked hard through diets, practice, weight training and effort. I spent time reading and researching to see what made them what they were. I came to the determination that I was going to copy what they did in order to be as successful as they were. I believed for me to be successful, I had to become like them—I had to imitate them.

In Ephesians 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul challenges us to imitate our Heavenly Father by following his example in Christ. This is done by emulating his attributes in our lives. Our lives should characterize our union with Jesus by following his example. His love should be demonstrated in our attitude and actions by mimicking Christ's love.

This love goes beyond earthly affection to self-sacrificing service. We reflect God's nature when we live in ways that express his love to others. This type of sacrifice is an offering God accepts from us as "fragrant" (v. 2) and acceptable.

In the last of chapter 4, Paul delineates individual attitudes and actions that can keep one from having a vital relationship with other believers and the church as a whole. In 5:3-7, he warns about the collective acceptance and encouragement of actions and attitudes unsuitable for the Christian community.

An enormous problem in the early church among Gentiles was sexual immorality. Paul uses “porneia” to describe all kinds of illicit sexual behavior. In verse 3, he says there should not be “even a hint” of such. If the members of the church tolerated this lifestyle of indulgence and greed, it would be opposite of what God desires from his people.

Verse 4 speaks to one of the most prevalent struggles in the church of today—careless speech. Evidently, the early church had difficulty with it also.

However, today with the exponential increase of electronic conversations, we see how words delivered in impersonal and careless ways destroy lives and testimonies. We read of the abuses of e-mail and social networking where things are written which never would be spoken if the individuals were speaking on the telephone or face to face.

The NASB translates this description in 5:4, “there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which is not fitting.” Paul points out such speech will hurt those who hear or read it, weaken the influence of the one who initiates it and cripple the testimony of the believers who allow it.

Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). What builds churches, testimonies and relationships, Paul tells us, is a spirit of “thanksgiving.”

The immorality, impurity and greed mentioned in 5:3 are compared to idolatry. Pointedly, Paul ties these three together. Whenever Christians allow these desires to control their lives, the desires that lead to immorality, impurity and greed become their idols. Thus, they are idolaters. Therefore, they have no inheritance in the kingdom of God (v. 5).

He then addresses the church in verse 6 that they never should allow someone “with empty words,” to be given places of influence. If this happened, Paul insists, they would allow those in sin a platform to preach

their idolatry leading believers to accept such behavior as proper. Thus, the church becomes a partner in such ungodliness.

Paul is not forbidding contact with unbelievers. He is speaking against condoning the lifestyles of people who make excuses for bad behavior and recommend its practice to others. Jesus has called us to be godly influences that change the world and not the opposite.

In verses 8-14, Paul once again contrasts for his readers' lives before their conversion with their present walk with the Lord. He says they now are "light in the Lord." As such, should "live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord" (vv. 8, 10).

Christians should reflect God's holy nature when we live as people of light. Light reveals God's truth, produces fruit and exposes the true character of sin.

Paul instructs the church to confront sin when exposed in the lives of other believers to insure the purity of the body's testimony, but it is to be done in a humble and loving way. In this way, we reflect God's holy nature when we live in ways that express Christian love for others.

In my adolescence, no matter how hard I tried to become as good an athlete as my hero was, I never was successful because I didn't have the athletic ability to do so. However, as a follower of Jesus, I can become more like him every day by responding to Paul's directive to "be imitators of God." With Christ living in us, we strive to become more pure every day.