

## Ephesians 5:1-33 - "Imitating Christ"- Rev. Amanda A. Nevin

Introduction: Last week we moved in to the practical part of the Book of Ephesians- the- "what we need to do" in light of the message we have received in the first 3 chapters of the book. Paul instructs us to live a life worthy of calling- a life that is point to Christ through our actions. We are called to have humility, gentleness, patience and to bear with one another in love. All of these characteristics are characteristics we are supposed to take on as we grow in faith and in love of Christ. We are called to do this in our individual life and in our corporate life together. In these last 2 chapters Paul explains further how we can live this life worthy of God's calling.

### Read Passage

The game Simon Says is a wonderful game for children because it teaches them how to listen, how to follow instructions, how to learn and how to mimic someone else. The game is simple enough- follow the leader, imitate what they are doing and listen to their commands. Of course after a few Simon Says' we forget to listen and we move when we aren't supposed to. For Paul in order to be living a life worthy of God's calling we need to be actively engaged in the way we live out our faith all the time. To do so we need to be imitating Christ who is our leader, who is the one who has given us the instructions on how we are called to live. As Paul starts off chapter 5 he is commanding us to be imitators of Christ. Just as children imitate their parents to learn good behaviors we to are called to imitate Christ. We imitate God by emulating Christ's lifestyle and attributes in our lives. Through our imitating Christ, through our taking on the characteristics of Christ we are living a counter-cultural life style- one that can be a beacon of light to the world- pointing people who are living in darkness and sin to Christ. Of course imitating Christ isn't easy so Paul give us the do's and don'ts behaviors we should have that help us follow Christ's example.

Paul tells us to be careful about how we live and then gives us a list of things that we are called not to do. Do not be engaged in any impurity, or greed, do not gossip (or share silly and vulgar talk), do not talk with empty words or allow sexual immorality among you. Why?, because these actions are not suitable among the Christian community because instead of building up the community it can tear the community apart. Gossip, vulgar and obscene language are so common in our culture today that we begin to think this is common place and we don't see the problem with our empty words or our gossip. We live in a whining and complaining culture and often along with that comes gossip and as Paul puts it "silly talk." And yet Paul cautions us that this language does tears people down because it does not reflect God's graciousness. We are instead called to focus on the goodness of God and his mercies towards us, to share uplifting and encouraging words to use language of thanksgiving and praise, to encourage one another and not gossip about each other because it helps up the build the kingdom of God not tear it down. Words are powerful and can have a lasting impact on a person's spirit and heart. Giving thanks, focusing on others brings about real joy and hope to a dark world. A pastor friend of mine Chris Erdman wrote "have you ever cleaned out a pumpkin for carving? Clearing the mind of unruly thoughts (vulgar language, gossip, silly talk) is like chasing after the slippery seeds." It is hard to do and yet this is Paul is longing for us to

take on in our lives- get the gunk out of our hearts, and minds and words and instead learn to bring joy and thanksgiving into our language so as to build up the body of Christ.

Paul also says there is no room for greed and sexual immorality in the community of faith because again it breaks down the community as a whole, these are self centered acts that can hurt not only ourselves but others in our community. When we engage in these and other practices we are living in darkness and sin. Paul longs for us to be children of the light, to be people who are engaging in activities that point to Christ. Our lives are supposed to expose the darkness for what it is: a self centered, greedy world that desires power, money, fame, and the self over the other; a world that would put ourselves first while trampling on the weakling. Paul reminds us that by our actions we become God's instruments of grace and mercy and yet if we engage in greedy practices, in silly talk, if we make promises that we aren't willing to keep, if we gossip about friends and family, if we make idol threats to another, if we fail to listen but always focus only on ourselves, if we conduct our lives in an opposite manner of what Christ teaches us in the scriptures then we are living as much in the darkness of the world as those who have never known Christ. Christ longs for us to take care of the widow, the poor, the needy, those without power and voice. We are called to think beyond our own needs and think more globally; for example investing time and energy to provide clean water for all people, being conservative in our own water use and not taking it for granted that we have clean drinking water. We are called to be instruments of peace which can mean doing business with companies that are encouraging grass root farming and education for people in other countries. It means that we are called to pray for our enemies- or those people that we are afraid of, people we disagree with, people we don't like, people we are tempted to gossip about and more. It means that we are called to take the high road in our business practices even when cutting corners would be cheaper and easier. It means that we think of the community as a whole and what is best for all people and not just our own personal needs. Paul warns us to be careful on how we live; be wise about making every opportunity to live in the light of Christ, do not be tempted to follow the evils of this world, but rather learn to take the harder road which is Christ's path for us. Our lives must reflect our motivation and our goal- which should always be to serve our Lord, to share his gospel message and to be ready for God's kingdom work when he calls to go.

How do we learn to do this? I think that Paul uses the image of a marriage to help us understand how we are called to live this life with Christ. In a marriage both husband and wife are called to submit to one another. Paul uses this intimate relationship as a microcosm of the larger picture that is the church. We are all called then to submit first to Christ who is head of the church. And yet for many of us this idea of submission carries with it a lot of baggage but for Paul it is extremely important- submission has to do with relinquishing control or our need to control to another in this case we are called to relinquish control of our lives to Christ then to one another. We are all called to learn mutual submission, meaning we are to put our own personal desires aside at times for the good of the loved one or for the good of the church. We don't like this idea of giving up power and control, we don't like this idea of our way not always being out in front and yet when 2 people whether their married or not, whether it is in a church committee or not are going head to head and neither is willing to listen, to learn and to submit you get no where. Real spiritual leadership involves service and sacrifice and if we aren't willing to at times learn how to submit our own wills and our own desires to Christ then we are

not learning the lesson of service and sacrifice. Christ gave himself up for the church, he surrendered his own heart and desires to God's will. Before Christ went to the cross he cried out to God; "Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me yet not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:39). In a relationship there is a give and take, there are times when we each have to defer to the other, there can not be 2 heads of household all the time; at times we each have to be willing to give up our own desires for what is best for the overall community or family. The same is true for the church, we are all called to engage in our ministry life together and yet there are times when we are called to defer to others leadership, knowledge, wisdom and guidance even if we disagree. Christ gave up his will for the will of God. Christ gave up his life for the life of the church and without his sacrifice and his willingness to go to the cross we would be no where today. We are called to love one another as Christ loved us- that is huge, that means we are called to sacrifice our hearts, lives, mind and soul for Christ and one another. Submitting doesn't mean that we become totally passive and non-participatory; it means rather that we become more willing to obey God's command to love our neighbor and our enemies; it means that we are more willing to submit to others and give up our constant need for control and power and to let Christ be at work in holy and mysterious ways- even if we don't understand them or we disagree with those ways. This is why it is so important for us to be unified in our belief and service of Christ, be unified in our mission, study and prayer lives. If we aren't unified, if we don't have a common goal of service to Christ then it is hard for us to learn how to give up power and control to another because we haven't built a common foundation of trust. In the church, the believers should be willing to learn from, serve, give to, or be corrected by others in the fellowship and yet that takes a lot of trust and a lot of learning to submit our hearts to Christ and to one another. If we gossip, engage in vain and empty words, engage in things that aren't of Christ; if we are selfish and always bulldozing our way to the front and never learning to listen; if all we do is study but never take to heart the lessons are we learning; if we can't pray for our enemies, if we only seek what is good for me/us and never learn to give out a helping hand to those who are powerless, if we fail to take care of the widow, the orphan and the poor then we aren't learning to submit to Christ first and foremost and then to each other. In other words we become a bunch of people running into each other with no goal or vision ahead of us. If we are not learning to submit our hearts and our wills to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, if we are not allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to shape us and mold us into the people God longs for us to be then we are living in darkness, living in sin and following the ways of this world. If however we learn to submit to Christ and to one another, if we learn to give up our selfish pride, if we learn to live out our faith as Christ has taught us then we are children of the light, shining God's light to a broken and hurting world. What will you choose to do? Will you learn to submit to Christ or continue to walk in your pride? Will you learn to take on the characteristics of Christ and be a shining light for all the world or will you continue to walk in darkness?