

WALK IN LOVE EPHESIANS 5:1-7

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Whenever I'm approached by a young man and woman who ask me to officiate their wedding, my first step is to have them fill out a pre-marital questionnaire.

It's my obligation to explain God's perspective on marriage. The questionnaire serves as a starting point. It helps me know *where they're at* and *what they think*.

The application is loaded with questions - some are quite personal. Its intention is to encourage the couple to identify their beliefs, and analyze their feelings.

But the hardest question by far, is also the shortest.

It's just three words, "What is love?" *And how would you answer that question... how do you define love?*

In college, I took Psychology 101, and I'll never forget the textbook definition of love, "an agitated state of psychological arousal." *How romantic... how warm?*

Imagine, leaning in, and whispering to your sweetheart, "Honey, have I told you lately that you agitate my psyche!" *After that she just might slap you!*

You're the one who'd be agitating her psyche!

Heartburn is "an agitated state"... Hemorrhoidal pain, or a kidney stone, or a barking dog next-door is "an agitated state"... A screaming kid on the airplane is "psychological arousal" - or the guy in the movie who won't stop talking, or a hurried motorist who won't back off your bumper - that's "psychological arousal."

Surely, the Psyche 101 textbook is not the definitive word on love! There's more to it than "an agitated state of psychological arousal!" Hopefully, love is not just the stirring up of my feelings, or a burning brave wave.

Real love has got to be more than emoting...

Well, in Ephesians 5, Paul gets us *up to speed* on love. He defines for us *what it is*, and *what it's not...*

Paul lets us know what real love looks like... then warns us of love's counterfeit - lust, *in its many forms*.

Verse 1 begins, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." At the end of Chapter 4 Paul told us to *put on* and *put off* - now that we're God's kids we need to

dress like it and act like it... Dress your soul in a new identity. Act in accordance with your new life in Christ.

Put on this new you - *blessed, chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, accepted, sealed* - embrace this, enjoy this, believe it's true (*for it is!*). Never see yourself as you once did *without Jesus*. **Put on Christ!**

Then **put off** *bad habits, and false notions, and foul language, and destructive attitudes* that carried over from the past, and now undermine your life in Christ.

You're a new creation in Christ - a child of God.

And this is THE big realization - *without which you'll flounder in your faith, and fail to live in spiritual victory.*

For when I understand what Jesus did for me, I'll love Him passionately. He'll be my hero. I'll follow Him. I'll relish God as my Father, and Jesus as my Master.

And my desire will be to *imitate God as a dear child.*

When I was a kid I'd sit in the bathroom and watch my dad brush his teeth. Dad wore dentures, so he'd pull out his plate and scrub them with his toothbrush.

Mom says that often she'd walk in on me, and I'd be brushing my imaginary dentures - *mimicking dad...*

This is what children are prone to do. They mimic the adults in their life. Here's a few pictures to illustrate the point (six pics)... *A picture is worth a thousand words.*

And when a kid acts like his dad, that dad pokes out his chest - it makes the dad proud. Nothing endears a child to a dad more than when the kid mimics his dad.

I'll never forget me and my three tots coming around the house... Kathy was on the deck cooking burgers.

She saw us... She saw me spit... then Zach spit... then Nick spit... then, oh no, she saw Natalie spit!

She wasn't worried about the boys - *"But what in the world are you teaching our daughter?"* I half-heartedly promised to reform, but secretly I was so happy - my sons, *even my daughter* - wanted to be like their dad.

And you should know this is how God feels when we mimic Him! It pleases Him. Notice again verse 1, when we imitate God, He calls us *"dear children."* Our desire to be like Him excites God and endears us to Him...

But here's the question, *how do we imitate God?*

Imitating God is not as easy as it sounds. God has big shoes to fill... I can't mimic His *wisdom*. His thoughts are higher than my thoughts... Or His *power*. All things are possible with God, whereas without Him I can do nothing... Or His *sovereignty*. The Almighty God manipulates the jet stream. He created the Big Dipper. *Whereas, half the time, I can't find my car keys!*

But there is one way I can mimic my Hero, and bring God joy. Read with me in verse 2, *"And walk in love..."*

Realize, love is the foremost feature of the Christian way of life. Love is what Christianity is all about!

1 John 4:16 tells us *"God is love."* I'm sure it pains God when He has to get angry. I

know He doesn't like to judge. It's love that comes naturally. Love is His joy.

And to walk with God is to *“walk in love.”* You know 1 Corinthians 13. I'll sum it up, *“Without love you ain't nothing!”* *“You're a sounding brass, a clanging cymbal.”*

Certainly, *God's love* is deeper, and broader, and higher, and wider than *my love* - but I've tasted His love. I'm the object of His love. Even more so, Romans 5:5 tells us, *“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

God puts His love in my heart, and this means I can love others with the same love God has given me.

God has shown me grace, *thus I can be gracious.*

God has extended mercy, *now I can be merciful.*

And this helps us with this definition of love that we're after. Verse 2 reads, *“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”*

Here, God defines love! But not with a dictionary entry - not in a black and white kind of way - not as a textbook would... *God writes His definition in blood.*

God shows all men for all times what true love is by drawing a picture - *and not even with paints* - He used two beams of roughed-out wood, a little rope, some rusty nails, a cat-of-nine-tails, and a crown of thorns.

God points to a Roman cross and the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus - and says, *“There it is. That is love.”*

And today, the cross remains the standard, the plumb line, against which real love is measured and understood. Jesus' predicted this before His death in John 15:13. He told His men, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends."

Question: "How much does God love us?" Answer: "Christ held out His arms, and said *"This much!"*"

And in verse 2 Paul uses 3 words to describe Jesus' work on the cross, and in so doing, helps us grasp the meaning of true love... *"given," "offering," "sacrifice"*

First, Paul writes, *"Christ has... given Himself..."*

Love is more than *"an agitated state of psychological arousal"* - it's a decision *to give*. It has little to do with agitation, emotion, feeling. It's a deliberate choice I make to give of myself for another person's well-being.

Realize, lust and greed will take. It's love that gives. Love is selfless... *Love thinks: "what can I do for you?"* While *lust thinks: "what can you do for me?"*

It was Amy Carmichael who wrote, *"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."*

I've heard it said there are three types of love...

First, is the *"I love you if..."* kind of love. I'll love only if you meet my conditions. It's performance based.

Then there's *"I love you because..."* Because you're good looking, or popular, or nice, or funny. It's based on circumstances that can change in a heartbeat.

But there's a third type of love. "I love you (*period*)." It's love with no strings attached. No pre-conditions.

And this is the love Jesus exhibited on the cross.

Romans 5:8 puts it, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Note, "*even while we were sinners.*"

The cross was unconditional love. God didn't preface it with an "if" or a "because" - He just put His love out there. When Jesus loved you He expected nothing in return. *He loved you... because He really loves you!*

The second word Paul uses to describe the real love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross is "*offering.*"

And this was a familiar term to Temple Jews.

The Jews paid tithes - and not just 10% of their income - the OT tithe was more like 32%. The tithe was a person's duty. It was what they owed to God.

But after the tithe was given, a person could add an "*offering.*" *This wasn't a duty, it was a delight.* Nowhere was an offering mandated. It was given from the worshipper's heart - because He wanted to, not because He had to. And this helps define the cross.

Jesus went to the cross with a willing heart!

The night before, in the garden, Jesus embraced the cross He would carry the next day. He laid aside any hurt or reservations, and renewed His commitment to the mission. Rather than go to the cross begrudgingly, He carried it with you and me in mind. He loved us.

And this is true love. Love is an offering, not an obligation. It's not, "Ok, I'll do it if I must." It wants to be involved. It goes the second mile. It turns the other cheek. Real love goes out of its way to offer its help.

Love is all about "giving" and "offering."

And then real love is a "sacrifice." This is the third word Paul uses. A sacrifice costs. It requires a price.

A sacrifice is more than a tip, or a courtesy, or even a favor. It involves not just what's convenient. It's costly.

Once a girl asked her boyfriend, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, My Love." She asked again, "Would you die for me?" He answered, "Uh, mine is an undying devotion." Well, *an undying devotion* isn't real love.

To love another person is to lay down my life for that person. But not necessarily in a single act of courage. Loving the Lord isn't just going out in a blaze of glory.

Real love is willing to lay down my life, and rights, and conveniences, and comforts, and pleasures in a thousand daily ways. Love is willing to slice up my life in half-a-million sacrifices over half-a-million hours...

Are you willing to die... a little at a time?

Put it all together, and rather than a psychological arousal, or an agitation, or fluttering of butterflies - real love is a commitment - it's a promise kept. *Love gets tough when life gets rough...* just look at the cross!

And this kind of love is a sweet aroma to God!

When an animal sacrifice was placed on the altar, often a drink offering was poured out on the carcass. It was like *sacred steak sauce*. The liquid spices turned the burning meat into a pleasant, scented fragrance.

In the OT barbecue was God's favorite smell, but no longer. Now love is what tickles and thrills His nostrils.

Love is like *"a sweet-smelling aroma"* to the Lord.

And yet there's a lot going up from among Christians today that has the opposite effect - *that's a stench in God's nostrils!* Selfishness and lust masquerading as love, is *polluting the air*, rather than *pleasing the Lord*.

And this is what I need to ask us... *what kind of stinkers are we?* Are we *imitating God and walking in love*, or are we *imitating the world and walking in lust?*

This is what Paul asks us in verse 3. He's helped us understand *what love is*. But now He's going to define *what love is not*. He uncovers love's counterfeit - lust.

He writes, *"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints..."* In this verse, just as he does with love, Paul also uses three broad terms, to define lust.

"Fornication" is the Greek word *"porneia"* from which we get the term *pornography*. In the first century it was a catch-all word for all kinds of illicit sexual activity.

"Uncleanness" means *"impurity."* It's the same kind of general prohibition against sex outside marriage.

And *"covetousness"* or *"greed,"* in this context, is the desire to use someone else for

your own gratification.

These terms would include premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, spouse-swapping, prostitution, incest, strip clubs, hook-ups, pornography, cyber-sex, phone-sex, sexting, friends-with-benefits, etc. *Anything that feeds a person's sexual appetites apart from marriage...* according to Paul isn't fitting for a Christian.

But Pastor Sandy are you serious? We're living in the 21st century, "anything goes." What could be wrong with two consenting adults going to bed together?

Let me remind you, who created sex in the first place. Sex was God's idea - not Hugh Hefner's or Dr. Ruth's. God designed sex for bonding and pleasure.

This means if God chooses to restrict the use of sex, that's well within His right to do so. And what's more, if He does, it's certainly because He has a good reason.

Ben Franklin once said, "Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful."

The boundaries God put around sex aren't intended to spoil our fun - they're drawn for our protection.

What our culture fails to appreciate is that sex is more than an animalistic instinct - a biological function.

Human sexuality carries spiritual connotations.

Sex creates emotional bonds. It glues two people together in a spiritual way. An unexpected oneness occurs. Listen to the words of a woman named Ingrid...

“There were a number of things I hadn't counted on, things which none of my friends who wanted to be "free" had counted on... When love didn't turn out as planned, there was a peculiar pain that I refused to acknowledge, a pain of separation that had not been part of the design... I didn't count on the power of sex.

I didn't realize that sex made a difference... that it transformed everything, that for me - and for most women - making love with a man several times created unpredictable bonds... I didn't realize physical intimacy had unknown properties, that it created deepening needs... (and) bursts of possessiveness and jealousy.

I didn't realize that love could reverse itself... be withdrawn, and that the consequences of such withdrawal could be so powerful as to crush one's own potential for feeling. I didn't realize that there actually was such a thing as falling apart over the loss of love.”

Realize, God created sex for marriage. He designed it as a super-glue. What it glues is suppose to stay.

And once it's glued, if you pull it apart it doesn't break loose easy. It rips, and tears away at places that were never meant to be torn. It does serious damage.

Sex was meant for a man and a woman in a lifelong relationship - otherwise it erodes a person's self-worth.

Listen to a woman named Nancy. “(When I had sex) I was so locked up emotionally, not being personally involved and all, that I couldn't really enjoy it. Maybe there'd be some tenderness afterward, but usually I was so out of it I didn't know or cared if there was.

Maybe I was afraid to care. Sometimes I'd think I was in love. But then I'd never hear from him again. They were just a piece of meat, I'd tell myself. I'd laugh it off, but inside I knew that I was the piece of meat. And I was dying. I loved life, but I hated myself; I loved men, but never any particular one, because I couldn't trust them. I loved sex, but I never enjoyed it - that is, I was never really fulfilled. I was hungry but never filled.

I never understood any of it, and I couldn't stop. The weekend came and I was back on the roller coaster.”

Here's the non-politically correct truth... If you're a Christian your body does not belong to you. It's been bought with a price. Your body belongs to Jesus.

And if you give your body to someone without a *promise from them*, and a *blessing from God* - it not only grieves God, it cheapens and degrades you in your own eyes. *You do get reduced to a piece of meat!*

Our culture today is so confused about sex and love. People believe they're one in the same. Folks even refer to sex as “**making love.**” But sex may have nothing to do with love. Two stray dogs in an alley like each other enough to have sex - *but that's not love.*

And just because you love a person doesn't mean you should have sex. Love respects and looks out for the other person's highest good. It never *dishonors*, or *dirtyes*, or *defiles* who it loves. It insists *on God's best!*

Let me just say, before modern society scoffs at what it calls the Bible's puritanical, old-fashion, out-dated views on sex, *how are we doing?* What kind of sexual landscape has the liberated attitude produced?

Do you think folks are more fulfilled today? Is there less hurt and broken hearts - an upswing of self-worth?

Or has the sexual revolution produced an explosion of STDs, and deviant behaviors, and a degrading of women, and unwanted pregnancies, and an epidemic number of single parents struggling to get by alone...

Here's the Bible's ethos on sex... **walk in love, not lust.** *Are you really saying we'd be worse off if we did?*

Understand, real love is grounded in faith... I'll obey God, and trust Him to take care of me and my needs.

Single Christians today act desperate.

They think if they don't advertise, and prove their prowess, and try a few people on - life and love will pass them by... *Where's our faith? Our trust in God?*

When Elizabeth Elliot was a single Christian, she decided to honor the Bible's standard for sex, and trust God with her personal needs for love and a family...

She wrote later, **"I took for granted that there must be a few men left who had the strength to swim against the tide. I assumed that those men would also be looking for women of principle. I did not want to be among the marked-down goods on the bargain table, cheap because they had been pawed over. Crowds collect there. It is only the few who will pay full price."**

And God blessed Elizabeth with a godly husband.

Understand, the Christian view of sexual intimacy is the most exalted of any religion or culture in the world.

Christianity's sexual ethos sets a high standard, but here's the reason, "A Christian is to walk in love." And we understand that love is *giving, offering, sacrificing*.

The world *walks in lust*. The Christian *walks in love*.

Listen to verse 3 in the NIV. It says it well, "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."

Once, Alexander the Great was reviewing his troops after a battle. He came across a man who'd been disciplined for cowardice. He asked for his name?

The soldier answered, "*Alexander*."

Alexander the Great replied, "What did you say?" The soldier repeated himself, "*Alexander, Sir*." The General went into a rage. He and a coward shared the same name. Alexander the General ordered, "Soldier, either change your ways, or change your name!"

And if you're living in sexual sin, while still calling yourself a Christian, I would issue the same challenge to you, *either change your ways or change your name!*

Imitating God and walking in love will steer clear of impure deeds - and it will also avoid impure dialogue...

Paul writes in verse 4, “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” Certain forms of humor, certain kinds of jokes, are not appropriate for a child of God.

“*Filthiness*” and “*foolish talking*” aren’t hard to figure out... But “*coarse jesting*” is an interesting phrase...

The Greek word translated “*jesting*” means “to turn.” It’s the turning of a conversation in an evil direction.

Here’s a person who makes sexually suggestive remarks - leading innuendoes. He takes your innocent remark, and then twists it in a salacious way. *A coarse jester has a quick wit tied to a promiscuous heart.*

You can tell a lot about a person by what makes them laugh... I, of all people, love a good joke! *In fact, I love a corny joke...* But I draw the line at dirty jokes.

Do you chuckle when you hear off-color funny?

Tomorrow, when you hear it, excuse yourself. Find some work to do and walk away... You don’t have to be self-righteous about it. Walk in love, even to the guy who’s telling the joke... Just don’t indulge in their evil.

As a child of God we were born into love - not lust.

Never forget we’re in a spiritual battle - it’s a fight with temptation. And our strategy should be to keep the war as far away from the home front as possible.

It’s bad enough if our enemy is in North Korea, or in the mountains of Afghanistan - but you certainly don’t want the combatants parked off the Carolina coast.

You want to keep the fighting as far as possible from what's most vital. And the same is true spiritually.

Sin is fought on multiple fronts...

Before sin grows into a destructive habit, it's a single deed I try... But before that deed, it's an attitude I developed... And before that attitude, it was a desire I nurtured... But the desire started with a thought I entertained... And that thought was planted by a picture I saw... And I saw that picture, in a place I went... And I visited that place with a friend I chose...

Now here's the battle strategy... **make good choices before sin snowballs**. Choose the right friends, avoid the wrong places. Do battle in the theatre of your mind.

Don't wait until sin gains momentum, and lodges in your heart - then threatens your marriage, or wrecks your home, or siphons off riches, or ruins your health.

Here's another way to put it, **keep your hands out of the cookie jar**. The surest way to resist a forbidden cookie is to never put your hand near the cookie jar.

Yet here's what Christians do. We see cookies. We use to like cookies. We think we might enjoy a cookie.

So we unscrew the lid, and stick our hand in the jar - **then we pray for God to deliver us from the cookies!** *Who's kidding who?* I suppose, 99.9% of the time, if a hand goes into a cookie jar it comes out with a cookie.

This is why if you're serious about overcoming sin and walking in love you'll keep your hand as far away as possible from the cookies. *Be a stranger to danger.*

And this is why verse 4 is so important - *how we talk and what makes us laugh*. Even if we have no thoughts of doing the deed, if Satan can get us talking about it, and joking about it, and laughing at it - he's cutting down our distance from it. He's eliminating our buffer.

Hey, you know how this works... You and your spouse have never mentioned you'd like a new car, but once either of you verbalizes the desire, it picks up momentum. It takes a giant leap toward reality. Now all you talk about is what model, or color - even extras.

And this is what happens when we joke and laugh about evil - without knowing it, we're inching closer to the edge - we're on the verge... You've never thought of cheating on your husband, but you've watched it done on television, and you've empathized with its participants... *And it breaks down your sensibilities...*

It amazes me, the companies that spend \$4 million for a 30 second ad on the Super Bowl, will deny that their violent or sensual programming has any effect on the viewer's behavior. *What entertains us, shapes us*.

Don't be deceived. Proverbs 23:7 tells us, "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*" We are influenced by stuff we consume. Over time we get sucked in. We end up *imitating the world* rather than *imitating God*.

And this is more dangerous than we think. Paul writes in verse 5, "*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

Let no one deceive you with empty words..."

Here Paul mentions three people - *that no matter what these folks say* - they're not headed to heaven.

They claim to be Christians, but over time, neither of the three are capable of restraint. It's obvious, they lack the conviction, and power, and life of God's Spirit inside them. Their lives are completely out of control.

For the *fornicator* the issue is sex - for the *unclean* it's deviant thoughts - for the *covetous* man its money.

And often these three people are one in the same.

It's all about him - *his glands, his perspective, his wallet*. This is a person void of any moral principles.

And it's not just a moral problem, its a spiritual one. Notice how Paul refers to this person - as *"an idolater."*

Most of today's Americans would never bow before a statue or trinket - but they worship sex, or things, or money, or personal autonomy. When you value something supremely - at all costs - it becomes an idol.

When "IT" (*whatever "IT" is*) becomes more valuable to you than your wife, your family, your church, your integrity, your faith, your God, even heaven and hell - then it has replaced the *true God* as your *new god*.

It reminds me of the young businessman who flipped his car over the guardrail and went down a steep embankment. The twisted metal severed off his arm.

When the hero units reached him, the guy just kept whining, *"Oh, my Lamborghini."*

Oh, my Lamborghini.” The attending paramedics were appalled that this man was so materialistic all he could think about was a car.

One of the EMTs told him, *“Buddy, you've got more to worry about than a silly car. Your arm was chopped off.”* The man suddenly gets this panicked look on his face, and starts crying, *“Oh, my Rolex. Oh, my Rolex.”*

Here's a person who's made wealth his idol.

Years ago there was a popular rap song with the lyrics, *“Boys want sex and girls want money.”*

And that's true for millions of people in our culture. *Getting her to bed and getting us ahead* is what life is about! Such a person *IS* imitating their God, but he's not the Christian God - Christ is all about *love*, not *lust*.

Thus, the *fornicator*, and the *unclean person*, and the *covetous* or greedy - is an *idolater...* not a Christian.

Again, verse 6, *“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”* There are folks who deceive *and have been deceived* by empty words.

My former church counted *“professions of faith.”*

They knew exactly how many folks had mouthed an allegiance to Jesus. But it's not a *profession* that saves us, it's our *possession*. *Is our faith more than words?*

Here's the question I know you're asking, "Sandy, are you saying a Christian will never struggle with sexual sin, or uncleanness, or greediness - *if so, I'm in trouble.*" Let's be clear, *that is NOT what I'm saying.*

Christians aren't perfect. We can be lured into sin.

The operative word here is "struggle." A Christian will *struggle* with these sins. In fact, that's one of the evidences that proves they're a Christian. Something inside them is pushing them to fight temptation and pursue victory. They don't just capitulate and cave in.

It's the person who doesn't care about what they do, or who they hurt - who has no desire "*to walk in love*" - he's the one with "*no inheritance in the kingdom...*"

As I've often said, **real faith leaves tracks.** There'll be marked evidence of it in how we live our lives.

If a bomb went off in this room, later I'd be able to prove it. I could show you the crater it left behind.

And the same is true when grace explodes in a person's heart... It changes the terrain. It carves out a new character. There's evidence of its impact...

I like the statement, "Christians aren't sinless, but as they grow they will sin less and less and less."

Verse 7 wraps up Paul's *talk* on our "*walk in love.*" He writes, "*Therefore do not be partakers with them.*"

He comes back to his original idea, "*be imitators of God*" - not imitators of the wickedness of this world.

As children of God we should learn to love...

Real love is more than “an agitated state of psychological arousal” - *it gives, it offers, it sacrifices.*

And avoid love's counterfeit - the 50 shades of gray that we refer to as “*lust.*” Keep the war far away from the home front - keep your hand out of the cookie jar.

Make sure your faith is real... “*walk in love.*”