

"UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT"
PART 11: EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Last time in Chapter 4, we saw that being a Christian is more than just believing the right stuff. Now, just so there is no misunderstanding, we certainly are saved by faith in Christ. And our theology is important. But Paul makes it clear that saving faith leads to a change in a person's life and that change makes us stand out from the rest of the world. In case you have not noticed, the world out there is a little bit different from us Christians. As Paul put it in Chapter 4, we are to "be renewed in the spirit of [our] minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:23-24). Paul makes it clear that, as Christians, how we live our daily lives matters. And as we get into Chapter 5, Paul is going to drive this point home even further.

So, when I was still working for TxDOT (before I retired – this has been years ago), one of my work associates who was a believer, he and I would occasionally talk at work and we would discuss theology and the Bible. He was Church of Christ and I was, as I am now, Baptist. So, he and I would frequently have theological discussions and we did not always see eye to eye. One day, we were discussing the doctrine of eternal security. Being Church of Christ, he did not believe as I did that once a person is saved their salvation is secure. We each felt we were on solid grounds biblically even though we had very differing viewpoints. So, it is OK to disagree and it OK to discuss our differences. And we did. He and I even went to the length over the next couple of days of exchanging our verses that backed up our opinions. He gave me his verses and I gave him mine. At one point as we were talking, he said this: "I know this woman who when she was younger made a profession of faith and became a Christian. Now she sleeps around with every man in town and just lives like the devil. Tell me, do you think she's going to heaven?" Now, a question like that will certainly make you think.

My response, and I do not remember my exact words (it has been years), but it was something along these lines: "I am not God, so I cannot tell you for certain whether that woman who you say made a profession of faith is really saved or not. I believe that if the Holy Spirit truly has taken up residence in her heart, if she really did get saved, then He will convict her whenever she engages in sinful behavior. If that woman is truly saved then, as she comes under conviction of the Holy Spirit, she is going to be miserable as long as she continues in her sinful lifestyle. Based on how I read the Bible, I believe that if that woman continues in her sinful behavior and shows no sign of repentance (as you claim), I have serious doubts as to whether she is truly saved."

So, that was my response. But let's hear what the Apostle Paul has to say about this. This is Ephesians Chapter 5, beginning in v 1...

READ Ephesians 5:1-2

V 1 begins with "Therefore." Whenever you see the word "therefore," it is connecting what the author is about to say with what he said before. Paul actually does this 11 times in the book of Ephesians – "therefore, therefore, therefore...." So, throughout this letter Paul is following a logical, progressive argument. If you read Ephesians, you can see that. "Given this...then this..."

Backing up to what Paul said in Chapter 4, as Christians, as saints, as part of the body of Christ, we are to do something. We are first to put off our old self (we talked about this last time) and then put on the new self. Paul is very specific about what this means. We put off the old things, those characteristics that defined us when we were lost and living like the world (like many of these Ephesian believers had). We no longer act like we did before we were saved. We don't lie. We don't steal. We don't carry around feelings of bitterness. We don't post nasty things on social media. We don't have unforgiving hearts. We're not harboring anger. Even the way we talk has changed. No longer do we have filthy language. No longer do we constantly criticize and tear others down. Instead, we put on, in

other words, we convey brand new attitudes and actions that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives now that we are saved. [Paul gives] some examples of these – things like love, graciousness, forgiveness, kindness, and so forth.

As Chapter 4 closed, Paul emphasized the reason why we Christians are to be loving and forgiving of others. And that reason is the very last phrase in Chapter 4, that is, because “God in Christ forgave you!” (Ephesians 4:32). Because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross, you and I have been forgiven of our sins. And it is for this reason that we should forgive others.

“Therefore,” Paul says, “be imitators of God, as beloved children.” The Greek verb form of the noun translated as “imitators” here means “to mimic.” We are to mimic God. We are to be just like Him. And Paul presents the picture of us as beloved children. Have you ever noticed how kids copy the actions and language of those they are around, especially their parents. If their parents go around cursing and angry, guess what? So will their children. If their parents go to church and practice their Christianity, guess what? Their children are more than likely going to do the same. No guarantees, of course. We are all individuals. But there is a high [probability] that they will turn out OK.

Like little children who mimic their parents, we are to be imitators of our heavenly Father. And here Paul is not simply saying we are like children. He is saying that we ARE HIS children, aren't we? Back in Chapter 1 Paul said, “He [God the Father] predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will” (Ephesians 1:5). So then, we became children of God through an adoption process. God adopted us into His family. God is our Father. We now bear the family name. We have all rights and privileges that go along with that. And as part of God's family, there are certain expectations that go along with that.

So, we are to imitate God and the specific pattern that has been given to us to follow is Who? Jesus Christ. V 2 says, “walk in love, as Christ loved

us and gave Himself up for us.” So, Jesus is our pattern, right? A pretty good pattern I would say.

What does Paul mean in v 2 when he says, “walk”? This term refers to our daily conduct, our lifestyle. We are to be like Jesus in our everyday living. We should reflect Him in our behavior and our attitudes. Do we always do that? No. We are to love like Jesus. We are to show compassion like Jesus did. We are to be forgiving like Jesus forgave. [We are to] pray like Jesus [and] interact with others the way Jesus did. You get the idea. WWJD, what would Jesus do? Remember that? That is an easy concept to understand intellectually. But it is hard to live. And we cannot do it in our own strength and by human effort. Just try doing it on your own and you will fail. That is why God gave us the Holy Spirit, why He indwells us; to help us to live that way. We need His help. And how do we get His help? By submitting every day to the Spirit’s leading. We talked about that earlier in [our study of] Ephesians. If we are going to be able to even come close to living like Jesus, that is what we have to do.

Now, v 2 talks about how Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. That is an obvious reference to His death on the cross. And then Paul adds, “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” This [imagery] harkens back to the Old Testament sacrifices. There were several offerings mentioned in Leviticus that produced “a pleasing aroma to the Lord.” What Paul is saying is that the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross was a fragrant offering and it pleased God completely. What a sacrifice! Paul is reminding his readers how much Jesus loved us, what He willingly went through to pay our sin debt so that we could have a relationship with God. This was all part of God’s plan from the beginning. And Jesus went to the cross. He carried it out. Paul is emphasizing that we are to love like that – [with] a self-less, self-sacrificing, and unconditional kind of love. “Walk in love as Christ loved us!”

As we get into v 3, Paul shifts gears.

READ Ephesians 5:3-6

“But---” he says in v 3. And then in the next few verses Paul contrasts God’s perfect love (that he had just been talking about) with a different kind of love, a worldly love.

Did you all know that Satan is a liar and a deceiver? He is. Did you know that the devil counterfeits the things of God and then tries to pawn them off as being the real thing? Not surprisingly, this is what Satan has done with love. Paul has just got done showing us how God’s love is forgiving, how it seeks not its own, is self-sacrificing and unconditional. Contrast that kind of love, pure love, godly love with the kind of so-called love of the world – what I prefer to call Satan’s “counterfeit love.”

[One class member commented that Satan was the first scammer.]

Look at the things that Paul mentions in v 3. So much of the world’s expression of love (we even say that any kind of sex is “making love,” which is counterfeit love, more lust than it is love) [is centered around self.] The whole idea of the world’s king of love is what’s in this for ME? How does it make ME feel? What can you offer ME? “I’ll love you forever or at least until somebody new and better and more exciting comes along.” That is sort of how the world is. Too often the world’s love is not love at all. They take God’s beautiful design of love between a man and a woman and they twist it into something ugly. What was beautiful becomes perverted.

Just look at the list: sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness (coveting someone who is not your own wife or husband). Paul says these things “must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.” In 1 Corinthians Paul [exhorts] the Corinthian believers not to even associate with people who do such things. Paul tells them, “Flee immorality!” (1 Corinthians 6:18). And Paul tells Timothy to “Flee youthful passions!” (2 Timothy 2:22)

And don’t just avoid doing the things mentioned in v 3, but don’t even talk about them, v 4 says. James Chapter 1 has a lot to say about our speech and directly connects what we say with what we do.

Don't do these things, Paul says. "But instead," end of v 4, "let there be thanksgiving." Now, why does he say that? Do you realize that whenever [we] give thanks to God or to others that it is an unselfish action? Being thankful means that we are content and we are grateful and we are happy and we feel blessed about something. But rather than keep that to ourselves (which we could), we share it with that person that made us feel that way – for their benefit. "What you did, brother or sister, I appreciate. You made a positive impact on my life by doing such and such." They may not even know that. They would not know it unless you told them. So, the focus is on what the other person did or said and we acknowledge that it was a good thing. It was a blessing. And that person would never know it unless we shared it with them. In God's case, He already knows it because He is God. But He just likes to hear us tell Him. He likes to hear the words come from [our lips].

V 5 mentions the same things that are mentioned in v 3. But this time, Paul attaches a warning to them. He does not mince any words here. That is what I love about Paul. He says, "Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure..." By the way, who is Paul talking to in Ephesians? He is talking to believers, right? But he says "everyone." He does not make a distinction. "Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Now, earlier, I concluded about the woman that my coworker used as his example, that she probably was not saved. Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, takes it a step further. He concludes that they are NOT a part of God's kingdom. Those are strong words, aren't they? What you have here is a warning for the saints, for all of us who claim to be Christians. If you are living like this (see the list in v 3), you better examine yourself! You are, as he says in v 6, "the sons [the children] of disobedience." And the result, Paul says, is not good. "Because of these things the wrath of God will come upon you!" This is a warning. It is a wake-up call.

I have good news, however. Here it is: As long as you still have life, as long as there is breath in you, it is not too late. It is not too late to repent

and to get right with God. See the thief on the cross. Praise the Lord! But in order to repent, you have to first acknowledge your sin. You cannot make excuses for it. You acknowledge it as sin and then you can repent of it.

Now, there is one last comment about v 6... Paul says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words." There are a lot of false teachings out there. They sound really good. Part of me wants to believe that they are true, but the problem is they are not scriptural. "God loves everyone. He would never send a person to a place like hell. He is a loving God. Hell does not really exist. Come on! God would not do that." You have heard that before, haven't you? "Everyone goes to heaven," they will say. By the way, every funeral I have ever been to, every person [who had died, they apparently] went to heaven. I'm just saying. [The officiant always assured us that old so-and-so was "in a better place."]

But Paul is saying something quite different here in these verses, isn't he? So, as Christians, who are we? We're "beloved children." We are "saints." We have been called to holy living. And that takes us to v 7.

READ Ephesians 5:7-11

[My wife mentioned a situation that happened in the singles class at a church we had attended 20-plus years ago. A man and a woman in that class were living in the same apartment together. This caused a stir in the singles class because everyone knew about it. As the teacher at the time, I prayed about what to say and then I went and had a talk with the man about it. I told him I wasn't accusing him of anything but that what he was doing did not look good. He received my admonition well and soon moved out of the apartment. A few years later he married another woman. The point is that sometimes we need to confront people and have the hard conversations.]

"Therefore," given all that he just said in those previous verses, Paul's admonition is, "do not become partners with them." With who? With the people who practice those things he was talking about.

Paul says, "That's not who we are. Not anymore." V 8 says, "For at one time you WERE darkness, but NOW you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." Here Paul is actually using Jesus's language. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Later, in John Chapter 12, Jesus referred to believers as "the sons of light." This is language borrowed from Jesus.

Now, you are going to notice in v 9 there is in parentheses. Paul is clarifying what he means when he says that we are light. What does that mean (because light can mean a lot of different things)? "For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." In other words, Paul says, the characteristics of light (as children of light) are doing what "is good and right and true." That is a reflection of our behavior. "Good" is exhibiting moral excellence or virtue. "Right" means righteous behavior or holiness. We are called many times in the New Testament to holiness. "True" leads to being honest and having integrity.

So, how do we know what is good and right and true? From God's word. That is why we study it. As the saints of God we are to live as God has told us to live in the Bible, in places like Ephesians.

In v 10 Paul says, "try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." John MacArthur says something interesting about this phrase. He says that "this carries the idea of testing or proving to learn by clear and convincing evidence what is truly honoring to God." That is why I like the way the KJV of this verse says, "proving what is acceptable unto the Lord." That is the idea. It is not enough just to know what is good or right or true. That is important. Knowledge is important. But we must live these things out in our lives. Exhibit those things. Prove them to be true. I heard it this way some years ago... "If being a Christian was suddenly outlawed, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

V 11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness..." Don't even get involved with them. Those things should not be a part of your life, Paul says, "... but instead expose them." This gets back to the story my wife told earlier. Knowing what God's word says, based on THAT, the fact that as Christians we are not to compromise with the ways of the world, we need to call sin what it is – it is sin. The Bible says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right" (2 Timothy 3:16 NLT). This goes along with our pastor's message about the [warning] lights on the dashboard. They are there for a reason. Check them out! Figure out what is going on.

Here is the thing – we start with our own sins first. That is where we have to start. And we deal with those. And then and only then, after we have dealt with that and got right with God, can we go to others and expose their sin. And be careful when you do that. When you start exposing the sin of other people, you are not going to make very many friends. You are not going to be their best buddy. They might not even like you anymore. Pray about it first and let the Holy Spirit direct you accordingly. That is what you have to do. That is just a word of warning. When you do start exposing the sin in others, be careful. And do it with the right attitude.

READ Ephesians 5:12-14

[V 12 says that] "it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret." Unfortunately, in our society every form of sin has come out of the closet. That is the world we live in. We see it all on full display proudly. They even have flags. Our senses have become dulled to sin, right? And how? By Hollywood, the internet and social media. They make it sound like all of that is normal, nothing wrong with it. As Christians, we should be embarrassed, ashamed and even angry about sin wherever we see it – on the television screen, in the news, in the movies, on our computer, or in real life. Remember, we are to live by God's holy standards. Those standards do not change. They do not change with the

shifting paradigms of our current culture. You wait five years. What is not acceptable now will be acceptable then. Things change all the time. But God's word is consistent. So, this [the Bible] is our standard. Follow it.

The last two verses. Let's wrap this up. "But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." The light of God's word exposes sin for what it is. That is why people do not like the Bible. They do not want to be told what they are doing is wrong. Then Paul makes a statement and he bases it on Isaiah 60:1. It is not a direct quote. Paul is taking the words of Isaiah 700 years before and applying them to Jesus in his day. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Isaiah was looking forward to a time when the Messiah would come and bring salvation to the nation. Paul sees Jesus as the fulfillment of this, not just for the nation, but for ALL sinners. Jesus is that One who brings salvation to everyone who will repent and call on Him.

So, v 14 is an open invitation. The "sleeper" here refers to a sinner, whether you are saved or not. It is an invitation to repent. [We] Christians need to repent, don't we? Not to be saved, but we need to repent of our sin. Christ is our Savior. If He is our Savior, He is our Lord. Paul's message to all sinners, lost or saved, is simply this: "Wake up. It's not too late. "Come to Jesus!" Or in some cases, "Come back to Jesus." I had to do that in my own life. I drifted away and I had to come back. "Let His light shine on you and change you," Paul says.

I want to close the lesson out with Jesus's words and this is from John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Saved by grace through faith. Praise God for that! But clearly, our behavior matters to our Lord.