

Addictions and Idols : Arising from the Banquet in the Grave (Ephesians 5:1-20)

For the Travelling Light Series (Part Four)

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We live in an age of influencers and imitators. 72% of gen-Zers and millennials follow one or more influencers online. They are the Greek gods and goddesses of our era.

But there is a certain burden in following these people, trying to imitate their lifestyle, their beauty, their fame. Paul sets before us an even more lofty goal, to imitate God Himself;

Ephesians 5:1-20 (The Message)

1-2 Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

3-4 Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed. Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don't talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn't fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.

5 You can be sure that using people or religion or things just for what you can get out of them—the usual variations on idolatry—will get you nowhere, and certainly nowhere near the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.

6-7 Don't let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with him. Don't even hang around people like that.

8-10 You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.

11-16 Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.

Wake up from your sleep,
Climb out of your coffins;
Christ will show you the light!

So, watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

17 Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.

18-20 Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge drafts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.

1. How can we actually imitate God?

- Spend time with God, invite his company. Like little children, *be a sponge*; observe, absorb and draw from God. Read God's Word with the wide eyes of a child, talk to him, sing to him. Be in community with others.
- Learn from God as a well-loved child. Approach God open minded and open hearted.
- Specifically, imitate God's love and Christ's sacrifice. **Love the difficult**, irregular people who don't deserve it - a difficult neighbour, a really mean boss at work, a relative who's prone to gossip. They, too, need the love of God. You may be saying, "You don't know what these people are like, am I supposed to love them?" Yes. Look, you didn't deserve Jesus, yet even when we were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).
- **Loved people love people**. In fact, Jesus reminds us in Luke 7 that the person who has been forgiven much, loves much, but the person who perceives they have been forgiven very little, loves very little. If you find yourself saying things like, "I would never do that, I just can't believe their behaviour." It's easy to judge others when maybe our sins are more internal than external.
- **Thankfulness and grace** is the language we speak. Thanksgiving is an important component in Paul's thought. When I start to feel stressed and angry, I try to step back and consider all my blessings.

"Thanksgiving is the basic attitude of the Christian, forces attention on God, His grace, and His desires rather than one's own desires."

– Max Zerwick, *Epistle to Ephesians*.

2. What gets in the way of imitating God?

- When we try to make life work without God, we eventually find ourselves falling back into bad habits. Maybe it starts with lingering looks at that other person or lingering on some images online you "stumbled onto". It may not seem that bad at first, but Paul instructs us to have nothing to do with these things, to avoid even a hint of impurity and greed. He is concerned about Christians falling back into bad habits and moving away from God. And he knows we are all susceptible to it. It was Paul who reminded us in Romans:

"For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want." - *Romans 7:19 (NET)*

- Ephesus had silver idols; we are *idol factories ourselves*. The idols we worship can be quite invisible and seemingly innocuous, they are generally seeking to fulfill a legitimate need, but in the wrong way.
- "I want", addiction starts here.

*Want becomes Need,
Need drives Compulsion,
Addiction is, "I want it, no matter what."*

Ultimately, idols are anything that absorbs our hearts and minds more than God and often lead to addiction.

"Jesus replied, '... everyone who sins is a slave to sin.' - *John 8:34*

3. Does imitating God lighten our load?

- Do you realize that scripture assures us that we can attain self control? (*1 Corinthians 10:13*)
- "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace." – *Romans 6:14*
- Sin is '*Incurvatus in se*,' a life turned in on itself.
- "Whoever finds their life, loses it, and whoever loses their life, for my sake, will find it." – *Matthew 10:39*
- Realize that our desires for joy and connection are not a bad thing, it's what we do with them.
- Sin is a heavy, costly, clinging yoke.
- Wake up, buoyed by grace, rise to the battle for self control.
- If you fall, rise again, slavery lies behind you, increasing freedom lies ahead.

Additional Resources

- [Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel](#) by Edward T Welch
- [Understanding and Navigating Addiction](#) PDF booklet

Personal Reflection

1. What knocks you off your horse the most often?

2. Who are the irregular people God is calling you to love?

3. Do you believe you can enjoy more self control?

- 3b. List three key points from this message that could be helpful in doing that.