

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change
“Pursuing Holiness”
(Ephesians 5:1-6)
July 18, 2010
by Kevin Haah



I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City! My name is Kevin Haah, one of the pastors here.

We've been studying through Ephesians. We are in a middle of a series called Gospel Driven Change.

Let's read Ephesians 5:1-6:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Last week we talked about God's agape love. Agape means unconditional self-sacrificial love. We talked about the reality that God not only agapes, but he is Agape. He is unconditional self-sacrificial love. He can't help but to love you and me. It's who He is. It doesn't matter what we do or don't do. His love for us is constant. You can't earn his love, because he is love, and you can't lose his love, because he is love. When we fully receive his love, when we get life from his love, we can stop being the black hole that tries to suck life out of everything around us, but become a supernova where we are exploding light and life.

I would like to think and talk about nothing but the beauty of his love and how we can mimic that love, how that love will free us.

But, there is a but. Paul goes on to a BUT.

It's like a bucket of cold water thrown at us in the middle of a great worship experience. It's like coming down from the mountain top experience to face the reality of life. At one time Jesus took 3 of his closest disciples up to the mountain top, and they had the most amazing experience. They saw Jesus talking to Moses and Elija. They loved the experience so much, they didn't want to come down. But, Jesus took them down. And the first thing they faced was a boy who was possessed by evil spirit. They faced the reality of real life. They had more to learn.

In the same way, verses 1-2 are like the mountain top. What is more awesome than God's love? Yet, Paul goes on. I've meditated on this passage for some time, and I've come to the conclusion that this passage is huge. This passage is so important to a biblical understanding of the gospel. (that's one of the reasons I love teaching through the book. We can't skip passages that make us feel uncomfortable. It makes us see the whole word of God, not just the words that we like and agree with).

Let's see what this passage teaches us. It teaches us (1) the importance of pursuing holiness; (2) some key ingredients of holiness; and (3) the power to pursue this holiness.

II. It teaches us about the importance of pursuing holiness.

Sometimes, when you look at all the churches out there, you can divide them into: churches that focus on verses 1-2 and churches that focus on 3-6. Generally, many liberal churches focus on verses 1-2, talking about God's love, how he loves everyone, and how loving everyone is the focus on Christianity. They also talk about grace. It's beautiful. They teach people to tolerate one another, not to judge anyone, and accept everyone and respect everyone. They become relativistic about right and wrong. "Everyone should determine what is right and wrong for themselves." What's wrong with that? Well, it is not all that Jesus taught. It is not all that his apostles taught. It is an incomplete gospel. Paul warns of that here. He talks about the importance of living a moral life.

But, there are also churches that focus on living a moral life, on sexual ethics, purities, greed, and obscenity—churches that focus on righteous living. "Look what it says here: these immoral people will not inherit the kingdom of God. So, we better shape

up.” But the problem is that we relegate love of God and grace of God as something we have to earn. We better shape up if we want God to bless us and accept us. We see God as holy but not as love. We see the justice of God but we don’t see his grace. If we just focus on moral living, we will end up either creating a lot of rules (very tangible rules) to figure out whether we deserve God’s blessings or not and if we lived up to it, we feel somewhat superior and deserving (and we get angry at God if he does not bless us the way we feel that we deserve) or we will end up in despair because we know we fell short of God’s rules, or we just fake it and become a hypocrite.

Neither the grace approach nor the moral approach is the whole gospel. The whole gospel is both/and. It is both God of agape love and God of holiness and justice. That’s what Paul is getting at in today’s passage. Yes, God is love; BUT, he says: BUT. There shouldn’t be sexual immorality, greed and impurity. We should be pursuing holiness. How important is it?

He says, “no immoral, impure or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God.” He accentuates this by saying emphasizing that this is sure. And he says again, let no one deceive you. How do we reconcile this with what he has been saying—that we have been saved by God’s grace and not our works?

It does not mean that if you sin in your life, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God (accepted by God). If that is the case, what he has been saying is completely irreconcilable. No one will be able to inherit. It means that God’s love has entered your heart, and if you have received that love and grace, and understand it, you have entered into a process of transformation. God is starting to change you. You can’t help but to be changed. However, if you do not demonstrate change in your life, if there is no fruit, if there is no evidence of the process of God’s work in your life, if nothing changed, then you don’t really believe in what God has done for you. That’s what he is saying. Your faith if it is without work is dead. You don’t have to have it all together, but Jesus in your life must bear fruit. That’s what the Scripture tells us: the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. If you don’t demonstrate fruit, you don’t have the tree! You just theoretically have the tree. You just hang around the tree. You don’t have it.

That’s why James says in James 2:14-19:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You see, real faith results in works. You are not saved by works, you are saved by faith; but saving faith always results in transformation of your heart and changes your life and results in works, results in purity, results in demonstration of grace to others.

Believing that God existing is not the saving faith; he says even the demons believe that and shudder. They probably even believe that God is love, but they have not received God’s love into their lives because when we do so, the Spirit of God changes us and bears fruit.

Paul has been explaining Christianity from the beginning—God’s love and grace and how that changes our lives. Now, he wants to tell it to us from the end. If there is no transformation happening in your life, you are just a grace abuser, and are not saved.

Another way to see this is that the goal of Christian life is holiness and love because God is holy and God is love. If we are not moving towards this direction, you are just abusing God’s grace.

As I was studying this passage, I was slayed by the Holy Spirit. He convicted that grace without discipleship is not Christianity. You can’t accept God’s grace by faith in your life without committing to follow him and putting yourself in the process of discipleship. You can’t just be a Sunday Christian and be a Christian. You can’t just be lukewarm Christian and be a Christian. You can’t just say, I’ll be a moderate Christian and be a Christian. You can’t be a normal Christian and let others be fully committed Christians. These are all forms of grace-abuse. The only way to be a Christian is to realize God’s love for us, and fully submit our lives to God, go 100% for God, and begin to run towards sanctification, to holiness and love and grace. We might fall. We might fall many times, but we need to make progress. You can’t just say, God is going to forgive me and continue your life of sin. The bible says that is a deception of the devil. Isn’t that what it says here?

III. What is the motivation to be holy?

Paul says because it is out of place and improper for God's holy people. Again, the motivation is not so that we will become accepted by God; he says, we are God's holy people and it is improper for us to act in that way. So, again, he shows us that our action is driven by our gospel identity. We are accepted first by God's grace; that bring us a new identity; and we live by that new identity. And that identity is that we are God's holy people. God seeks to make us holy.

The passage about not inheriting the kingdom of God is not, even if you are a Christian, if you don't do this, you will not make it to heaven. That's not the logic. It is if you don't show any fruits, if you separate your faith from following Jesus, it shows that you are not a believer.

Our motivation is not to earn our salvation. That's already done. Our motivation comes from the gospel. It comes from his love, which leads to a new identity, and a new life in Christ.