

March 5, 2008
The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Ephesians 5:1 – 20
Quotes from the Fathers

Ephesians 5:1

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

You are called to imitate God, to become like God, This can happen when you are reconciled with him. . . . Paul then adds another splendid incentive: You are to act *as beloved children*. He is saying, in effect; “You have another reason for imitating him, not only to receive good but also to be fittingly called his own children.” . . . Not all children imitate their father, but those who know themselves to be beloved act like *beloved children*. (Homily on Ephesians 17.4.32-5.2)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

When he wrote to the Corinthians, indeed, he said, “be imitators of me” (1 Corinthians 11:1) . . . for though they could not instantaneously become imitators of Christ, it was still a great thing for them if they could be imitators of the imitator. But to the Ephesians, since they are those to whom he has revealed such great mysteries, he neither says “be imitators of me” nor “be imitators of Christ” but *be imitators of God*. This does not imply that it is less to be an imitator of Christ than of God, for Christ is God. . . . Admittedly much that God has done we humans can hardly be said to imitate. But in the way that he is merciful to all and rains on good and bad, so we may pour out mercy upon all we meet. When we do this, we shall be beloved children. We shall be imitating either Paul or, as I rather think, God himself. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.1)

Ephesians 5:2a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

See how love is the foundation of everything. Where love is present there is no anger, no passion, no railing, no blasphemy. All this is put away. Now he states his chief point; How have you become a child? Because you have been reconciled. On the same basis on which you have received so great a privilege, offer this same gift to others. . . . And as the Lord has loved you, so you love your neighbor. Even if you are not able to do that completely, you must do it according to your ability. (Homily on Ephesians 17.4.32 - 5.2)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Who is it that truly walks in love? The one who, for the salvation of others, contends against sin to the point of shedding blood, so as even to give up his soul for them. That is the one who “walks in love,” imitating Christ. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.2)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

Here too he reveals the equality of the Father and the Son. For having called them to be imitators of God, he then urges the same pattern with respect to the Son. The Father has bestowed forgiveness. The Son has loved us and gave up his life for us. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.2)

Ephesians 5:2b

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

As Father and Son are of one substance, so too they are one in will. . . . The Son offered himself to the Father that through this mystery of his sacrifice all things might be made new by his Spirit. In this way he himself is the aroma of sweetness. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.2)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

You spare your friends. He spared his enemies. . . . He suffered on his enemies' behalf. This is the fragrant offering, the acceptable sacrifice. If you suffer for your enemies as a fragrant offering, you too become an acceptable sacrifice, even if you die. This is what it means to imitate God. (Homily on Ephesians 17.4.32 - 5.2)

Ephesians 5:3a

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

Fornication in the strict sense is consorting with prostitutes. "Impurity" is the generic name, in the maelstrom of our bodily existence, not only for adultery and pederasty but also all the other inventions of sexual licentiousness in all their many and diverse practices. "Greed" can be taken either straightforwardly or, as I have established (with regard to 1 Thessalonians 4:4-6), in the sense of "adultery". (Epistle to the Ephesians)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

What a grave sin is covetousness, though we gloss over it when compared with fornication and uncleanness. We treat covetousness as a minor fault when in fact it is a grave matter. No one can be a saint in whom is found any of these things that he forbids. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.3)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

He has already spoken of the bitterest affection, which is wrath. Next he passes on to lust, which comes after wrath, as we see in the law of Moses, who first says, "You shall not murder," which springs from wrath, and then, "You shall not commit adultery," which springs from lust. For just as bitterness, clamor and every evil, including blasphemy and the like, belong to the anger prone, passionate nature, so do fornication, impurity and covetousness belong to the lust prone, appetitive nature. Just as he earlier prohibited clamorous disorder because it is a vehicle of anger, so he now prohibits filthy and loose talk, because it is a vehicle of lust. (Homily on Ephesians 17.5.3)

Ephesians 5:3b

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

The name, the mind and the conscience of the saints demand that the tongue itself should be an agent of holiness. If a person who is holy in his ways speaks unnecessarily of abominable behaviors, he may harbor sin. Even speaking of them may show how well acquainted he is with vices better left unspoken. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.3)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Even one who is in fact free of fornication is not holy if he remains mentally preoccupied with some uncleanness or with the avaricious pursuit of the pleasures that have once delighted him. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.3 - 4)

Ephesians 5:4a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Let there be no obscenities, either in word or deed, that might quench the flame of the spirit. For words often lead the way to actions. Then, in order that it may not appear that he is a spoilsport or too austere, Paul gently shows that he is not an opponent of playfulness. For he qualifies this instruction by explaining its reason: You are not to indulge in that form of silly talk that is not befitting to this community. Better to offer thanksgiving than to spew out such talk. What good is it if you make an unbecoming witticism? All you have done is raise a laugh. Tell me, does the shoemaker use any instrument that does not befit his trade? Would he purchase a tool that does not contribute to his craft? Of course not. Similarly, that which is of no use to our purpose is nothing to us. . . . Inordinate levity may easily open the door to blasphemy, and the blasphemer heaps up countless other evils for himself. (Homily on Ephesians 17.5.4)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

The “silly talk” to which Paul refers occurs not only among those who tell dirty jokes to get a cheap laugh. He is also referring to those who put on frivolous airs and to those who manipulate whoever they are trying to please. There is another kind of silly talk that occurs among those reckoned to be the intellectuals of the age who, when disputing on matters of natural science, imagine that they have fully comprehended the sands of the shore, the drops of ocean, the extent of heavens and the minuteness of earth. . . . Note that levity follows silly talk. The intent here is to speak of frivolous and inappropriate stories. The difference between silliness and levity is this: silliness has nothing in it that is wise or worthy of the human heart. Levity devolves from a clever mind and deliberately seeks out certain words, be they witty, vulgar, obscene or facetious, in a jocularly the sole aim of which is to get a laugh. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.3 - 4)

Ephesians 5:4b**Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):**

Having said what should be the case, he adds what must above all be the case, which is this, that we should give thanks - to God, without doubt, but also to other people. Hence he uses the term thanksgiving without qualification. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.4)

Ephesians 5:5**Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):**

Since he has listed three sins first, then added another three, his instruction requires him to explain that the first three are more serious, seeing that he has said that these first three (that is; fornication, sexual impurity and covetousness) are not even to be named among the saints. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.5)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Are those merely guilty of silliness and inordinate levity to be kept out of the kingdom of God? Are they excluded on the same basis as those sins that he has marked off specially (that is fornication and sexual impurity)? It would seem a cruel sentence not to pardon the weakness of human frailty, so that our words condemned us even when said in jest. . . . Yet in making this distinction [between lesser and more serious sins] we are not making excuses for silliness and levity. They do not exclude from the kingdom. But they are not negligible and remind us that just as “the Father has many mansions” (John 14:2) and “one star differs from another in glory” (1 Corinthians 15:41), so too will it be in the resurrection of the dead. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.5)

Ephesians 5:5b

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

To teach us that covetousness is such a dangerous thing he calls it “idolatry”, no sin being greater than this. But why is Covetousness called idolatry? Idolatry usurps the honor of God and claims it for the creature. The holy name of God, which belongs solely to the Creator, is thereby applied to creatures. Covetousness is viewed on a level with idolatry because the covetous person similarly usurps for himself what belong to God and hides them away. Covetousness withholds the resources offered by God for the common use of all. It hoards them to itself so that others may not use them. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.5.1)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

Paul also makes this point in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:10-11). He speaks of Covetousness as idolatry, reminding us of the Lord's saying, “No one can serve two masters” and you cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:10-11). (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.5)

Ephesians 5:6a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

There are always people among us who want to diminish the force of words. When Paul clearly says that covetousness is idolatry, they immediately argue that this is an exaggerated saying and in this way compromise all the commandments. It is to these that the blessed Paul is alluding when he writes to the Ephesians, “Be sure of this, that no one who is covetous, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom.” “Empty words” are words that are for a moment attractive but in no way are proved by deeds. They become a flimsy deceit. (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.5 - 6)

Ephesians 5:6b

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

These people he calls “children of disobedience,” for there are many who make light of the promise of a heavenly kingdom. . . . They disbelieve; they have no faith. The wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. Disobedience is epitomized by the devil they serve. Therefore they are said to be his children. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.6)

Ephesians 5:7-8a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Note the balanced way in which he exhorts them. First he approaches them from the viewpoint of Christ, saying “love one another and do no wrong to anyone.” Then he approaches them from the viewpoint of their punishment and Gehenna. . . reminding them of their previous wickedness, as if to say “remember what you were and what you have become.” (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.7 – 8)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

“Once you were darkness” suggests ignorance. No one sees clearly in shadows. The ignorance referred to is disbelief, harking back to pagan days. Those who lived in darkness have been drawn to faith by the grace of God, which has been brought to light, that is, truth. Things that

exist are made apparent in the light. Paganism remains deluded as with covered eyes they celebrate their own mysteries as if in the shadows of a cave. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.8)

Ephesians 5:8b

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

The darkness is being turned into light. There is not, as some heretics argue, a nature so alienated that it cannot receive salvation. . . . Those who receive salvation - the righteous – are “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). Those who refuse, the unrighteous, are in consequence called “darkness”. . . . The difference and distance between one and the other is clearly seen by their own fruits. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.8)

Ephesians 5:9

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

Where there is goodness there is righteousness. Where there is truth there you will find righteousness. For both goodness and truth belong to God alone. So righteousness is always found with him and no other. (Epistle to the Ephesians)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

When Paul says “in all goodness” he is directing this against those who are wrathful and bitter when he says “and in all that is right” he is speaking against covetousness. When he says and in all that is true he speaks against false pleasure. The fruit of the light is evidenced not in the vices he has already spoken of but in their opposites. (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.9 – 10)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Christ himself is rightly called goodness, righteousness and truth. He is goodness in that he gives grace to those who believe in him, not according to their works but according to his mercy. He is himself righteousness in that he gives to each what he deserves. He is himself truth in that he is the one who knows the causes of all creatures and all things. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.9)

Ephesians 5:10

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

From the abundance of his holiness and goodness it is possible to know what works delight God. . . . In his holiness we are purified. In his mercy we are brought to full and perfect righteousness. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.10)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

You share in the Word. You have received the grace of the Holy Spirit. Now you are made able to discern what is pleasing to God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.10)

Ephesians 5:11

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

He has said, “you are light.” Light exposes what takes place in darkness. Insofar as you are light your goodness shines forth. The wicked are not able to hide. Their actions are illuminated as though a lamp were at hand. (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.11 – 13)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Paul uses the term “fruits” in the case of the Spirit, “works” in the case of the sin nature (Galatians 5:19). . . . In the present case he indeed is saying that the works of darkness are unfruitful. Those who do these works share an association with darkness.

No one is prepared to admonish sinners except one who does not deserve to be called a hypocrite (as with the account in Luke 6:42). . . . Only those prophets who were themselves unpolluted by any stain of sin were in a position to upbraid others for their wrongdoing. From this we learn that the one who is in the best position to reprimand is the one who cannot himself rightly be reprimanded in turn. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.11)

Ephesians 5:12

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

It is shameful even to speak of these things in secret, it is fairly plain that these people were doing wicked things, things too depraved even to talk about. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.12)

Ephesians 5:13

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Having instructed them also to counsel all those who are doing ill, he next shows what a great service this is. For admonition makes those sins manifest. It puts them in the light. For the one who admonishes shows how important is the behavior he illumines. In doing this he is in effect illuminating the evil to show its consequences. When the one who commits evil under stands this, the shadows are dispelled, and he enters the light. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.5.12)

Ephesians 5:14

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

The one who is content with a simple answer will say indeed that Paul must have read this phrase in some arcane prophet or in the writings called apocryphal. He then brought the text into the open, as he manifestly does in other places - not to substantiate the apocryphal texts but in the same way that he makes use of verses elsewhere from Aratus, Epimenides and Menander to substantiate what he says on other occasions. . . . Someone less content with this simple answer might argue that the apostle said this as an exhortation to penitence. It is as if he were assuming the voice of the Holy Spirit. For my part, scanty as my knowledge is, I have nowhere found this written after diligently scouring all the editions of the ancient Scriptures and the texts of the Hebrews themselves. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.14)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

By “sleep” he signifies a stupor of the mind. The sleepers are lost from the true path. This estrangement is a kind of death, from which he calls them to rise that they may repent and acknowledge the truth, which is Christ. Thus the faithless and vicious, steeped as they are in mud without hope of life, are called to rise and come out and have a share in life with Christ, so

as to pass from the shadows out to the light and from death to life. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.14)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

He is not speaking only to unbelievers. For there are many believers, no less than unbelievers, who remain still trapped in various sins. There are indeed some who do so all the more. Therefore it was necessary to call these to “awake,” etc. (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.14)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

It is to be noted that this testimony is not scriptural, for we nowhere find it in the canonical text. Some interpreters have argued that those who were favored with spiritual grace were writing psalms. The apostle himself hints at this when he says in his letter to the Corinthians, “each of you has a psalm” (1 Corinthians 14:26). (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.14)

Ephesians 5:15

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

Paul has previously ordained that false and vicious lives be exposed by the servants of God. He now adds a qualifier; they are to be exposed in a careful manner to avoid scandal. The faithful must be prudent in their conduct among the faithless, especially at a time when the faithless hold dominion, trusting in an unholy ruler. If then a Christian encounters a troubler who is turbulent and angry, he should be cautious in his presence so as not to incite him to blaspheme or raise a storm. He will utter his words where occasion offers. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.15.1)

Ephesians 5:16

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

His motive for giving this counsel is not to urge them to be more crafty or underhanded. Rather he is saying, “The times do not belong to you. Now you are migrants and expatriates, strangers and foreigners. Do not seek honors. Do not seek glory, authority or retribution. Bear all things. Only by patience will you redeem the time. Pay whatever is required, all that they desire.”

When Paul says “the days are evil” he does not mean that they are created evil or that they are by their very nature evil. Rather he says this of the troubling events that occur in time. We are in the habit of saying, “I have had a terrible day.” But that does not imply that the day of itself is intrinsically terrible. Rather it refers to what has occurred in the day. Some of the things that occur in it are good, as they are enabled by God. Some are bad, because they are brought about by evil willing. Therefore it is we humans who are the authors of the evils that occur in time. Only on this basis are the times called evil. (Homily on Ephesians 18.5.15-17.2)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has risen. Rise up from the sleep of the age. Walk cautiously and prudently. Cast off folly. Take hold of wisdom. In this way you will be able to avoid changing yourself constantly as you walk through the vicissitudes of the times. Rather you will find a unity within yourself even amid the diversity of the times. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.16)

Ephesians 5:17

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

Do what you have to do with moderation. This is the will of the Lord. Do not allow commotion and din or discord with bad feeling to give rise to estrangement. So Paul adds these words to

what he has said about his wish that the servants of God should admonish wrongdoing. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.17)

Ephesians 5:18a

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

It is good conduct that strikes fear in the wrongdoer. Only one who is sober is prepared to counsel another realistically and with confidence. The person being counseled feels less resentment when he knows how good is the actual conduct of the one who admonishes him. But where there is intoxication there is also debauchery, and debauchery causes base deeds. Therefore it is our duty to be sober, so that the requirements of good conduct may be observed. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.18)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Immoderate indulgence makes one rash, passionate, prone to stumbling, anger and severity. Wine was given to gladden us, not for intoxication. (Homily on Ephesians 19.5.18)

Ephesians 5:18b

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (AD 337-397):

One drunk with wine sways and stumbles. But one who is filled with the Spirit has solid footing in Christ. This is a fine drunkenness, which produces even greater sobriety of mind. (On the Sacraments 5.3.17)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Be ready for the Spirit's filling. This happens only when we have cleansed our souls of falsehood, anger, bitterness, sexual impurity, uncleanness and covetousness. It happens only when we have become compassionate, meek and forgiving to one another, only when facetiousness is absent, only when we have made ourselves worthy. Only then does the Spirit come to settle within our hearts, only when nothing is there to prevent it. Then he will not only enter but also fill us. (Homily on Ephesians 19.5.19 - 21)

Ephesians 5:19a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Do you wish to be happy? Do you want to know how to spend the day truly blessed? I offer you a drink that is spiritual. This is not a drink for drunkenness that would cut off even meaningful speech. This does not cause us to babble. It does not disturb our vision. Here it is; Learn to sing psalms! Then you - will see pleasure indeed. Those who have learned to sing with the psalms are easily filled with the Holy Spirit. But if you sing only the devil's songs you will soon find yourself filled with an unclean spirit. (Homily on Ephesians 19.5.19 - 21)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Our hymns declare the strength and majesty of God. They express gratitude for his benefits and his deeds. Our psalms convey this gratitude also, since the word Alleluia is either prefaced or appended to them. Our psalms properly belong to the domain of ethics, teaching us what is to be done and avoided. The domain of the psalms is the body as an instrument of grace. But the domain of the spiritual canticles is the mind. As we sing spiritual canticles we hear discourses on things above, on the harmony of the - world, on the subtly ordered concord of all creatures.

These spiritual songs help us express our meaning more plainly for the sake of simple folk. It is more with the mind than with the voice that we sing, offer psalms and praise God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.19)

Ephesians 5:19b

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

“Making melody to the Lord” means paying attention while you are singing. It means not letting your mind drift. Those who in singing do not offer this deep attention to God are merely mouthing psalms, uttering words, while their hearts are preoccupied elsewhere. (Homily on Ephesians 19.5.19 - 21)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

If we are living well, we are always being filled with the Holy Spirit so as to confess and extol the gift of God. The Holy Spirit loves this way of life. This is especially expressed in songs, that praise may be sung to God by every tongue. If the Spirit is dwelling within someone, he is always meditating on the Spirit. It is not only his lips that burst forth but his heart. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.19)

Ephesians 5:20

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

We are told to give thanks to God for all his gifts. For God has stooped low to adopt us through Christ his own Son, through whom we know God. We have learned that God, being Spirit, is to be adored in the Spirit. So we submit ourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ, who commanded us to pursue humility. (Epistle to the Ephesians 5.21)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Paul now calls us to “give thanks always and in everything.” This is to be understood in a double sense, both in adversity and in good times. . . . In this way the mind rejoices and bursts out in gratitude to God, not only for what we think good but for what troubles us and happens against our will. . . . It is obvious that generally we are called to give thanks to God for the sun that rises, for the day that goes by and for the night that brings rest. . . for the rains that come, for the earth that brings forth fruit and for the elements in their course. . . . Finally, we are thankful that we are born, that we have being, that our wants are sufficiently taken care of in the world, as if we lived in the house of an extremely powerful family patriarch, knowing that whatever is in the world has been created on our account. In this way we give thanks when we are grateful for the benefits that come to us from God. All these things, however, the heathen also does, and the Jew and the publican and the Gentile. But the second sense of giving thanks is seen in the special gift of Christians to give thanks to God even in seeming adversity. . . . Those who are saintly in their own eyes are prone to give thanks to God because they have been released from dangers and afflictions. But according to the apostle the greater virtue is to give thanks to God precisely amid those very dangers and affections. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.20)

*Compiled by Jim Anderson
3/5/08*