

Ephesians 5A

- For unbelievers, the beliefs and practices of Christianity can appear to be a contradiction
 - On the one hand, they'll hear how we believe we're assured Heaven solely because of our trust in Jesus Christ
 - We reject any theology that doing good deeds is a means of salvation or that it even contributes to our salvation
 - Of course this confuses a world that assumes good things come to those who help themselves
 - As I've heard more than one unbeliever say having heard of salvation by grace through faith... "it can't be that easy"
 - But then having been saved, Christians maintain that doing good deeds should be the mark of a changed life
 - Jesus calls His followers to pursue doing good so that we may glorify our Father in Heaven
 - We put away sin and we seek to serve others as a loving response to our salvation, not a means of salvation
 - For believers taught by the Spirit of God, these concepts make perfect sense, but to the unbelieving world they can appear to be a contradiction
 - They see no sense in claiming a salvation that comes without regard to our personal merit or effort
 - Yet at the same time, teaching that the Lord demands good works from those He has saved
 - This theology is a stumbling block to other religious system because every false, manmade religious system assumes God thinks like we do
 - That He follows a cause-and-effect reward system
 - Those who do good, receive good; while those who do bad, receive judgment
 - That's how we operate

- So unmerited favor seems too easy to an unbeliever, and doing works after receiving salvation seems pointless
 - It's like studying **after** the test is over
 - And yet this is exactly the way the Lord has constructed salvation
 - Because it brings Him all the glory and leaves us with none
 - He saved us without any of us lifting even a finger, so He alone deserves the glory
- Then secondly, when a believer lives an obedient life of good works, he or she continues to give God glory
 - Since we don't claim our good works as a means of earning salvation, then our good deeds can only be understood as an act of love for God
 - Consider the example of a young boy who decides to wash his father's car one Saturday morning
 - Perhaps a neighbor witnesses the boy's good deed, and he assumes the boy's father must be paying the son to do this chore
 - In which case, he simply concludes the boy is working to earn a wage
 - But what would the neighbor think if he discovered that the boy wasn't being paid at all?
 - Instead, the young man simply decided to wash Dad's car out of love and respect for his father
 - Knowing this, the neighbor would naturally wonder what kind of father inspires such selfless love in his children
 - In that sense, the boy's good deed brought glory upon his father
 - And in the same way, we are called to glorify our Father in Heaven through good deeds done out of a heart thankful for our salvation
 - We know by faith alone we have been adopted into the family of God, made sons and daughters of God Most High by His grace
 - So now that we are in the family, we are called to glorify the Father

- First, by putting away sin, putting on the new self
- And secondly, by living out our faith through good works
- These things will lead the world to ask the question, “What kind of Father inspires His children to live this way?”
- This is where we find Paul at the end of Chapter 4 and moving into Chapter 5
 - He was exhorting the church to put on the new self, to let our Christ-like nature we received by our faith shine through
 - And to disassemble our corrupt, sinful outer man one thread at a time
 - This is the call of sanctification
 - It’s a decision to take up an inward battle, to fight against ourselves for the glory of God
 - Paul’s call to obedience in the faith runs three chapters, and when we last studied together, we reached the end of the first of those chapters
 - Paul was giving a series of five exhortations to adopt a different approach to life consistent with our new nature
 - If you remember, each of these exhortations had three parts:
 - A negative command to stop something, a positive command to begin something new in its place
 - And a justification or reason for why this change was beneficial or necessary
 - While we read through all five exhortations in vs.25-32, we only discussed four of the exhortations
 - The first was to stop speaking falsehoods
 - The second was to cease sinning in anger
 - The third was to stop stealing
 - The fourth was to put an end to unwholesome speech
 - Each of these is self-evidently a good thing

- Just ask yourself how you feel when someone lies to you or comes against you in anger or steals from you or gossips about you
- Clearly, these things are unloving and unholy and should not define the life of a follower of the Lord
- Yet as we said last time, they certainly define the world around us
 - In fact, these things are so common, they are expected and even tolerated
 - We celebrate someone who steals and gets away with it
 - We cheer those who say unwholesome things in a comedy routine or in a movie
- Therefore, it's all the more impactful when a Christian acts differently for the glory of God
 - We stand apart in a healthy way
 - And the Lord may use that to draw others to Himself, which is our mission while we await our resurrection
- That brings us to the final example at the end of Chapter 4, which is a list of several related behaviors

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Eph. 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- Paul commands that we put away or set aside six vices that work together in a particular way
 - Let's look at each vice for a second and see how they conspire to create a single problem in the body of Christ
 - First, Paul says put aside bitterness
- Bitterness is the Bible's term for a festering hurt or resentment against another
 - Bitterness is the opposite of grace and forgiveness

- A bitter person keeps track of the wrongs done to him or her by another rather than letting them go
- As Barclay once remarked, every Christian should pray that the Lord might teach us how to forget
- Next, Paul says put away wrath and anger
 - Wrath is a passionate response born out of forethought
 - It can come across as anger, but it's fundamentally not anger
 - It's aggression or abuse focused against someone or something
- Anger is listed separately, because it's a different emotion
 - While wrath is a planned act of aggression, anger is an unthinking, emotional response to something
 - Remember, Paul said righteous anger is appropriate, since it is a Spirit-triggered emotion intended to stir us to a righteous response
 - But unrighteous anger manifested by the flesh is an impulsive act demonstrating a lack of self-control
- The next two, clamor and and slander, are also related
 - Clamor is a vocal outcry or outburst intended to create a disruption
 - Like shouting over someone else in an argument so as to silence them
 - Or being boisterous as a prideful display of power, like the way a man boasts loudly in a crowded bar hoping to intimidate an adversary
 - Similarly, slander is speaking words to hurt another, but the effect is very different
 - If clamor is a verbal frontal assault, slander is the rhetorical equivalent of a knife in the back
 - Slander is whispering false accusations about someone to anyone who will listen and hopefully repeat it
 - Lastly, Paul says put aside malice, which is focused hatred for another person manifested in a variety of ways

- Having malice for another means being absorbed by thoughts of hurting them or seeing them come to harm
- It's a preoccupation with another's downfall
- Paul asks us to put away these six vices, because together they work against healing and forgiveness in the body of Christ
 - There is no doubt that we will injure one another from time to time
 - You can't expect a group of very different people to come together into a single body and not expect some friction
 - That friction is a product of sin...of selfishness, pride, arrogance, thoughtlessness
 - While we understand that relationship problems will arise, we don't accept them nor ignore them
 - We came together to help each other put away our sin nature, so as our flaws come to light, we will call them out gently while encouraging better things
 - But that process will be blocked before it even starts if we harbor bitter, angry, unforgiving hearts
 - If someone does us wrong and we respond with wrath or slander rather than forgiveness, we will cement that person as our enemy
 - We can't shout them down or harbor hatred for them in our hearts, for that just exposes us as the evil one
 - Which is why Paul issues the positive command to be kind to one another
 - Paul isn't merely saying "be nice" to everyone
 - He's speaking the context of being wronged
 - Be kind to those who wrong you, who hurt you or are thoughtless to you
- Don't just refrain from a negative response...go out of your way to provide a positive response
 - The opposite of retribution isn't merely silence...it's showing kindness

- Paul says be tender-hearted, which means literally have a good heart
- So that you might truly forgive one another
- And of course our model is found in the way the Father forgave us in Christ
 - While we were His enemies, despising Him and offending Him in everything we did or said
 - He moved first to show us kindness, forgiving us and granting us mercy before we even knew we needed it
 - The kindness of God brought us to repentance
- Here's one of the oxymoronic Christian moments for unbelievers
 - We show forgiveness to others because we have been forgiven
 - We show kindness to others who don't deserve it because the Father showed undeserving people like you and me His kindness
- But it makes perfect sense to those of us who know the grace of God
 - We understand how love wins over the hard heart
 - So when we put away malice, anger and wrath, we surprise people who were bracing for a different response
 - When we refrain from clamoring to respond softly and kindly to a member of the body of Christ, we let kindness accomplish a work in their heart
- So as we end Chapter 4 and move into Chapter 5, we look back on Paul's command to live as one body putting on the new self
 - We live and work together in this world as one body with one Spirit through one faith
 - Yet we're gifted in a variety of ways by that same Spirit
 - Those different gifts work together to make us spiritually stronger together than we can be alone
 - We serve in our gifts, growing together in the likeness of Christ, acting as His body before the world
 - And if we're to fulfill that mission, we cannot look like the world

- We must not follow in the same path of sin that defines their lives
- To do so is to be unlike Christ and therefore to be unlike His body
- And if we're not prepared to look like Christ, then how successful can we be in representing Him to the world?
- Like my example of the young boy who washes his father's car, what if that young boy was cussing as he did the job?
 - Or what if he used the neighbor's hose to wash the car, stealing the neighbor's water?
 - Or what if he threw his used rags on the neighbor's lawn?
 - Any message concerning the boy's love for his father was lost on the neighbor who saw just another unruly, thoughtless hooligan
- Which leads us into Chapter 5, with Paul moving away from discussions of behavior within the body to personal behaviors that mark our character

Eph. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

Eph. 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Eph. 5:3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;

Eph. 5:4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- Therefore, Paul says, let's imitate God as His children
 - The word "therefore" comes in reference to our mission as Christ's body
 - Paul could have said "So that we may accomplish our mission, be imitators..."
 - This is a call to missional living for the sake of the Gospel
 - This is not about earning or preserving your salvation
 - This is about being effective in the role Christ assigned to His body
 - There is simply no other way

- And it begins with walking in love
 - The phrase is certainly common, and everyone agrees with the concept
 - But when you see Paul's definition of what it means to walk in love, it gets harder
- Paul defines walking in love as walking in Christ's footsteps
 - Specifically, Christ willingly lay down His life for those who were spitting on Him and whipping Him
 - He took insults and fists and returned them with sacrificial forgiveness
 - This is the biblical meaning of "walking in love" which is showing everyone self-sacrificial, agape love
- This is walking in love, but it's hardly what the world means when it talks of love
 - But it is the love God expects, and it's a pleasing thing to our Father when we do it
 - If you and I are going to show that kind of love to others, then we must eliminate the behaviors that are contrary to that kind of love
 - And so what follows are an examination of the many ways we fail to walk in love
- Beginning with our personal purity
 - In v.3 Paul says if we want to walk in love as Christ walked, we can have no immorality, no impurity and no greed among the saints
 - These things can't even be named among us, Paul says
 - Which is to say that even the suggestion that such things are part of the body of Christ is harmful to our mission
 - If we thought Paul was going to go easy on us, it's clear Paul has no intention of skirting the tough issues
 - Immorality is a Greek word that always describes any conduct that defiles the marriage bed like fornication or adultery

- While impurity refers to any form of unholy living like using pornography or illegal drug use
- Finally greed seems to be connected to the earlier two thoughts, which means any uncontrolled appetite for evil things
- Paul begins with these things because they are exactly the opposite of walking in love
 - Walking in love means sacrificing the desires of self for the betterment of others
 - But these actions are all about serving self at the expense of others
- Fornication is having sex with someone without marrying them first
 - It's the most selfish form of love
 - It's stealing something precious from someone's future wife or husband
 - It's about serving our own greedy desires rather than sacrificing self for the sake of the other person and their future spouse
- Obviously, we can say the same things about an adulterous or homosexual relationship
 - They are illegitimate relationships born out of selfishness and greed
 - They don't love another person because they aren't for the betterment of the other person
 - They are merely ways we love ourselves
- In fact, every immorality (drug abuse, pornography, etc.) is a selfish act that hurts others, whether directly or indirectly
 - And therefore, we cannot allow such things to gain a perch inside the body of Christ
 - We cannot have even the suggestion that such things are compatible with a walk with Christ
 - Because their very existence in the body of Christ argues against the truth of our message

- We say we want to show Christ's love to the world but then we act in ways that are the opposite to the way Christ loved
- In Paul's day in Greek cities like Ephesus, these behaviors were commonplace and so he's concerned about these things making their way into the church
 - But don't think we're far removed from these concerns
 - Many Christians today struggle with various forms of immorality
 - But it's even more troubling to know that many Christians aren't even struggling anymore
 - They have conceded to the existence of these things in their lives without even putting up a fight, as if it's the new normal
- Many churches have come to accept these things as normal in our culture
 - Like young Christian couples living together before marriage
 - Or Christians talking openly about enjoying watching near-pornographic television shows and movies
 - Or kids in Christian families using illegal drugs or alcohol, caught in "sexting" scandals at school, etc.
- If we think this is the new normal in the Church, then we've lost the message of love Christ left for us to share with the world
 - Our message has merely become the world's message
 - Which is love yourself at all costs
 - And that message brings no one closer to God
- Finally, Paul moves from immoral behaviors to immoral speech in v.4
 - Like Jesus said:

Matt. 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt. 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

- What lies in our hearts will find its way out of our mouths soon enough
- And just as immoral and impure acts are contrary to love, so is vulgarity
- Let's look at each of Paul's concerns
 - Paul starts with filthy speech
 - Filthiness is obscene conversation
 - Like two men discussing a woman's body in lurid terms
 - Or using profanity
- Speaking in these ways is the opposite of love
 - It's abusive to others
 - And it's insensitive to those who will be justifiably offended by such things
 - In fact, there is probably no faster way to undermine your Christian witness than to engage in profane or obscene speech
 - And by the same token, there is no more obvious and powerful way to stand apart from the world than to refrain from such language
- Next, Paul tells the church to cease silly talk, which could be translated foolish talk
 - This is a broad category of speech, but think of it as any talk that is beneath us
 - And in particular, any conversation that diminishes us in the eyes of those we're trying to influence for Christ
 - For example, repeating silly phrases like a child might or speaking in a silly voice
 - Or talking seriously about meaningless things as if they were worthy of mature conversation
 - I think much of what passes for entertainment on the internet (e.g., internet memes, for example) might fall into this category
 - We all enjoy the occasional cat video

- But it's easy to get carried away with that sort of stuff to the point of acting juvenile
- I think this category of speech is especially challenging for teenagers
- It's a time in life when we're supposed to move beyond the silly and frivolous to serious concerns of life
- Let's encourage our Christian teens to mirror their adult aspirations with adult speech patterns
- Obviously, there can be moments in life when talking in silly ways is perfectly acceptable
 - Like when entertaining a baby or during private moments with your spouse
 - But when we carry these kinds of behaviors into a public setting, we encourage others to take us less seriously
 - And if that's who we become in front of our friends or acquaintances, then we'll find it difficult transitioning to serious discussions of eternal life
- And it's in that sense that we are unloving when we talk in this way
 - If we truly have love for the lost, then we will guard ourselves against looking frivolous or silly before them
 - We want to make sure they see us as serious, thoughtful people who can be trusted to offer meaning counsel on weighty matters
 - People don't seek eternal advice from people who can't act like an adult
- Finally, Paul asks us to put aside coarse jesting
 - He's talking about dirty jokes, and we all know one when we hear it
 - Keep in mind that this category also includes subtle dirty humor
 - Like double entendres that imply something profane
 - Once again, we know when we hear it
 - And term coarse jesting also includes crude remarks of any kind

- For example, making off-handed remarks about someone's spouse
- Thomas Constable tells a story of a time he attended a wedding where a guest proudly declared that she was the first person to get the groom drunk
- That was coarse jesting too
- Coarse talk of this sort isn't consistent with walking in love because it imposes on others
 - Either it offends
 - Or it incites lust
 - Or it celebrates depravity and sin in others
 - In all cases, it is contrary to love and detracts from our ability to represent Christ
- Instead of these speech patterns, use your tongue to give thanks, Paul says
 - First to the Lord Himself and then to others
 - Be someone who is a blessing with your mouth
 - Because in that way you will certainly stand apart from the world
 - Which can only serve to help you reach them for Christ
 - We've just begun the chapter and there is a lot more waiting for us here
 - Paul will move from individual purity to marriage and then family and to those in authority
 - We'll have plenty more to consider as we go
 - But before we look past today, give some sober thought to how you carry yourself in the things Paul mentioned
 - Remember, your job is to glorify the Father from a thankful, holy heart