

Ephesians 5:1-14 – Lessons in Holiness

Paul the prisoner wrote this letter to the Ephesian church, to explain what had happened to them when they were converted and how they must now live. In this part of the letter, he is teaching in detail about how to live the Christian life.

1. Holiness means imitating God (v1-2)

Paul tells us to be imitators of God (v1). That's what holiness is: it is children growing to be like their Father. Man was made in God's image (Genesis 1:28); that image was ruined when Adam sinned – but now is restored through Christ. Holiness is about pleasing Christ (v10) and being like him (v2). He is the one for us to follow. In love he gave himself for us. We must give ourselves for others in love. Holiness is about showing that we are children. We do not *become* children by being holy – we become children through believing the gospel. But after becoming children, we must live as children. Is that what you are doing?

2. Holiness means stopping sinning (v3-4)

What is holiness? Some people speak about holy clothes, holy places, holy oils – but there are no such things under the New Testament. Paul shows us that holiness is very practical – it is to do with everyday behaviour. Holiness means stopping sinning – stopping disobeying God's laws. It means, not fornicating (sex outside of marriage) or having any uncleanness, and stopping being greedy. It means getting rid of all god-less talk. These things do not belong with God's holy people. Note that Paul says that covetousness (greed) is a kind of idolatry. It lifts up money to be equal with God. Many people see greed as good, and it is everywhere in our country; but God hates it.

3. Holiness is essential (v5-6)

No unholy person will enter heaven. This is what verse 5 says. If you live in any known sin, then you are an unholy person and you are outside God's kingdom. Some people teach the idea “Once Saved, Always Saved” - and they mean that, however evil your life becomes, you cannot lose your salvation. This is not Biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that someone who carries on in sin *was never saved at all*. Paul warns us not to be deceived (v6). There are many people who speak very fine words, but if they say we can disobey the Bible, they are lying, whoever they are (Matthew 7:21-23).

4. Holiness means being different (v7-13)

There is light and there is darkness. Paul says that we were darkness; now we have become light through Christ (v8). We have been made new – we must live as new people. We must show whose children we are. This means, following goodness, righteousness and truth (v9). It is not enough to avoid evil; we must pursue what is good, so that we can shine (Matthew 5:14-16). We must make sure that light and darkness remain separate. Concerning evil, we must have no fellowship with it – indeed, we must rebuke it (v11). Many Christians try just to keep quiet and keep out of trouble when evil is done. This is unholy. Our calling is to shine light into dark places, v13 – that is what light does, and so is what we must do.

5. Holiness is for converted people (v14)

Holiness is not repaying a debt to God. It is not the entrance door into salvation. It is Christ who saves us by his death (v2), and raises us from spiritual death (v14). Holiness

is demonstrating that Christ has done this in us – and all the glory is his.