

*Isn't it just delightful when you see a little boy imitating his dad, or a little girl imitating her mum???*

*You know, sometimes you see a little boy dressed exactly the same as Dad, walking down the street, or going out on the farm to work with his dad. Same hat, same boots, same shirt, little pair of jeans, pocket knife on the belt....*

*Or the little girl, wanting to be just like her mum, pushing the little dolly around in the pram....*

*We imitate those whom we look up to, and it's actually an amazing expression of love. It's natural for children who are loved, to reflect the parents who love them.*

And today, we read: **5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.** , and that's exactly what it's talking about.

Just like a child wants to imitate his dad, or wants to imitate her mum... As beloved children of God, it's natural for us to become **imitators of God** – But, what does that mean???

(obviously it **doesn't** mean that we set ourselves up as the creator of the universe. It **doesn't** mean we expect people to bow down and give us glory) – what **does** it mean **to be imitators of God**?

Well, we're really carrying on from where we left off, a couple of weeks ago, in Ephesians chapter 4. And that topic then, was "Living as the transformed creatures that we are". God has transformed us from unrighteousness to righteousness. We are transformed from profanity to holiness. We are transformed from darkness to light... And because of

this, we are to be imitators of God, but what does that mean????

V2 – To imitate God, means to walk in love, as Christ loved us.... And that's a very particular sort of love – it's a sacrificial love. **Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** – it's a sacrificial love.

And it's in this same sort of love – this sacrificial love – in which **we** are to imitate **God**.

In Romans 12 Paul tells us more about this sacrificial love – he talks about it in terms of being a living sacrifice: <sup>Romans</sup>

<sup>12:1</sup> **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, (now that's a strange thing to say, isn't it??? – sacrifices are usually dead things – killed and placed on an altar... but we are to present our bodies as a **living** sacrifice) holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (now that's interesting isn't it??? We tend to think of spiritual worship as some kind of feeling, or maybe an inner glow that we get, when we sing a particularly nice song, with a bunch of particularly talented musicians, but spiritual worship isn't that at all – it's presenting your body as a living sacrifice)... <sup>2</sup> **Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.****

Sacrificial love, is as a result of our old-self having died, and we have now been born again, to live this new life, to which

God calls us – a life of holiness – a life of purity. Through the blood of Christ, God takes away our sin and makes us holy, and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He gives us the power, to continue to live in holiness.

We've been working our way through Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, and in the early stages, it was all about our identity in Christ – it was about who we are in Christ, and now – because of who we are in Christ, – this therefore, is how we should live... We are children of God, and therefore we should live lives, worthy of the calling to which we've been called... And thus the title of last week's sermon – "Living as the transformed creatures that we are"...

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called, to a higher ethic.

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- Teenagers, no good going home to Mum and Dad, and saying, "I want to be allowed to go and do such-and-such – all my friends are allowed to do it...." Firstly, that's a lie. A few of your friends might be allowed to do it, but not all your friends. Secondly, You've got to get it through your head – you're not the same as all your friends anyway... As a Christian, you are called to better than that.... Paul talks in terms of darkness and light – you once were darkness, but now you are light.
- Other people **might** be cheating on their tax – but that's not OK for us – because we are called to the highest of integrity.
- Your mates might go out and get drunk on a Friday or a Saturday night, but that's not OK for you – you're called to wisdom, and drunkenness is not wisdom. Jesus is

returning. It will be instantaneous and unexpected... I don't think he's going to wait 8 hours for us to sober-up, after He's come.... That'd be a bit of an anti-climax, wouldn't it?

- 22%<sup>1</sup> of people in their 20's might be living together in a defacto relationship, but that's not OK for you – as Christians, we are called to a higher ethic ...

And reading from V8, it gives us the reason: <sup>8</sup> ... **at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light**

Alright, he's saying "This is what you were, but God, by the blood of Christ, has redeemed you out of that – this is now what you are... Live as you are – not as you were.

V<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them..

Alright, you understand this, don't you? This is all part of imitating God.

Imitating God, is an expression of sacrificial love, **and** sacrificial living. And these two, are so tightly bound, you can't really separate them. I can't say "I love God", and then go off and live for myself – that's just demonstrating that I don't really love God at all... Jesus said: <sup>John 14:15</sup> **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**

And likewise, a life of self-denial and asceticism (sacrificial living) – is empty and pointless and meaningless, if it's done without love. In the Men's Bible Study on Thursday night, we came to 1 Corinthians 13, and its famous passage on love: <sup>1</sup> Corinthians 13:3 **If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned (sacrificial living), but have not love, I gain nothing.**

The two go together – sacrificial love, and sacrificial living... And Paul gives us some examples of these.

In fact, next week, we'll begin a few weeks of a little sub-series of "living in submission", which is also an expression of sacrificial love, and sacrificial living... But that's next week – For now, in today's reading, there's a few other examples for us:

The opposite of self-sacrificial love, is self-indulgent sensuality. And Paul rails against it. Self-indulgent sensuality has no place at all in the Christian church. He says this:

**... sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints**

*Just this week, Hillsong have made the news again, because of the Royal Commission into child abuse. Pastor Frank Houston (who's dead now)(father of Brian Houston – the current leader of Hillsong), well Frank originally began the "Sydney Christian Life Centre", which later became Hillsong. And Frank Houston, in 2000, admitted his sexual abuse of a*

*boy in New Zealand, in the 1970's.... And it makes you sick, doesn't it??? That's old news, but it's still just as sickening...*

*And names like Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker, Clark Taylor, Ted Haggard... - they're all well known Christian pastors or televangelists, who have been guilty of sexual immorality... And it's just wrong.... It's even happened here in this district, in the last decade...*

It's wrong for sexual immorality to be in the church, and you know it. And the world even knows how wrong it is – that's why it comes up on the news. And don't go thinking it's just those outsiders who do it... *The biggest lure of sexual immorality today, began to be piped into our homes through a copper wire. Today, it can turn up on your phone or your ipad wirelessly, just like that.*

*One recent study says that around 30%<sup>ii</sup> of all internet traffic is pornography... And you might think that what you do on the internet is anonymous... No way is it anonymous... Every internet connection has a unique IP address, which is logged, any time you go to any internet site. I've noticed, that whenever I go to the Elders weather site, over on the right hand side, there'll be an advertisement, advertising whatever I've recently been researching. So, as I wrote this sermon, to test it, I went to the Elders weather site. And the add that came up was for a UHF CB. Guess what!!! Half an hour earlier, I had unwrapped a brand new UHF radio, that I'd just received in the mail. You see, I'd been looking for the cheapest price for a UHF CB, on the internet, and I've been tracked – they know where I've been... There's nothing private about the internet...*

And whether you feel it's private or not, sexual immorality, even by viewing pornography, is wrong... And if you have a problem in that area, talk to me about it. (I'm not going to judge you. I'm not going to tell anybody about it) But come and talk to me, so we can put some kind of accountability procedures in place, so you don't get caught in that rut... If you're willing to be accountable, we can help you get out of that rut....

But it's not only sexual immorality and impurity – there's other stuff listed here – covetousness... Well, covetousness, we think of that as a “respectable sin”, don't we???, but what's it say here??? **V<sup>5</sup> ... you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

There's nothing respectable about covetousness. To covet something, is when you strongly desire something that somebody else has. And covetousness should have no place in the church. To covet something, is the opposite of self-sacrificial living. When you covet something, you idolise it – your desire for it, is greater than your desire for God. And Paul actually makes that connection – and he says that to covet, is idolatry...

And then there's **V<sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.**

*Sometimes our tongues run away with us, don't they???? And this is an area that I sometimes battle with. I love a good joke, and when I think of something funny, I want to share it, and sometimes the funny thing I think of, is actually a bit rude.... And it's wrong. I know it's wrong...*

*In men's bible study a few weeks back, someone gave a bit of very wise advice – “If you have to think about whether it's OK to tell a particular joke, it's probably not OK to tell that joke.” ....*

And in the work place, or at a party, or maybe even a wedding, you can be sure there's going to be plenty of filthiness, foolish talk and crude joking... And that might have been the way you used to be... but that's not the way you are now...

Do you get what Paul's doing here??? He's not making a list of rules and regulations and laws for us to keep. What he's saying is, “That's the way of the world. That's the way you used to be. But that's not who you are now. Be who you are – not who you used to be.

And you might be sitting here, listening to this, and you might be getting a bit of joy in your heart now, thinking about it, because sometimes we don't realise how much we've been changed, until we think back to what we once were... And for some of us, that might be a little change, and for some of us, that might be a massive change, that God's been working in us.. Maybe at one time, you were a champion at foul language or rude jokes or crude thoughts, and it never used to worry you, in the slightest.... And now you hear these few words, and you're thinking, “Wow, God's brought me a long way, but I know I've still got further to go”...

And, the good that God has worked in you, is through the power of His Holy Spirit. And if there's one thing that gives me joy, it's to see the activity of God in people's lives.

So, that's not who you are any longer. Don't go back to what you were... And don't let anybody, entice you back, to the old you...

Verse 6 says: <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Peter O'Brien, said this:

*It is all too easy for believers to be influenced by the surrounding world and to succumb to its ways of thinking and behaving. The result is that what is acceptable to the culture of the day becomes acceptable in the church. This is particularly true in contemporary Western society in the area of sexual morality.*

*Paul now underscores his first warning with a second as he urges his readers to heed the admonitions to avoid sexual immorality and obscene speech. They should not be misled by anyone who encourages sexual permissiveness, thinking such activities are a matter of indifference. Arguments of this kind are empty and devoid of the truth, because they do not reckon with God's holy judgment of sin.<sup>iii</sup>*

I think he's laid it out pretty clearly there – The danger, is for what is acceptable to the culture of the day, to become acceptable in the church. And so Paul says, **do not become partners with them.**

Preparing this message this week, has been very difficult for me – not because it's hard to understand, I actually feel it's pretty easy to understand.

My difficulty is, I rarely preach on the same passage twice, and last time I preached on this one, was the day I announced to the congregation that I loved very deeply, that I was resigning from the denomination that I was in. And this reading just happened to be the lectionary reading for that day. And I was just amazed at the way God does stuff. It set out exactly the reason why I could no longer continue in that denomination.

It had become a church, very much swayed by prevailing cultural values. I had seen enough of the way that the church makes decisions, to know that I could not partner with it, any longer. If I sent my children away on its youth camps, they would be just as likely to be taught permissiveness, as righteousness... Why would we partner with them? Why would we continue with a denomination, more influenced by cultural values, than God's word????

And so I was amazed that God brought this reading up on that day.

I guess my question for you today, is “In what ways are you partnered with sons of disobedience?”

Let me put it another way: What company do you keep, that pulls you away from who you are in Christ, and draws you towards the old you???

I’m always really up-front with people about marriage. *If you marry a child of the devil, you’re always going to have trouble with your father-in-law.* If you’re a Christian, never partner with someone who is not a Christian, so don’t even bother going out with a non-Christian.

Or for you, it might be a business partnership that gives you trouble. If your business partner isn’t a Christian, his priorities might be to make the biggest profit, at any cost... Where as, as a Christian, your business opportunities, can be a means and method of serving God, and so you might find a conflict there.

Your friends might be a bunch of drunks, and you find that when you hang out with them, you drink too much. Maybe they’re the ones you shouldn’t be partnered with.

Maybe when you get together with your footy mates, you find yourself back into bad language and filthy jokes... Maybe they’re the ones you shouldn’t be partnered with.

Don’t be partnered with those who would lead you away from the righteousness of God.

The alternative to all this, of course, is “fill up on God”. Hey??? Don’t be partnered with sons of disobedience, but fill up on God.

<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Amen.

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<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March+Quarter+2012>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://gadgets.ndtv.com/internet/news/30-percent-of-global-web-traffic-is-porn-study-223878>

<sup>iii</sup> O'Brien Peter T. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, "The Letter to the Ephesians". Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999. Page 364.