

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SEVENTEEN

A Stirring Summons to Purity

Ephesians 5:1–7

In the Christian life, belief and behavior always go hand in hand. And they go in that order—first belief and then behavior. Because if there isn't behavior to back up the beliefs, not only will we be hypocrites, we will cause confusion among those searching for truth and answers.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN a child acts like his or her parent, we sometimes say with a smile, “The apple didn’t fall far from the apple tree.” Children naturally imitate their moms and dads in the way they gesture or laugh or walk or even in their tone of voice. Has your friend’s teenaged son ever answered the phone and you thought for certain that you were talking to his father? The son and father sounded just alike! And the same is true for daughters and mothers. Like parent, like child.

Paul tapped into our natural instinct to imitate our parents when he urged us to model our lives after our heavenly Father. “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). But how can we imitate God?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll suggests these ways:

He’s good; we should be good. He’s kind; we must be kind. He’s just; we should be fair. He’s holy; we are to be pure. He’s full of grace; we ought to demonstrate grace toward one another. The list could go on and on.¹



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Jesus spent His life imitating His Father. In fact, the Son mirrored the Father’s qualities so clearly that He could state with honesty: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!” (John 14:9). That’s our goal—that people would see in us the same character traits of our Father, just as people saw the Father’s traits in Jesus. And, as we’ll examine in this study, our first baby steps in imitating God is to “walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2 NASB).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imitating God would be impossible were it not for Christ’s Spirit who lives in us and through us. Jesus stated truly, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But He also made this promise: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!” (15:7).

As you open God’s Word, take a moment to yield your will to Christ, acknowledge your need for His power, and pray for His life of love to fill you and flow through you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 5:1–7* in the New Living Translation alongside the New American Standard Bible. As you read, note the contrasting themes: love versus sexual sin, self-sacrifice versus greed, Christ’s kingdom versus the world, following the example of Christ versus partnering with sinners.



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 **Observation: Walk in Love Not Sexual Sin**

Now take a few minutes to write down your observations in the chart below.² What did Paul say about each of the contrasting themes?

Love (<i>Ephesians 5:1-2</i>)	Sexual Sin (<i>Ephesians 5:3-4</i>)
Self-Sacrifice (<i>5:2</i>)	Greed (<i>5:3, 5</i>)
Christ's Kingdom (<i>5:5</i>)	The World (<i>5:5</i>)
Following Christ (<i>5:1-2</i>)	Partnering with Sinners (<i>5:6-7</i>)



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Do you observe any other contrasts or perhaps any similarities?

At the helm of sexual immorality and impurity is Captain Greed, the obsessive impulse of our nature that steers us into sin's treacherous waters. Why do you think Paul included "greed" in his prohibition of sexual sin? What is the connection?

Paul not only warned his readers to stay away from sexual sins, he added, *Don't even joke about sex!* "Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you" (Ephesians 5:4). What did Paul say to do instead (5:4)? How does this practice break the bad habit of vulgarity?



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Who created sex? Our heavenly Father, who gave it to the first couple that He married. He told them, “I give you the joy of intimacy which can be enjoyed between the two of you.” And the implication is, “not with anybody else.” So give thanks to God for the gift of sex. He put it together in its beauty and joy and innocence between a couple who is married.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Walk in Love”

As we interpret this passage, let’s explore deeper Paul’s concept of love, particularly as it relates to our understanding of sexuality. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “Live a life filled with love” (Ephesians 5:2), also translated, “walk in love” (5:2 NASB)? What form of love did Paul have in mind? Read the following references to “love” in Ephesians—God’s love for us and our love for others—and write down what you gather is the meaning of “walk in love.”

God’s love for us: [1:4](#); [3:18–19](#); [5:2](#)

Our love for others: [4:2](#), [16](#); [5:25](#)



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What do you conclude is Paul's definition of love and the meaning of "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2)?

How would you say that "walking in love" guards us from sexual sin?

Jesus, who left heaven and took upon Himself human flesh and lived on this earth a little over thirty-three years, modeled the life of God. What characterized Him? Two things: self-sacrifice and a fragrant aroma. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Those Who Inherit the Kingdom of God

Loving others with the self-sacrificing love of Christ is the highest form of imitating God. But we must receive by faith Christ's great love before we can share it. Those who haven't received Christ's love have no relationship with Him. Their immoral and greedy lifestyle exposes both their lack of faith and their rejection of the kingdom of God in favor of the kingdom of this world.

Paul wrote these somber words:

You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. (Ephesians 5:5)



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He wrote a similar statement to the church in Corinth. It also appears within the context of Paul's warnings against sexual sins. Compare Paul's statements to help you understand his teaching on this subject. Read *1 Corinthians 6:9–11*. What did Paul add in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that helps clarify the distinction between those who inherit the kingdom of God and those who don't?

When we come to the cross of Christ, we are able to be changed. Until then, we're a lost soul. —Chuck Swindoll

Application: A Stirring Summons for Purity

Why would we even *want* to imitate immoral idolators who worship this world and not God? We wouldn't! How much better it is for us to walk in step with God by walking in His Son's footsteps of love. This is the crux of Paul's stirring summons for us to live in purity.

In his message, Chuck Swindoll sums up Paul's teaching with these final thoughts:

- *Sexual perversions degrade our humanity.* Immorality never enhances our character.
- *Sensual talk and gutter humor serve no beneficial purpose.* Vulgar language never makes us better people.
- *Trafficking in sexual sins is incompatible with the Christian faith.* The self-gratifying, self-centered ways of the world oppose the way of Christ.
- *Stay away from anyone who tries to convince you that living close to the edge of sexual sin is acceptable.* Paul makes this point clear:

Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.
(Romans 13:13–14)



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Clothing ourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and walking in His love is the strongest antidote to sexual sin. Put Paul’s summons for purity into action, first, by the way you think about sexual sin and those who participate in it. What changes in your thinking do you need to make?

Second, what changes in your actions can you make?

Finally, use the prayer below to invite the Lord to transform your spirit into a place where the love of Christ lives and pours out to others.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I desire my behavior to reflect my beliefs about Jesus Christ. He who loves me and sacrificed Himself for me is the One I want to follow. Help me see others through the lens of His love instead of the impulse of my own greed. Enable me to see sexual sin for what it is—a degrading imitation of Your beautiful gift of sexual intimacy. And, finally, bless me with an ache for Your kingdom that nothing else on earth can satisfy. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 265.
2. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”

