

## 14. Learning to Avoid the Sins of the Flesh

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to put away the sinful actions that we practiced before we placed our faith in Christ. Such actions are common among those who are not Christians. However, Christ has given us new desires and new attitudes that give us a desire to develop new actions. Those old actions could be called the sins of the flesh. In our topic today, we are going to see how to help our children learn to avoid the sins of the flesh.

In Ephesians 5:1-2, we read, “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.” Paul wrote to the Ephesians as his dear children. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul had earlier written to the Corinthians, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” Here, we see that Paul was encouraging the Christians in Corinth to follow his example as he followed Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, we read, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” What Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to do, the Christians in Thessalonica had done from the beginning of their spiritual lives. Here, we are reminded that people learn to follow the Lord by following the Lord’s people. As Christians, if we greatly love our physical and spiritual children, we will invite our children to imitate us just as we imitate Christ.

Paul also encouraged the Ephesian Christians to walk in love. To walk in love is to learn to imitate the life of Christ. Galatians 5:13, 16 say, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another...I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” To walk in love, we must walk in the Spirit. Then, we will follow the example of Christ and serve one another in love. Christ showed His love for us by giving Himself for us. When Christ died on the cross for us, we see that God viewed the sacrifice of Christ to pay the penalty for our sins as a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Here, we see that the sacrifice that Christ made for our sins was well-pleasing to God. When we walk in love, we see such a walk is also well pleasing to God.

We also see that walking in love will cause us to avoid certain actions and certain words. Ephesians 5:3-4 say, “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.” The word that is translated “fornication” includes all forms of sexual impurity including any sexual relationship outside the relationship of a husband and wife. The word that is translated “uncleanness” speaks of any lustful or wild living. These sins are at the start of the list in Galatians 5:19-21 where we read, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Here, we see that these are the works of people who do not have spiritual life.

The word “covetousness” speaks of a greedy desire to have more. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 says, “Now

godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that covetousness is a temptation and snare that destroys many people. In fact, fornication and covetousness are often mentioned together. That is why saints are encouraged to even avoid talk about such things.

We are also encouraged to avoid other sins of the tongue. The word that is translated “filthiness” speaks of using obscene words. “Foolish talking” is talk that is degrading, foolish or dirty. The word that is translated “course jesting” speaks of jokes that are dirty, suggestive or immoral. This kind of talking is common among people that are not Christians. However, we see here that such talk is not fitting or appropriate for Christians. Instead, we are to speak words of thankfulness. In Colossians 2:6-7, we read, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” As our lives become rooted and grounded in Christ, we see that our speech will be filled with thanksgiving.

We also see that judgment is facing those whose actions and words are based on the sins of the flesh. Ephesians 5:5-7 says, “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.” One of the key things we see in these verses is that God says a covetous person is an idolater. Here, we are reminded that money or things have become the idols of those who are covetous. “Empty words” come from a sinful heart. James 1:26 says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless.” In these verses, we see that the people who practice these things have not placed their faith in Christ and they are still facing eternal judgment.

That is why we want to help our children learn to understand the danger of becoming a partaker in the actions or words of those who do not know Christ. The word that is translated “partaker” means *to share jointly in something*. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in Ephesians 3:6 where we read, “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” In that verse, we see that Jews and Gentiles who become Christians share jointly in the life of Christ that we receive through the Gospel. Here, in Ephesians 5:7, we see that those who are sharing jointly in sinful living with unbelievers need to seriously examine their lives to see that they have true faith in Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-10 goes on to tell what will help us to avoid the sins of the flesh. Those verses say, “For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” Here, we see a key point because it helps us to understand why we did what we did before we became Christians. We were in darkness. Luke 11:34 says, ““The lamp of the body is the eye.

Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when *your eye* is bad, your body also *is* full of darkness.” Before a person becomes a Christian, the whole body is full of darkness. That is why Zacharias said in Luke 1:79, ““To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”” Zacharias spoke of the fact that Christ would give light to those in darkness.

As Christians, we are to learn to walk in the light. 1 John 1:5-7 says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” To walk in the light is to walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” As we help our children learn to walk in the light (walk in the Spirit), the Holy Spirit will begin to bear His fruit in their lives. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” The Spirit produces that fruit in our lives as we walk in the light.

Three things are mentioned in Ephesians 5 that happen when we walk in the light. First, the word that is translated “goodness” speaks of being upright in our heart and life. Romans 15:14 says, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” Paul was confident that the Christians in the city of Rome were full of goodness. Second, the word that is translated “righteousness” speaks of actions that are pleasing to God. Ephesians 4:24 says, “And that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” We see in the previous verses that we are to put off the old man and the evil of the sin nature. Here, we see that we have been given a new nature that desires to practice the righteousness of God. We are able to practice that righteousness in our lives at any time that we are yielding to the Holy Spirit.

Third, the word that is translated “truth” means *to speak the truth*. When we are walking in the light, we are able to speak truth because we are allowing the Lord to speak through our lives. Ephesians 4:25 says, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.” Because we have been given a new nature, we are able to speak the truth to one another. As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to put away the sins of the flesh and learn to walk in the light, we will see that their lives will show the results of walking in the light both by what they say and what they do. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to avoid the works of the flesh and practice the works of light.