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Love = Love?

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Series: The Church and the Home

Ephesians 5:1-14

## **BIG IDEA – YOU WILL BECOME LIKE THAT WHICH YOU BEHOLD**

Hey, happy Father's Day, dads and grandpas and great-grandpas. God loves dads. How do we know that? Well, because God has always been a dad. Think about this with me for a second. Theologians who think about these kinds of things... It's deep, but here's what they say.

God has not always been a creator because he was not a creator until he created you and me, God has not always been a lawgiver because he wasn't a lawgiver until he gave the Law, and God was not always a redeemer because he didn't become a redeemer until he redeemed us, but God has always been a dad because God has always had a Son, and they've been coequal and coeternal. I know it hurts your head.

Happy Father's Day. Look. I want us to see something about that Jaquez video really quickly. I can't replay it for you right now, but about a minute in, he realizes... He says this. He says, "I realized that God was my Father," and then he goes on and talks about Jesus as his great older brother.

Let me just summarize what he said in three movements. This is what I want us to hear every day, but maybe especially on Father's Day. God has done something *for* us. We call it *salvation*. That's the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. Once you realize God has done something *for* you, then hopefully you realize God wants to do something *in* you, and that's what Jaquez was sharing about. He was sharing about what God was doing in his life.

That's what we call *sanctification*. It basically means becoming the godliest version of yourself or becoming more and more like Jesus or becoming practically and progressively holy. It's all the same thing. Then he realized something else, and that's the last part of the video you saw. God wants to do something not just for me and not

just in me but *through* me, and that's what we call *service*. That's ministry, mission, and mercy, and all of that.

Let me just speak to the dads on Father's Day. Dads, I love you. Dads, I'm one of you. Here's what I want to say. I'm going to give you a little sermon before the big sermon. So, on Father's Day you get two sermons. Amen? You're not that excited about that. This is a really little one.

So, there's this interesting thing. There are just a couple of times where God the Father shows up explicitly in the Gospels and we get to see his relationship with his Son. I think it gives us a paradigm, dads, of what we should be doing. Here's what it is really quickly. At Jesus' baptism and Jesus' transfiguration, God the Father shows up. Here's what we learn about being a dad.

Dads are present at the big events in their kids' lives. Wow. Okay, that's good. Secondly, dads speak. When God the Father shows up, he's speaking. Some of you men are way more known for your silence than your speaking. (It needs to change today, and it can.) We don't know, Dad, what you're thinking, and we don't know what you're feeling. You need to speak more.

Then the third thing God the Father does both times he shows up in his Son's life in the Gospels is he lets everyone around him know how proud he is of his Son. So, if you're like, "What do I do as a dad?" be present, be speaking, and be proud.

Now, I know also... I said this on Mother's Day in a different way, but I know Father's Day is hard for some because people have father wounds. Their dad abdicated or he abused or he abandoned his responsibility and his role in their life. If that's you, we're going to pray for you in a minute.

Let me just speak to men who might have father wounds. Here's what you need to do. There are two things if you have a father wound. First of all, you need to realize that every Christian has two dads. I don't mean that in some progressive way. I mean you have a father on earth and you have a Dad in heaven. Sometimes you have to look to your Dad in heaven because your dad on earth was not the best example.

Then, secondly... This is a word for some of you. The way your father wound gets healed is when you become a father. Being a good father will be part of your healing, and that could begin before you become a biological dad by being a spiritual father to others. So, let's just take a moment. Let's pray for dads, and then we're going to dive into Ephesians. Let's do that.

Lord, we thank you for dads. Though our society doesn't respect them, though in every sitcom they're the dumbest person, we know that Dad is unbelievably

important. It has been said that every nonprofit is started because of the failure of Dad. We just pray for dads to embrace their responsibility to protect and provide, to be present, to be speaking, to be proud of their kids. Kids so desire at every age... "Does Dad see me, and does he like what he sees, and is he proud of me?" I pray that we would be dads who do that.

I pray for anyone who has a father wound in here. They're deep, and a lot of times, it's not until our 30s or 40s or sometimes 50s when there's this dysfunction in our lives, and we look back, and one of the main reasons is father wounds we haven't admitted and haven't dealt with. I pray that our church would be a place of health, hope, and healing when it comes to these areas. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

You've heard this before. It has been said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. You've heard that, right? If somebody is imitating you, you might be upset, because maybe you had a great business idea, and maybe there's intellectual property associated with it. Someone is copying what you're doing, but the reason they're copying what you're doing is because they think what you're doing is great. Imitation is the highest form of flattery.

We see this with little kids. I know I talked about little kids last week as well. Think about this for a second. What do little kids do when they're 3 or 4? They start to play dress-up. And what's the first thing they do? Well, one of the first games they like to play together is "house." The girls are "Mommy" and the boys are "Daddy." What are they doing? They're imitating.

Here's the principle of imitation: *admiration always comes before imitation*. We imitate that or who we admire. Think about it this way. Admiration is the reflex of your conscience. You almost can't help who you admire. You're going to see somebody you admire, and then you're going to want to imitate them.

This is, by the way, one of the reasons we watch movies. I know you think you watch movies because you want to have a good time and you want to be amused, but part of the reason we watch movies is we want to learn how to live and we need role models. Did you know that when the first *Top Gun* came out back in the 80s (and *Top Gun: Maverick* obviously came out last summer)...

Now, again, correlation or causation? It's hard to tell. But they can tell there was a massive influx of more men wanting to go into the navy after that movie came out. That's interesting. Why is that? They admired Maverick, and they wanted to imitate him.

You'll find this in your life. There will be people you'll admire. You're like, "I can't believe how good of shape you're in" or "I can't believe how your prayer life is and

how you walk with God" or "I can't believe how well you steward and are generous with your finances." Or you'll see a couple, and you're like, "You guys have been married for 20 years, and you still like each other. How did you do that?"

You'll see families, and they're raising godly kids. Here's what you should do, and this is what I've tried to do for 20 years now. If there's someone you admire, get to know them, and then learn and ask them questions about the things you admire, and then try to imitate that without being a copycat.

Why do I say all this today? Because I want you to turn to verse 1 of chapter 5. Here's what it says. ***"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."*** The Bible tells us to imitate a lot of things. Sometimes Paul will say, "Hey, imitate..." And he'll point to some leader. He's like, "Hey, there's this guy named Epaphroditus, and he suffered a lot for you guys. You should be like him to bring the gospel to others. Be willing to suffer."

Other times he'll tell you to imitate a church. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 he does this. He goes, "Hey, guys, there's this great church, and it's poor and it's suffering, but it's unbelievably generous." He writes to another church and goes, "You guys should be like this church." Sometimes Paul says, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" or "Follow me as I follow Christ."

This is one of the only times we are told that we are to imitate God. Here's the principle. This is the rest of the sermon, and we're going to get there the rest of this morning. *You will become what you behold.* You know this. This is why you care about who your kids hang out with. You're like, "Why do I care so much?" Because you know they're going to become who they behold.

This is why there's this big conversation about the public school system and what's in libraries and what our kids are being taught. Why do we care? We care because we know that whatever they behold somehow they're going to become. This is why when our kids get older and become teenagers, we're like, "What are you listening to? What are you watching? Who are you following on social media? What podcasts are you listening to? What YouTube channels are you subscribed to?"

Why? Because...you know this...you will become what you behold. Or here's another way to say it really practically for us today: *there are more things in life that are caught than are taught.* I mean, it's Father's Day, so let's talk about Dad for a second. How do you teach someone to be a dad? Good luck with that. What do dads do? How would you talk about protecting and providing? We can give you the language, but it's very, very hard to teach someone how to be a dad. You have to see it.

This is why, by the way, we're telling you and encouraging you, "Come to the Weekender and get in a Community Group." Here's why. We want you to get in a Community Group because there are a lot of things that need to be caught that can't be taught. You need to get around other people so it can be caught and not just be taught, and other people need to get around you so it can be caught and not just taught.

In a good Community Group, everybody is watching everybody else's life, not in some critical, judgmental way but asking, "What are you doing well, and how can I learn?" If you have a group of a bunch of different people... We're not all good at the same things, and we're learning how to grow together. Well, that's the principle of that.

So, what I want us to do with the rest of our time... He's going to tell us to imitate God. Now, this is interesting. We're going to go deep for a minute, but you guys can handle this. Theologians talk about the *incommunicable* attributes of God and the *communicable* attributes of God.

So, how do we imitate God? Well, there are certain things we can't imitate. For example, God doesn't change. He doesn't need to mature, and he doesn't need to grow, and he doesn't need to develop. He doesn't need to learn new things, and we do, so we're not like God in that. Then you could take the omnipotence and omnipresence of God, and we go, "Okay. We're not all-powerful. We're not all-knowing. We're not everywhere at once."

But then there are a lot of categories... Basically, all of the communicable attributes of God are mental and moral. We have knowledge. We have a moral compass. We know right and wrong. So, here... And you'll see this. I'm going to show it to you in just a minute. We're only going to be in these first 14 verses. Here's what he tells us. Here's the big message. Imitate God today by doing two things: *walk in love* and *walk in light*. That's it. I'll unpack all this.

*Walk in love*. What is love? Or what *isn't* love, we should say? What is the opposite of love? Some people say, "The opposite of love is hate." Actually, no. In fact, sometimes you'll find yourselves hating things that people you love are doing, and you hate those things because you love those people.

Do you want to know what the opposite of love is? Indifference. When is a marriage in trouble? Not when the couple is fighting. Not when they're still willing to talk about everything and wrestle it out together. A marriage is in big trouble when one or both of the spouses stops caring. The opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is indifference. We'll get there.

Then *walk in light*. This is interesting. That's all about personal holiness. I heard a pastor say... He was an older pastor, and he was observing the church in America. He said there are a lot of great things (and I think this is true) that have happened in the church in America. Like, we've recovered the gospel-centered nature of our churches.

Guys, the idea that we get up here... And we're not the first. We learned from other people. But the idea that we get up here and always talk about planting other churches... Churches were not doing that 20 or 30 years ago. The idea that we are focused on loving the city and a recovery of world missions...

Anyway, these are all great things, but what this pastor said is there's one hole in Christianity in America. He said it's personal holiness. When's the last time you heard a sermon or read a book or had a good conversation with someone, and it was about your or their or our personal holiness? Well, today he's going to say, "Walk in love and walk in light." Don't fall into indifference and focus on holiness. I'll show you this.

## 01 WHAT IS LOVE? (CULTURE)

Follow me. We're going to be in verses 1 and 2 to start. Let's look at this together. Watch. The word *love* shows up, in some form, three times in the first two verses. "***Therefore be imitators of God...***" We already talked about that. Then he says (here it is), "***...as beloved children.***" Here it is again. "***And walk in love...***" The second time it's used. "***...as Christ loved us...***" The third time it's used. "***...and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***"

Okay. We have to talk about love for a while this morning. Part of the reason is we're really confused about love because, in our culture, which is unique, and in our language, which is unique, there's only one word for *love*. So, we say things like, "I love my wife" and "I love my husband" and "I love my kids" and "I love tacos." You go, "Is it all the same?"

By the way, if you want to read more on this, C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Four Loves* where he breaks up the different Greek words and what they mean. So, we have one word. Do you know what the main word for *love* in the New Testament is? If you've been around church for a while, maybe you've heard of the word *agape*. Now, here's what I don't want us to do. I don't want us to get sloppy with *agape*. I know. That was a theological dad joke. "Don't get sloppy with your *agape*."

In other words, sometimes what happens with us is we don't have a precise definition of what love is. The way you do that (this is the way you get anything) is you have to have what are called *affirmations* and *denials*. "This is what it is, and this is what it

isn't." Let me tell you, first, what love isn't. I think you're going to feel this. I'm going to tell you what culture thinks love is, but it's not.

First, love is not a feeling. Or I should say it more carefully. Love is not *only* a feeling. There's a component of that. We'll get there in a few minutes. But love is not sentimentalism. See, the way people act... This is what you're going to believe unless you're thinking critically and biblically.

If you're thinking culturally, this is what culture thinks. Culture thinks love is like something that comes upon me that I passively engage in like a victim. You'll hear this. Have you ever heard someone say they fell in love? I know what they mean. We've all had that experience if we're married. I know what they mean, but have you ever heard people talk about falling out of love? "We just fell out of love."

It's like, "What happened?" "I don't know. It left us. It's like it was this spirit or this feeling or this emotion, and it left us." How do we know love is more than just a feeling? I can give you this biblically. It's very simple to defend this. It's that love is commanded. So is joy. That's a whole other sermon.

Those are the things you think you can't control. "I just can't be joyful right now." Well, it's commanded. "I just can't be loving right now. I don't feel..." It's commanded. It's so commanded it would take the rest of our time together if I just walked you through every command to love. The whole Law is summed up in "Love God and love each other." So, it's commanded.

Okay. That's the first thing. The second thing people think love is is affirmation. Here's what people think: "If you love me, you will make me feel good all the time. In fact, if you confront me on some sin in my life or talk to me about how I'm not being a very good parent or challenge me on my finances or ask me about my sin life, I'm going to probably say something to you like, 'That's not very loving.'"

Here's what happens. This is what happens in a lot of homes. This is about to get really real for just a second for some of you. Here's what happens. Someone's kid wants to live an alternative lifestyle in Asheville. This happens all the time. Then the parents have to go, "Well, what do I do with Johnny?" They say, "I love Johnny, but do I affirm it?"

By the way, most moral relativism happens when someone gets a relative who has some lifestyle. You become a moral relativist when a relative starts living an alternative lifestyle. And it's hard, right? But it is not loving to affirm sin. But I know it's complex.

So, then you start saying, "Johnny's girlfriend is not a believer, and they're living together. They're cohabitating and sleeping together. I want to invite Johnny on vacation, but if I invite Johnny, do I have to invite his girlfriend?" This is real stuff, guys. "And if Johnny's girlfriend comes, do they sleep in separate rooms? What do we do?" Love is not affirmation. We'll get to what it is.

Okay. Here's another big one in our culture: "Love equals love." Have you seen these? If you live in Clemmons and Lewisville, maybe these yard signs haven't made it to you yet. They're coming. They're in Ardmore. They're in West End. They're all over Buena Vista. "Love equals love." In fact, there's even the shorter one. Have you seen the yellow "equal" sign inside of a blue square?

Your HR department, unfortunately, probably has this on its door. The diversity/equity/inclusion office at your university or your kid's university 100 percent has that sticker front and center. Here's what this is. I want to explain this to us. "Love equals love" is basically saying a feeling is an excuse to do whatever I want to do sexually. That's what it's saying.

We live in a society that does not want to put any guardrails or guidelines at all around sexuality. Here's what the culture needs to hear. I'm trying to help us, because part of it is we know these things are wrong, but we don't know how to defend them and articulate them.

So, here's what you need to understand and tell people. "Hey, listen. Sex doesn't make every relationship better." People need to hear that. I won't give crude examples. I could. You could think about a bunch of relationships that if you added sex to that relationship, it would make that relationship worse.

Well, let me give you another one: when people have sex before they're married. "Well, everybody is doing that." I know everybody is doing that. It makes the relationship worse. Actually, here's what it does: it makes the relationship dysfunctional, because you're saying with your body what you haven't said with your life. I see this all the time.

Young people start having sex before they're married, and guess what: their relationship should have been over months ago, sometimes years ago, and that's really sad. Guess the only reason the relationship is still going on: because of the sexual component of the relationship. Everything else is dysfunctional, but they've added that in early.

So, we can't say, "Love equals love" or "Love is a feeling." So what is love? Let me just give you the best definition. I heard a guy named John Frame, a really smart guy, "Yoda smart" kind of guy, down in RTS (Reformed Theological Seminary) in Orlando.



Let me give you this. It's helpful. I think this is the best, most comprehensive definition. He said *love* is allegiance, action, and affection. I'll unpack this.

*Allegiance, action, and affection.* Why would I say that? Well, *allegiance* is this. If you want more feelings of love... And we all do. We all want more in our marriage and with our kids and with our friends. If you want deeper feelings, you need deeper commitments. The greatest picture of love symbolically that we, thankfully, still have in our culture is the wedding ceremony.

When I did my first wedding, I had this guy who was in his 80s, and he said to me... He was a former pastor. He was giving me advice on doing a wedding. He said, "Don't try to be funny, and don't try to be cute. Focus on the vows." I've always tried to listen to that advice except for the part about not being funny or cute, but I'm always focused on the vows.

The reason for that is the center of a wedding ceremony... Most people don't know this. The reason people come to a wedding ceremony is not for the live band, the open bar afterward, the cool location, the dance party, or whatever. The reason, historically, you come to it is to watch the vows. Here's the interesting thing. We don't really understand this in marriage. That's why the divorce rate is so high. We don't understand the idea of commitment.

Here's where we still get it. I think it's spiritual and biological. We get it with our kids. I don't know how it exactly works, but everybody knows, "I am completely committed to my kids. Even if they're breaking my heart, even if they're a prodigal, even if they're born and have many mental or physical disabilities, I'm all in. I'm not going anywhere." This is just what a dad and mom do. It's the foundation.

Okay. So, there's allegiance. Then there's *action*. The Hebrew word for *love* is *ahabah*, which means a love of the will. So, if you want deeper feelings, you need deeper commitments and more consistent action. I heard a story, a true story, of a guy. He was going to a Christian counselor, and he said to the Christian counselor, "I want to divorce my wife." Now, he didn't have biblical grounds for divorce, but he wanted to divorce the wife.

As the story goes, the counselor obviously didn't want him to divorce his wife, so he played a trick on him. He said, "I've got an idea. Here's what you need to do." He said, "Before you divorce her, I want you to go home and, over the next three months, I want you to be as servant-hearted toward her as possible. I want you to serve her and be kind to her and meet all of her needs in a timely and consistent way, and then she'll never see it coming. As soon as you do that for three months, then we're going to hand her the divorce papers."

You know what happened, right? This guy goes home, and he starts to... And this is a word for some of you in *your* marriages. You're like, "I don't feel anything." Because you're not doing anything. He goes home and starts to serve her, and he starts to have all of the feelings they used to have because he started to do the actions. He goes back to the counselor and says, "I don't want to get a divorce anymore," and the counselor goes, "I know. I played a trick on you."

Allegiance, action, and affection. That's the order. We have it completely reversed in our culture. We see God makes commitments to us, sends his Son to perform the actions, and then the Holy Spirit gives us the affections. So, we have to understand this. Okay. He says, "***And walk in love...***" Then he says, "***...as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***"

In verse 1 he calls us *beloved children*. In other words, the motive to love other people is that we've already been loved. Just a word on this really quickly. God loves us with what's called an *efficacious love*. An *efficacious love* is a love that transforms and changes us to be more lovely ourselves and to love other people better.

Every once in a while (or maybe more often than once in a while), you'll see an older lady, and she wouldn't be what *Cosmopolitan* magazine would say is pretty, but she is beautiful, uniquely beautiful. In almost every case I've ever seen this, that woman has been well loved by her husband and, often, by her dad before that, and that efficacious love made her lovely. That's what God does to us.

Then it says we're supposed to love a certain way. Do you see it in verse 2? We're supposed to love as Christ loved us. Now that's interesting. Literally, it says, "Love other people the way Christ loved you," and then it talks about the sacrifice he gave. When we think of the cross, we always have to think substitute *and* example. We can't think only of substitute. That's the temptation for us to think. "Jesus was our substitute. He was our perfection in his life and our penalty in his death."

We need to celebrate that. That's the heart of Christianity, but the Bible (1 Peter does the same thing) talks about the cross not just as (most importantly) the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus but as an example for how we're supposed to live. What does this mean? What is the heart of love? I already gave you the longer definition. The heart of love is self-giving and sacrificial, which is not what we wanted to hear, probably.

Don't we all know this? Every time you see it in the news or you see a show or a movie on Netflix, and you see somebody give themselves for others, it's involuntary. You get emotional. I want to show my boys (and my daughter too), when they get older, the HBO series *Band of Brothers*. It's a powerful story. It's a classic example of

the guy who jumps on the grenade to protect all of his friends around him, and we all just go, "That's the deepest form of love."

This is why one of my favorite movies of all time is *Armageddon*, if you've ever seen it. There's that scene at the end where Bruce Willis basically gets Ben Affleck out of the way and says, "You're not going to sacrifice yourself. You're going to go home and love my daughter. I'm going out there," and he sacrifices himself.

So, we know this, but how does that work for you and me? Most likely, you and I are not going to get a chance to give our lives for another person at one moment in a dramatic way where we die and go to heaven and everybody remembers the one dramatic thing we did to save somebody else.

Here's what it's going to be more like. How do you lay your life down daily in little ways? I can't answer that for you. It's almost like this. It's almost like if God said your life is worth a million dollars. I know it's worth more than that, but let's just say God said, "Here's a million dollars that represents your life."

We all want to do some dramatic act where we get to lay it all down at one time, and God says, "Actually, what I want you to do is lay \$10 down this morning and \$15 down tomorrow. There might be a moment where I need you to lay \$10,000 down in some dramatic way for somebody else."

How can you lay your life down in little ways for the people you love? I'll talk to the men on Father's Day. Guys, we're supposed to love our wives as Christ loved the church, and we don't want to watch her show. We're supposed to lay our lives down sacrificially for our wives, and we don't want to go to her restaurant.

Every time I've ever watched... Because I do get fascinated when I see somebody do something heroic and they die giving their life for someone else. Then, usually, what do they do? They interview their kids, and they interview their wife or their husband, and they interview their friends.

And what do you find out? They were that type of person. They'd been doing little sacrificial things their whole life that got them ready. Some of you think, "If something big happened, if some big opportunity came, I would lay my life down." You probably wouldn't if you're not laying your life down in little ways today.

## **02 SEX & LOVE (A CHRISTIAN SEXUAL ETHIC)**

So, we have to talk about love, but then look at what comes next. You have to see this. We have to talk about sex. Verse 3. By the way, it's very interesting that he talks

about sex right after love, because we get those two confused. I think that's not a new idea. We've always been confused, so Paul puts them together and explains them.

***"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints."*** So, Paul gives us three different words for sexual sin: *sexual immorality*, which is the word *porneia*, which is where we get *pornography* from; the word *impurity*, which is uncleanness...

That's more of the experience of participating in sexual sin. I've talked to guys before who give in to some type of sexual sin, and then they'll feel like they have to get a shower. What's up with that? It's their soul telling their body they're dirty. That's what's happening.

Then *coveting*. That's very interesting. *Coveting* can be talking about a lot of different things. If you go back to the tenth commandment, what is the first thing we're told not to covet? Not the ox, not the donkey, not the house. The first thing we're told not to covet is another man's wife. So, in some sense, sexual sin is a coveting as well as a lusting and as well as uncleanness.

Anyway, you see all this. Look. I don't want to be the guy who... And I'm not, actually. I only talk about sexual sin and sexuality as much as it comes up. I've told some of you who have been around here for a while I didn't know we'd talk about suffering and sexuality so much, but they just come up everywhere.

Here are a couple of things I need to talk about. Why do I need to talk about this issue? Think about this with me for a second, and you'll see this is true. Almost always (and certainly right now), the number-one pastoral issue in the church and the number-one cultural issue in the world are both sexual in nature.

What's the number-one pastoral issue in any church? You don't have to be a pastor to get this. You don't have to be in a Community Group to get this. What's going to be the number-one problem with men and women in the church? Sexual addiction of some sort.

Yes, there's also anxiety and depression. Yes, there are also addictions to substances. There are a lot of other things, obviously, but I'm just telling you, in 10 years of college ministry and now seven years of being here, I know that is the number-one problem in the church. If somebody is ensnared in a sin, it's normally a sexual sin. So we have to talk about it.

It's also the number-one cultural issue. We're not picking this fight, but whether it's the whole gender versus sexuality and how we break those apart and gender reassignment surgery and the pronouns your boss wants you to put in your

LinkedIn... I was talking to a friend. He goes on a Zoom call. Everybody on the Zoom call has the "he/him," "she/her," or "they/them." It's everywhere, and it's invading everything, so we have to talk about it.

Now, here's what we have to say. This will make some of you who are a little bit more religious feel uncomfortable. We have to say that everybody is a sexual sinner...you, me...all of us. The fall was probably most immediately felt in our sexuality. We're all sexual sinners. We're all sexually broken. We all have sexually disordered desires, and our culture is not helping with that. They're going everywhere.

So, what I want to talk about for a while... In the same way we did about love, I want to talk to you about our culture's sexual ethic and then the Christian sexual ethic, because Paul is giving us the Christian sexual ethic. By the way, this is what's called a *vice list*. Paul has vice lists, and he has virtue lists.

Sometimes he puts them together. Sometimes he separates them. Sometimes he only gives us one of them in a letter. Every vice list is different except they all have one thing in common: sexual immorality. It's in every list, and it's almost always the first thing mentioned. This is why I'm spending a lot of time this morning talking about it.

Okay. What is the culture's sexual ethic? Because they have one even if they can't articulate it, so I'm going to articulate it for us. First, "Sex is only physical." That's what they say. It's like, "If I'm hungry, I eat. If I'm tired, I sleep. If I have a sexual desire for something, I engage in it." That's the world's view of it. How do we know that sex is more than just physical? Because almost everybody's greatest regrets in life are sexual in nature.

If a woman is beat up, she will often (not always) report it, but if a woman is raped, she is very unlikely to report it. Now, why would that be? There's something more shameful with our sexuality, at times, and what's done to us or what we do. Why is it that men with the deepest sexual issues often come from homes with no dad? Sex is more than just physical; it's not less than physical.

Here's the second thing that has happened with sex in our culture. Here's the sexual ethic of our day that's particularly prevalent on a college campus. "All you need to engage in sexual activity is consent." The old view was covenant. You had to stand before your friends, family, God, and government and commit your whole life. Then you could have sex. Today it's dropped to consent, and you'll see that that's bankrupt, because this is why we're having all of these...

This is actually why the "Me Too" movement started: because consent is not a good enough reason. What's the problem with a college campus? We don't have time to get into all of the problems of a college campus, but at the student level, I can tell you

what the problem with the college campus is. There's a whole other problem at the administrative level, but at the student level, the problem with the college campus is alcohol, obviously.

Consent doesn't work with alcohol. I mean, think about it. "What happened? Were you drinking? Was he drinking? Was she drinking? How much did you drink?" How about *this* on the college campus? Consent plus regret. Take alcohol away. Consent, but later I don't like that I consented. Well, what do we do with that? If you don't know this, on college campuses there are whole court systems just for the college campus, just to bring all of these trials and cases, because consent is way too low of a level for sexual intimacy.

Thirdly, "Sex is safe." Have you heard this? I grew up in the 90s, so, the safe sex movement. It's very interesting. There was a very well done, very winsome sexual purity campaign that Cru did on college campuses. They put these posters and billboards all over college campuses, and it was tastefully done.

It was the four or five major condom companies. It was a condom from each one of those with the name underneath it, and all that, and it was put on this big screen. Then underneath it said, "...too bad there isn't one for your heart." People weren't mad about it. It struck a deep chord in people's lives.

I mean, everybody knows this. Sex isn't safe. The AIDS epidemic of the 80s and 90s told us that. In the Victorian era, you could get syphilis and go blind. Everybody knows. Sex isn't safe because of disease. Sex isn't safe because of the chance of pregnancy. Sex isn't safe because of all of the emotional connections to it.

Okay. So, that's the world's sexual ethic in a nutshell. Here's the Christian sexual ethic: *all sex outside of heterosexual marriage is sinful*. That's my answer to every question. That's the junk-drawer answer. It's like, "Yes, friends with benefits is sinful. Netflix and chill is sinful. Homosexuality is sinful. Pornography is sinful. Fornication is sinful. Hookup/shack-up/breakup culture is sinful. Lust and fantasy lives are sinful."

This is an act of faith. You have to believe that because God designed sex, he knows how to direct it. Sex is like fire. Thank God for fire. The discovery of fire was like, "Now we can heat our homes and cook our food." That's exactly what fire does. It can bring warmth and all of these other things.

But what does fire do also? If it's not in a fireplace, it will burn up and destroy you, your kids, and everything you've ever loved. Fire is a great example of what sexuality is. It needs a fireplace. So, the first thing we have to say is all sex outside of heterosexual marriage is sinful, but also forgivable. You have to say both of those.

The second thing we have to say is God has purposes for sex. Let me just give you them really quickly. There are three purposes for sex. We're having the "birds and bees" talk this morning just for a few minutes. It's helpful, because our culture is so strong right now, we need to be more sophisticated than "We just don't do certain things." We need to have a whole comprehensive worldview.

Sex is for *pleasure*, obviously. The Song of Solomon is the greatest image of that. We have eight chapters about the physical and visible pleasures of sexual intimacy in marriage. So, check. Obviously pleasure. Our world understands that.

Second, *procreation*. Weirdly, we've separated sex from marriage and sex from kids. That's a whole other sermon. That's the birth control pill. Think about this. God decided to create new life at the moment of deepest connection between the husband and the wife. That's how he designed it.

So, there's pleasure, there's procreation, and then it's *protection*. That's 1 Corinthians 7. You can read that with your DNA Group. It's a long conversation, but 1 Corinthians 7 basically says the sexual relationship of a husband and wife is one of the main things... It's not the only thing but one of the things that guards a person's sexuality from going places it should never go.

So, what do we do with all this? Part of it is we have to be able to learn how to talk about sex in a compelling way to the next generation. Look at the standard. Here's the standard. Let me give you this really quickly. If you go back to verse 3, here's what he says.

The standard is, "***But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named...***" I like the NIV even better. It's a different translation. It's more literal. It says sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness... There must not even be a hint of it among you.

What Paul is giving us is a standard. You think, "What is the standard for sexuality among the world?" "Don't get caught. Make sure it's between consenting adults. Look at the menu but don't order, or order but don't eat." It's like, "Let's get as close to sin as possible." Here we're told, "Let it not even be a hint."

Now, why is that? Because every other standard will lead you downhill. Whatever little amount of sexual sin you allow into your life, like any other sin, it will just grow. This is a word for some of you. Every person in here is three decisions away from committing gross sexual sin and, by connection, ruining your life and your witness.

Most of us are not one decision away. Most of us are three. I would say *all* of us are three decisions... By the way, the three decisions don't happen, like, today, tomorrow,

and the next day. You may have already made one of them four years ago by letting something into your life, and you may make another decision that's going to connect that more in the next year.

If you ever talk to people... There are a lot of people like this who have fallen into sexual sin, and then they've been restored, and usually they end up having a ministry to help people. They all tell you the exact same story. It's like the same movie, the same book, all the time. It's some version of "How did you get there?" "One step at a time." "How did you get there?" "Not overnight but over time. It's all of the decisions we made and the things we let in."

So, he says, "Don't let there even be a hint." But let me say this. We can't just tell the next generation, "Not even a hint of sexual immorality." That's a good word. That's the biblical word. Let me give two other things really quickly as we think, because I want us to get better at talking to the next generation about sex. We have to tell a better story about sex than the world does.

One of the things we have to do is we have to talk to the next generation about sex positively. Here's the message most people get from their Christian parents and their youth pastor and everything: "Sex is dirty and gross and evil. Save it for the one you love." Here's what happens with sex. People either demonize it because of a moralistic, religious home where they thought it was evil...

I actually had a young couple come up to me afterward last night, and they were basically saying that they grew up in this purity culture that overly demonized and talked about sex as if it was gross, and then when they got married, they had a lot of sexual problems, because it was hard to turn something on that they had been told was bad their whole lives.

We can't demonize it. We can't idolize it. That's the other side of the culture. That's being awash in pornography and having massive fantasy lives. And we can't trivialize it. That's what some of you want to do. "It's not a big deal." Your sexual drive is a big deal, and if you don't know that, I'm scared for you. It's a very, very big deal.

The second thing we have to do with the younger generation... Hear this. This is going to sound heretical until I explain it a little bit more. We can't focus only on virginity. I was a part of (I didn't teach it; I was a kid during it, a teenager during it) the purity, silver ring thing, the purity culture movement, which had a lot of good things. Churches do the same thing politicians do. Twenty years later, we look back and go, "We tried that, and it didn't work. Sorry."

What it was... Hear me out. I still think virginity is a great gift to give to your spouse. I still think it's the great biblical standard. Let me tell you what happened by only



talking about virginity. We made people with sexual pasts feel very guilty. That's one thing. The other thing we did was by just telling people, "Just be a virgin. Just save yourself..."

What people did was everything but have sex. It was like, "Oh, yeah. We're not going to do the one thing we're not supposed to do, but we're going to get as close to the line as possible." That's why we need to teach young people it's not "What is the line?" but "When is the time?" and the time is marriage.

### 03 THE MOTIVES FOR LOVE

Thus ends our section on sex. Let's move on to another thing. I want to talk to us with the little bit of time left... Here's what he says. Verse 5: ***"For you may be sure of this, that everyone..."*** Okay. We'll talk about it just for a little longer.

***"...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. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."***

Very quickly, and I already hit so much of this... He's basically going to tell you that people are going to come along... They're called *false teachers*. You might call them *podcasters*. I don't know. You might call them your *professors*. It doesn't matter, but there will be these false teachers, and it says they're going to give you empty words about sexual sin.

They're all going to be the same. Did you notice that? Paul tells us what the true word is, so the empty word was the opposite of the true word. Paul basically says people who persist in unrepentant sexual sin don't go to heaven. So, what is the empty word? Here's the empty word: "You will be safe in your sin."

The empty word the culture comes along and tells us is, "Hey, you can love God and do whatever you want to do with your body." I love what Charles Spurgeon, that great preacher, said. He basically said, "The same grace of God that saves my soul changes my life." Now, why do we believe empty words? I thought about this a lot.

Why do we believe empty words from false teachers when it's not the truth? It's because false teachers don't tell us what is true; they tell us what we wish was true, and what we wish was true is that our situation is unique. We look at all of the sexual immorality verses, and there's a little asterisk. We turn to the back of the Bible, and there's a picture of you, saying, "This person is the exception."

## 04 WALK IN THE LIGHT

Instead of that, Paul says... Here's the second part quickly. He says, "Walk in the light." ***"Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."***

Paul is always doing contrasting things, showing distinctions and differences. So, he says *light* and *darkness*. I want you to know this. The Bible is binary. We're living in a culture that no longer understands binary. The Bible says *male/female*. The Bible says *heaven/hell*. The Bible says *angel/demon*. The Bible says *Creator/creation*.

We're living in a time of what theologians call *one-ism* where we're trying to act like there's no difference and no distinction. The average American wants to say, "Yeah, there are angels, but not demons. Yeah, there's heaven, but not hell." No, you have to believe in both.

Paul tells us, if you read carefully, not that you *walked* in darkness but that you *were* darkness. Just quickly on darkness. *Darkness* can mean many things. It can mean I don't understand something. You might even say that sometimes. "Hey, I'm in the dark. Can you fill me in? I don't understand that."

*Darkness* can mean *secrecy*. *Darkness* can mean *evil deeds*. Jesus says people don't come into the light because they love the darkness. What is *that* about? That's about loving evil deeds. Here's the principle with darkness: people don't like to watch themselves sin, so they do it in the dark.

You think about the average... I know I've been picking on college students because they're gone, but think about the average fraternity party. What is it? It's at night, the lights are low, the music is loud, and alcohol is flowing. What is that? We want to keep consciousness to a minimum.

Here's the principle: you don't like to watch yourself sin, so you'll do it in the dark. The first dark is "I don't want anyone else to see me do this." Why do people drink? Because when you drink too much, it turns the lights down on the inside. In some ways, you're not as coherent and conscious and watching yourself sin.

Paul says, instead, let's walk in the light. Light is that which brings health and direction. When you and I think of light, we think about Thomas Edison and light bulbs. Guys, when they're talking about light, they're talking about the sun. What

does the sun do? Two things: health (all of the things with that...life and all that) and direction.

## **05 LIGHT EXPOSES DARKNESS (LOVING)**

Now, here's the command at the end. If you want to know what it means to walk in the light, let me show you. It's in verse 11. ***"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible..."***

Really quickly, I want to talk about how the three ways you walk in the light are by exposing darkness in three places. You need to expose darkness in your heart, in the heart of others, and in our culture. We always need to start with ourselves. Right? Otherwise we're hypocritical and don't really have anything to say to anyone else.

How do you expose the darkness of your own heart? Through confession. Confession is agreeing with God. We believe here that you don't need to confess your sins to everybody, just to maybe one or two people. The Bible teaches privacy but not secrecy. *Privacy* is not everybody needs to know what I'm struggling with. *Secrecy* is nobody knows what I'm struggling with, and sin is the only thing that grows in the dark.

I've heard that confession is like throwing up. It gets all over the other person, and then you feel better. You need to do it in a safe environment where you can confess the sins you're struggling with, and when you do that... You'll feel this. The moment you let someone in, you can almost feel its power off you. It doesn't have the same weight.

The second way we bring light or expose darkness relationally is, first, through living a godly life publicly. Now, this is what will happen. Watch this. If you'll start to be more godly, if you'll start to be more like Christ, then you'll be more light, and it will expose the darkness around people, and they won't like it.

For example, say you're married and you decide... You're the wife, and you decide, "You know what? I'm going to get up in the morning. Neither I nor my husband ever do this, but I'm going to get up in the morning, and I'm going to start reading my Bible. Then maybe after that I'm going to go on a run, and I'm going to start eating healthy." After about day five or six, your husband will be like, "What are you doing?"

And he won't even know this. He'll try to cut you down. "You don't need to run. Let's go out and eat." Why? Because you're exposing the darkness he's still in. It's easier to

try to yell at the light to become dark than to walk into the light. Your healthy eating is exposing his unhealthy eating, your exercising is exposing his lack of exercise, and your Bible reading is exposing his lack of love for the Word of God.

The second way you expose the light relationally is through conversations. We have to have convictionally kind, courageous conversations in which we love future people more than current people. Let me explain that more. The only way you'll find the courage to have the conversations about the darkness you see in other people's lives is you can't just love them right now; you have to love future them, which is a lot more of them. So, you have to be willing to offend, potentially, current them because you love future them.

Then, finally... And this is a larger conversation that I'm trying to figure out. How do we expose the darkness in our culture? I'm not trying to be up here as a culture warrior, and I'm not upset or angry at the culture. I know the church is a different and distinct community, and I know we're not supposed to police the world. I know all that.

I know we have to have standards for ourselves that we don't have for the world, and we have to have compassion on the world. Those are all airbags we're putting around this. At the same time, we have to expose the darkness of the world so that the world itself, hopefully, would see it and repent. We have to learn how to articulate it. I'll tell you a story about this.

Maybe you've heard of Emmett Till. Emmett Till was a 14-year-old boy, and it was 1955, and he was in Mississippi. As the story goes, he looked at or said something inappropriate to the grocery store owner, who was a white woman, and then that woman's husband and another man, a couple of nights later, abducted Emmett Till from his house and brutally beat, tortured, and lynched him.

Why am I telling you this story? Because at his funeral, his mother said, "I want an open casket." A critical moment in understanding the evil and sinfulness of racism, as a nation, was the open casket of Emmett Till. Why? Because she wanted to expose the darkness of what was being done. So, they took pictures, and the video people came. The city saw the open casket, and they were horrified.

This is why the ultrasound machine is so important. We have to expose the darkness of what's going on in abortion. In 1999, there was a surgery done on a little baby 6 months old in the womb. This baby had spina bifida, and they were working on it. Back then, it was not as invasive as it would be today.

The baby's arm comes out of the stomach of the mom, and the doctor puts the arm back, and the baby grabs his hand. I have to show you this picture. The doctor said it

was the most emotional moment of his life. That baby was still going to be in the mother's womb for three more months. We need to show, winsomely and compellingly, the sinfulness of abortion. We need to articulate the evil so they can repent of the sin.

It all ends with this. He ends in verse 14 with this. ***"Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"*** He ends by basically saying, "Wake up, guys." In fact, you'll notice it's in italics. This is what they would say at the early baptisms. Isn't that interesting here on a baptism Sunday?

This is what they would say to the baptismal candidates when they baptized them. They would say, "Wake up, O sleeper." What he's telling us is that salvation is not just coming from death to life or darkness to light. Salvation is, in one way, described as waking up from a deep sleep.

So, we're called to imitate God. We're called to walk in love and walk in light. My concern for some of you is that you are asleep at the wheel spiritually. I'm just going to pray for us individually right here and as a church that God would wake us up to walk in love and walk in light. Let's pray.

Lord, we just pray for that, that you would help us. We've seen that we're to imitate you. We've seen the horror that sexual immorality leads to. We've seen the call to love as Christ has loved us. We've seen the call to walk in light and expose darkness, Lord.

I pray you would wake us up. Wake us up to the culture we're in. Wake us up to the belief systems around us. Wake us up to the spiritual condition of our own souls and families and neighbors and kids, Lord. Would we awake, O sleeper, and would Christ shine on us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.