

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

Do you think of yourself as a loser or a winner? Do you ever wish you had someone else's life? When someone criticizes you, does it devastate you because deep down you believe the things they say about you? When you think of all the mistakes you've made, do you say to yourself, "Of course I have a miserable life. What other kind of life would a loser like me have?" Do you know what God says? He says, "This is not the truth about who you are."

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 5

5:1-2, it begins with "therefore" ("in light of"), which ultimately points back to 4:1, though one might argue that it points back to 1:1. That is, in light of everything that God has done for us—He adopted us into His family and it cost Him a Son to do it, 1:5-7. He stripped us of our old life with Satan and gave us a brand new and permanent life in His Son, who will inherit the entire universe, which means we get an inheritance, 1:11, 14, 18, 20-21; 2:6. He gave us His Spirit by which we become the house where He now dwells, 1:13-14; 2:18-22; 3:16, which means we get access to Him 24/7/365, 2:18; 3:12. His Spirit gives us His strength and enables us to understand Christ's love, which enables us to love as He loved, all of which fills us with God's fullness, 3:16-19. Finally, Christ Himself gave us a role to play in His Body and personally teaches us, reminding us who we are and how we should live, 4:7, 11-16, 20-32—in light of all this, He's urging us to imitate Him as dearly loved children. Notice: you are dear to Him; He sees you as His dearly loved child. Why does God consider us His beloved children? Because we are; He's our Father and we're His children and we get access to Him any time we need it, 1:5; 2:18-19. Can you see why He's asking you to imitate Him? As any loving father, He wants you to think, speak, and act like Him, "Like father, like son/daughter."

Next, He tells us to imitate His Son, i.e., He tells us to "walk in love" as Christ did. What does it mean to "walk in love"? It's to give up your life for others the way Christ did, 1:7. When you sacrifice yourself for others, your sacrifice is a "sweet-smelling aroma" to God, i.e., it pleases Him the way all the Old Testament sacrifices did (Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 4:31, etc.). This is how He sees selfless acts; they imitate Christ's selfless life. To love God is to give our lives over to him, our thoughts, words, actions, and will. To love others is to sacrifice for them, to do what is best for them, 1:15; 4:2, 15, 16, it's to copy the way God loved us, 2:4, it's to let His sacrificial love drive our every move, 3:17-19. Thus, God wants us to imitate Him and His Son, to walk like them not Satan, 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17-19.

5:3-4, previously God urged us not to use rotten, worthless words, 4:29. Now He targets obscene, foolish, and indecent language. The conversations of Christians should not be sexually explicit or discussions of greedy desires, indecent acts, foolishness, or vulgar humor. Instead, our speech should be colored by things like gratitude. Is your language characterized by offense, injury, and complaints or does it reflect a heart of gratitude for all the things God's done for you? Do your words edify and build up or offend and destroy?

Why should we not speak this way? Because it's not "fitting for saints," i.e., who are we supposed to sound like? Our Heavenly Father not our former stepfather, Satan, 2:2! God doesn't speak this way, neither should we, His children who are His "saints." The word "saint" means something or someone who is dedicated to God, who is to remain holy and sacred.

Is it sin to use bad language? It can be. There's a time to use strong language but your motive, intent, and the manner you express it matters. God uses very strong language which some might consider obscene or vulgar, but it's not. In Isaiah 64:6, God says "filthy rags" but the Hebrew means rags used for menstruation. In Galatians 5:12, the Holy Spirit tells those insisting on circumcision to cut it all off! In Ezekiel 16:25, God speaking of Israel's adultery against Him says, "you offered yourself to everyone who passed by." The NASV captures the meaning of the original Hebrew, "you spread your legs to every passer-by." In Ezekiel 23:20, God speaking of Israel again (this time represented by the Southern Kingdom) says, "For she lusted for her paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is like the issue of horses." The NIV captures what the Hebrew is saying, "There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals are like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses." When God uses such strong language, He's not looking to offend, injure, or be obscene. His goal is to edify to build up, i.e., to point out just how depraved and wrong the person or nation has become so that they will repent. Therefore, you can use "bad language," but the question is, "What's your motive, intent, and how will you express it?" Your motive and intent must be pure and the way you express it must not be vulgar, indecent, or obscene.

5:5-7, why should Christians not be idolatrous individuals through sexually immorality, moral impurity, or greed? And all three of these are idolatry. Why? Because an idol is not just a statue you worship but anything you put before God, whether sex, material possessions or anything else. So why shouldn't we be idolatrous in any way? Because such individuals will lose out on their inheritance. That is, God seated Jesus as ruler over the entire universe, 1:20-21, and we have been seated together-with Him, 2:6, which means we get to rule with Him. Thus, we have an inheritance waiting for us, 1:11, 18, but that inheritance depends on our obedience, 5:5, see also 4:1ff. Will we stay clear of indecent, immoral behavior and speech and instead live like God and His Son? If we do as God asks, then we will get our inheritance. If we don't, then we will suffer loss of inheritance.

Finally, God doesn't want us to be deceived. He doesn't want anyone telling us, "C'mon, there's nothing wrong with having a little fun. Don't be such a prude; we can joke around. What's wrong with a dirty joke here and there? Can't we Christians have a sense of humor? What could happen to us? We're God's children; He loves us. He won't take our inheritance away. Didn't He say that we're seated together-with Jesus? Nothing can jeopardize our inheritance; it's ours!" God says to all this, "Don't be deceived by these empty words. Those who practice such things get My wrath. I punish every son of disobedience who follows after Satan (2:2). Don't participate in their wickedness; you're My child, not Satan's (4:17-19)."

What is God saying to you about who you are? Notice how He keeps pointing to your identity. Every time you look in the mirror, every time something or someone (including you) makes you feel bad about yourself, He wants you to remember who you are: you are not some broken human who's a failure, who can't measure up to God's standard, who's always falling short. This is not you. You may feel that way, others may make you feel that way, your life may be telling you this, but that is not the truth about who you are. Don't get me wrong, God's not asking you to make believe, to pretend something that is not true. Yes, there's work to be done, habits to be broken, things that need to change about your life. Amen and amen, we are all a work in progress and will continue to be until the day we die. The Lord will keep refining and refining us until He calls us home. However, that is much different from what He's saying to you about who you are at your core. This is who you are:

- His beloved child whom He adopted.
- His beloved child whom He rescued from Satan's grip.
- His beloved child whom He washed and cleansed of their former life, whom He gave a brand new life in His Son.
- His beloved child whom He gave part of His Son's inheritance.
- His beloved child whom He gave His Spirit, who will give you His power, His capacity to love and forgive, and complete access to His help anytime you need it.
- His beloved child whom He gave His Son in order to show you how to live the brand new life He gave you.

So no matter what anyone else says about you, no matter how many mistakes you make, have made in the past, or will make in the future, no matter how you feel about yourself, no matter anything, one thing you must know to the core of your being: you are God's beloved child whom He will never abandon, whom He will always help and guide.

III. Conclusion

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any 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. Therefore do not be partakers with them.