

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes February 27, 2008

Ephesians 5:1-20 (Part 1)

- 1: Therefore
 be imitators of God, as beloved children.
- 2: And walk in love,
 as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
 a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
- 3: But fornication and all impurity or covetousness
 must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints.
- 4: Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting;
 but instead let there be thanksgiving.
- 5: Be sure of this,
 that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater),
 has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
- 6: Let no one deceive you with empty words,
 for it is because of these things
 that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
- 7: Therefore do not associate with them,
- 8: for once you were darkness,
 but now you are light in the Lord;
 walk as children of light
- 9: (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),
- 10: and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
- 11: Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,
 but instead expose them.
- 12: For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret;
- 13: but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible,
 for anything that becomes visible is light.
- 14: Therefore it is said,
 "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
 and Christ shall give you light."
- 15: Look carefully then how you walk,
 not as unwise men but as wise,
- 16: making the most of the time, because the days are evil.
- 17: Therefore do not be foolish,
 but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- 18: And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery;
 but be filled with the Spirit,
- 19: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart,
- 20: always and for everything giving thanks
 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Introduction: Very often the problem we face when it comes to living our lives the way we know we ought is not that we lack the knowledge of what is good and right and true, what we ought to do or not do. Rather we lack the will to follow our convictions. St. Paul once wrote, in his letter to the Romans, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” Sometimes, however, it’s also a problem of a poorly formed conscience. This is part of what we’ll be discussing today on **Deep in Scripture**.

House cleaning items...

- Website, book special: “**Hidden Power of Kindness**,” by Fr. Lawrance Lavasik
- We want your input!!! Phone: 740-450-1175
Email: marcus@deepinscripture.com
Forum: <http://www.chnetwork.org/forums/forum51>

REVIEW:

- **Today on Deep in Scripture we’re going to begin discussing Ephesians 5:1-20.**
 - In the first three chapters, St. Paul describes the changes that take place in our lives once we have heard, believed, and then were sealed with the Holy Spirit, or baptized. Our relationship with God, with other baptized believers, and with ourselves is changed by grace.
 - As St. Paul wrote in chapter 2, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”***
 - In the grace of baptism, we were saved from our old nature tainted by the guilt of original sin as well as any bad habits, desires, and tendencies we learned and practiced in our old life;
 - We were saved, not because of anything you or I did while we living in that old nature, but rather because God loved us, and by grace opened our minds & hearts to hear His truth.
 - But when we responded by believing and then submitting ourselves to the sacrament of baptism (adult baptism), this required an act of our will, aided by grace. We were saved by grace through faith, but God forces no one to believe, to submit, to obey Him. He gives us the grace to freely respond—and He does this through the Church and her sacraments
 - But our wills are impeded by **concupiscence**. One definition of **Concupiscence** is that it is “the spontaneous movement of our sensual appetite toward what we imagine as pleasant and away from what we imagine as painful.” I.e., We are drawn to chose to do what we believe is good and to avoid what we believe is bad, and therefore, this brings us to the issue of **formation of conscience**, in which our intellect (mind / heart) is shaped in what it believes to be good and right and true.
 - At the core of our **conscience**, in the nature of every human being, is the rule which God has prescribed for our conduct. In the very constitution of our nature, we have a law laid down for us, reflecting the eternal law of God.
 - Those actions which conform with the tendencies of this law, lead to our destined end, and are thereby constituted right and morally good; those actions at variance with our nature are wrong and immoral.
 - Upon being baptized, the guilt of original sin is wiped away by grace, we are born again/ anew, and we are given the grace to carry out God’s expectations for our lives, which are summarized in the Great Commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.”
 - But upon being baptized, concupiscence remains and our conscience needs to be correctly formed. Any bad habits, desires, or tendencies we brought with us to the baptismal font still remain; we need to chose to learn what is good and right and true and then live our lives accordingly.
 - This is essentially what the second half of Ephesians is all about.
 - St. Paul summarizes this in verses 22-24,

22: Put off your old nature
 which belongs to your former manner of life
 and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,
 23: and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
 24: and put on the new nature,
 created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

▪ **St. Paul, knows from experience that baptized believers do not always act like baptized believers:**

- Even though our relationships with God, with other baptized believers, and with our very selves has been changed by grace, yet we do not honor these relationships in the way we are supposed to: we still sin; we still fail.
- Therefore, in order to correct and then form their consciences, St. Paul, in chapters 4-6, gave the newly baptized Gentile (pagan) believers rules to live by, especially in their relationships within the Body of Christ.

- Note what he said in 1 Timothy 3:14-15:

*"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, **you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.**"*

- He in no way implies that everything a baptized believer needs to know is contained in this letter or in a collection of his letters; 1 Timothy did NOT contain most of the things he wrote to the Ephesians!
- Rather in his letters, he dealt with immediate concerns, leaving the fullness of his teaching until he was with them in person

▪ **In 4:25-5:2, St. Paul gave some "Rules" for dealing with conflict within the Body:**

1. Keep it HONEST! (4:25)
2. Keep it IN CONTROL! (4:26a, 31a)
3. Keep it FRESH! (4:26b)
4. Keep it CENTERED ON FORGIVENESS! (4:28, 32b)
5. Keep it POSITIVE! (4:29, 32a)
6. Keep it PRIVATE! (4:31b)
7. Keep it CLEANED UP! (5:1-2)

▪ **In Verses 5:1-20, St. Paul turns his attention to another crucial aspect of getting along: what does it mean to love one another.**

- In verses 1-2, when he makes the transition in his focus, he gives standards by which the newly baptized are to model their lives:

***"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children.
 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."***

- As new born-again children of God, we are to imitate God our Father and love one another as Christ loved us;
- But it is almost as if as soon as the words "walk in love" came out of St. Paul's mouth, he knew there was a problem for these newly baptized pagan converts:
 - And this is also why I believe these verses pose a particular problem for us today.
- There really is nothing in these verses about living in love that we don't already know:
 - Most of us recognize in our gut (conscience) that what St. Paul says here is obviously true;
 - And for a large number of us, our upbringing / our religious formation taught us all these things;
 - And so, to some extent, none of us can hear these verses in the same way the first

hearers did back in Ephesus 2000 years ago, because our culture is so radically different;

- Yet this doesn't mean we don't need to hear these verses today, because in many ways our modern culture is worse—a more devastating environment for the formation of our consciences.

▪ **Why was it particularly difficult for the first hearers?**

- They came from a pagan culture of temple prostitutes & promiscuity; there were no standards at all; sexual immorality was not a “sin.” Even though they had within them the law of God, through generations of pagan culture, their consciences had been misformed to have a different standard for what is good, right, & true.
- **So, when they heard “walk in love”:**
 - 1st, their natural cultural background would have tempted them away from God;
 - 2nd: they may have been puzzled by the word for love used here, “agape”
 - A very uncommon term, adopted by Christians:
 - *Eros, phileo, & storge* were more familiar, but *agape*?
 - This was used specifically to describe the self-given sacrificial love of God; the love of Christ we were then to imitate.
- **But what about today?**
 - We basically use one word, “love,” as a catch all for every imaginable form of affection, from loving chocolate & our car to loving our spouse to loving God.
 - Today, “love” has become so convoluted and redefined that our culture approves, even sanctions, lifestyles and ways of “loving” that up until fifty years ago would have been considered unconceivable.
 - In fact, today in England, to teach what these verses have always meant would be declared an unlawful act of intolerance and might lead to jail time.
 - We need to HEAR these verses all over again, correct our consciences regardless of what our present culture believes, pass this on to our children, and then live this out, regardless of the consequences.

▪ **So what does it mean to “walk” in this agape love in our human relationships?**

- Or as he states in verse 3, “**as is fitting among saints**”?
 - “**Saints**” here does not mean what the term eventually came to mean, as a technical term for those faithful deceased believers whom the Church confidently believes are now in the presence of God in heaven: i.e., the Saints.
 - **Rather, St. Paul means baptized believers:** We are to walk in the kind of agape love that is fitting to how God expects baptized believers to love one another.
 - I’m reminded of the **toy where one tries to fit pegs into holes**: round into round, square into square; but sometimes we try to put square pegs into round holes; hard to do; but for some baptized believers with poorly formed consciences—then and now—trying to live and love “as is fitting for saints” is like putting square pegs in a round holes.

▪ **So what kind of love is fitting for baptized believers?**

(1) **Walking in Agape love means wholesome / pure Intimacy: (5:3)**

***“But fornication and all impurity or covetousness
must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints.”***

- Behind this we hear the teaching of Jesus: Matthew 5:27-28,
“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
 - Not just the acts but our inner attitudes / lusts.

- **“fornication”** = Grk word, *“porneia”* = prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.
 - “unlawful” is the key here; i.e., to what authority do we form our consciences?
 - Their pagan background: no concept of sin; not comparable to laws of God.
 - **Today: Who decides what is lawful / proper / holy?**
 - Is this an individual freedom?
 - Our Supreme Court?
 - The majority opinion of our culture?
 - Our individual interpretation of Scripture?
 - The preferences of whatever church we belong to?
 - Or was he referring to the Church which Jesus established in his Apostles, that had the authority, as demonstrated in Acts 15, to set standards for living, guided by the Holy Spirit?
 - In order to form our consciences, the Church has established rules for sexual behavior, based on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and we have these readily available to us through the Catechism which is a summary of the official statements of the Church, expressed in councils, papal encyclicals, etc.
- But some might say, “Wait a second here! St. Paul says this kind of immorality ‘must not even be named among you,’ and yet the history of the Church is full of the reports of scandals of sexual immorality amongst Catholic clergy as well as laity.”
 - And all we can say is that this confirms the issue being addressed here by St. Paul: baptism doesn’t automatically make us holy; it gives us a new start and the graces to live out the new life: but our consciences must be reformed in obedience to Christ’s Church and we must live accordingly.
- St. Peter wrote in his first letter, 3:15,

*“... but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and **keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.**”*

 - Here we are called to give witness to our faith, but not just with our words, with our actions; our witness can be destroyed by an immoral life, so we must live by these words given by St. Paul.

(2) Walking in Agape love means wholesome / pure Language: (5:4)

“Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving.”

(3) Walking in Agape love means wholesome / pure company: (5:6-7)

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them;”

But why must we live this way? What difference does it make?!

(4) Because these are contrary to the will of God for our lives: (5:5)

“Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

(5) Because these are contrary to our new natures: (5:8a)

“...for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord...”

These are the negatives, what are we to do positively?

- **Walk in the light (5:8b)**
“...walk as children of light

- **What does this mean?**
 - (1) **Our lives ought to exude virtues: (5:9)**
“(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)”

 - (2) **We ought to seek to please God (5:10)**
“and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”

 - (3) **We need to say No! (5:11a)**
“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness...”

 - (4) **We need to take a stand against immorality (5:11b-13)**
*“but instead expose them.
For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret;
but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible,
for anything that becomes visible is light.”*

Conclusion: Truly live by the new life / new birth of their baptism! (5:14)

*“Therefore it is said,
‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light.’”*