

Exploring Ephesians 5:1-7

Introduction

Last week we looked at a broad strokes overview of the book of Ephesians. We discovered that the book is typically divided into 2 halves.

- The first half provides us with **doctrine** focusing on God's blessings and salvation. The second half provides us with **ethics** or practical instructions regarding how believers should live.
- Chapters 1-3 are **indicative**, describing what God has done for us as believers, whilst chapters 4-6 are **imperative** providing instructions for us as believers in terms of how we should live based on God's blessings.
- Chapters 1-3 are **epideictic** which strengthens the audiences understanding and convictions, whilst chapters 4 to 6 are **deliberative** moving the audience to act based on these truths.
- Ephesians is a **diptych** or two panel work: Panel A provides thanksgiving and worship for what God has done and Panel B provides exhortation regarding how believers should love in a manner worthy of what God has done.

Ephesians offers a detailed synopsis of the Gospel, moving from worship and reflection on God's redemption to describing God's ongoing work through the Holy Spirit and a vision for the Church.

Table1. Overview of the structure of Ephesians

Ephesians 1-3	Doctrine	Indicative	Epideictic
Ephesians 4-6	Ethics	Imperative	Deliberative

Figure 1. Overview of Ephesians

Greeting	(1:1-2)
The believer's position in Christ	(1:3-3:21)
<i>Believer's position: chosen, redeemed and sealed</i>	<i>(1:3-23)</i>
Chosen by the Father	(1:3-6)
Redeemed by the Son	(1:7-12)
Sealed by the Spirit	(1:13-14)
Thanksgiving and prayer	(1:15-23)
<i>Believer's position: alive with Christ</i>	<i>(2:1-10)</i>
Old condition: dead to God	(2:1-3)
New condition: alive to God	(2:4-10)
<i>Believer's position: united in one Body</i>	<i>(2:11-22)</i>
Remember your past situation	(2:11-13)
Remember Christ is your peace	(2:14-18)
Remember your new status in Christ	(2:19-22)
<i>Believer's position: equal in the Body</i>	<i>(3:1-21)</i>
The stewardship of the mystery	(3:1-7)
Proclamation of the mystery	(3:8-13)
Prayer	(3:14-21)
Walk worthy of your calling	(4:1-6:20)
<i>Walk in unity</i>	<i>(4:1-6)</i>
<i>Walk in diversity</i>	<i>(4:7-16)</i>
<i>Walk according to the new life</i>	<i>(4:17-32)</i>
<i>Walk in love, imitating God</i>	<i>(5:1-7)</i>
<i>Walk in light</i>	<i>(5:8-14)</i>
<i>Walk in wisdom</i>	<i>(5:15-21)</i>
<i>Walk wisely in relationships (household code)</i>	<i>(5:22-6:9)</i>
Husbands and wives	(5:23-33)
Parents and children	(6:1-4)
Bondservants and masters	(6:5-9)
<i>Walk wisely in warfare</i>	<i>(6:10-20)</i>
Benediction	(6:21-24)

Ephesians 5:1-14

Why?

One of the scenes of the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in 2024, broadcast all over the world, contained drag queens, a transgender model, and a semi-naked singer in blue around a table. Some claimed this was a parody of the Last Supper. Thomas Jolly, the artistic director, claimed it was a depiction of a pagan party linked to the gods of Olympus. Whichever it was, the outcry resulted in Jolly voicing his intentions for this scene. He said he intended to convey **values of inclusivity, kindness, solidarity, generosity and tolerance, especially towards different sexual and gender identities**. (Bronner 2024; News Wires 2024).

This is worldly wisdom.

Why were many Christians shocked by this public portrayal of unbiblical thinking? This is the logical fruit of embracing the postmodern and post-Christian ideologies currently espoused and even celebrated in various educational institutions, domains, workplaces, Christian communities, and churches, in many nations.

The current era in South Africa (and many nations in the West) is one where post-Christian ideologies have taken root inside and outside the Church, in our educational institutions (Department of Basic Education, 2020) and beyond. These have grown out of a postmodern mindset that is pervasive in many institutions today.

Paas (2011,11) defines the term “**post-Christian**” as being **a context where the significance and relevance of Christian truths to a group of people diminish, resulting in the requisite associated practises ceasing**. (He notes that)... **this can happen even if people do not leave the church formally. Where Christian truths and doctrine once provided a standard and motivation for certain behaviour, they do not anymore. In this case, a post-Christian community or society is forming.**

Purdy (2010, 100; 106-7) quotes Crouse and Mohler in defining **postmodernism** as being **a context where the intellect is replaced by the will, “reason by emotion, and morality by relativism”**. He continues, stating how **postmodernism declares that there are “no universal truths”, truth is not fixed, absolute, universal or objective and it is not found, it is rather made.**

Our children are taught in many South African schools that everyone needs to be “tolerant”. This is what being kind, inclusive and loving looks like. This value is espoused in many workplaces. It sounds noble. **Almond (2010, 1)** asks the following questions regarding tolerance:

“Must we approve as well as permit? Must we refrain from judgement? Is tolerance something that is due to people themselves or does it include their views and opinions?” And how should we respond if it should turn out to be impossible to tolerate one group or view without discriminating against another?”

The reality is that in many schools and workplaces in South Africa, celebration of “gay rights” is compulsory, regardless of personal beliefs. In many churches, unmarried couples living together is a common occurrence. Certain liberal Christian denominations recognize same-sex marriages or bless same sex civil unions (Chan 2005; Collison 2019; Hall 2015; Wyatt 2022). Some Christians are labelled extremist, or intolerant if they do not passively or actively go along with this “progress”. Not wanting to offend, many well-meaning Christians have passively concurred with these sentiments. Yet, the Bible is clear in terms of what God expects of His people.

The pericope we will be studying over the next 2 weeks will answer the questions people have concerning this.

The pericope which will be studying falls in the second half of the epistle. This is the paraenetic or application section, with thirty-six verbs in the imperative with instructions regarding how to respond to the doctrinal truths detailed in the previous three chapters. In both the first and second half of the book, the term “walk” is used, and it is a theme that reappears through the book. However, the second portion of the epistle has five sub-sections, each one all instructing the Ephesians regarding how they are to “walk”. They are to walk in unity (4:1-16); holiness (4:17-32); love (5:1-6); light (5:7-14); and wisdom (5:15-6:9). Paul closes the letter enjoining the Ephesians to be strengthened in the Lord. His final instructions are concerning the armour of God and spiritual warfare (6:10-18). He concludes the letter with a blessing (6:23-24).

The target pericope (Eph. 5:1-14) is made up of two halves, the first half (vv. 1-7) instructing Christians to walk in love and the second half (vv. 8-14) instructing Christians to walk in light. To walk in love, Christians are to imitate God and Christ and refrain from evil in conduct and in speech. The first half closes with an explanation of the consequences of not abstaining from evil.

*¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of **sexual immorality**, or of any kind of **impurity**, or of **greed**, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be **obscenity**, **foolish talk** or **coarse joking**, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: no **immoral**, **impure** or **greedy** person—such a person is an idolater—**has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God**. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things **God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient**. ⁷ Therefore do not be **partners** with them. (Eph 5:1-7 NIV)*

***Imitate God**, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. 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, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. (Eph 5:1-7 NLT)*

Ephesians 5:1-14 advances its controlling purpose, for the Ephesians to imitate God as His beloved children by living a life of love and living as children of the light.

The conjunction “therefore” in v. 1, refers to 4:1 and 17 making an additional application from the first three chapters of Ephesians. Paul is also building on the previous pericope 4:17-32 regarding putting off the old person and putting on the new person.

V. 1 of this section of scripture forms a type of heading for the section that follows. Paul instructs the readers to follow God's example as beloved children. The conjunction "as", provides the grounds by which believers are to become imitators of God. This is a continuation of the theme of adoption into the family of God (Eph 1:5) with God as Father. Believers in the family of God are instructed to live in such a manner as is fitting for this family. The two primary ways he exhorts readers to imitate their Father as His children are to live a life of love (v. 2) and live as children of the light (v. 8b).

Figure 2. Exegetical outline of Ephesians 5:1-7

Imitate God as dearly loved children (5:1-7):

By living a life of love (vv. 3-7)

1. Avoid immorality, impurity and greed (vv. 3–6)

(i) There should not even be a hint of these among God's people (v. 3)

(ii) Replace obscenity, foolish talk and coarse jesting with thanksgiving (v. 4)

(iii) People who continue in such sins will have no inheritance in the kingdom of God (vv. 5–6)

(iv) Therefore, do not be a partner with them.

Significant words or phrases

1. Ephesians 5:1

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children

a. Imitate God

The pericope under study opens with a remarkable statement that is not found anywhere else in the NT, "Imitate God" or "Follow God's example", depending upon the translation being used. In Paul's letters, imitation is an important concept. Usually, Paul gives instructions for the reader to imitating Paul and his associates (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9), and Christ (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6). Here believers are instructed to imitate God. Many may write this off as

impossible due to the enormity of this statement. However, Paul believes this is within the believer's capability.

One of the reasons Paul asks believers to imitate God, is the fact that believers are children of God the Father. The idea of imitating God is made possible by the reality that the new creation is created in the image of God. If Christ is the "exact representation" (Heb. 1:3) of God's being, and believers are to live lives characterised by the kind of self-sacrificial love that Christ did (Eph 4:32; 5:1-2), then, this statement, within its context, informs Christology in that it reveals that God and Christ are one and the same Lord.

In other NT texts, both Jesus' equality with God as well as his submission to God is portrayed. In Hebrews, we discover that Jesus is the "exact representation and perfect imprint of His Father's essence" (Heb 1:3 AMP). We also discover Jesus being portrayed as a perfect and sinless high priest (Heb 5:7), whose blood deals with the debt of sin, purifying the believer's conscience, opening access for believers to approach "the throne of grace with boldness" (Heb. 4:14-16). In Peter, Jesus is presented as a model for those who suffer (1 Pet 1:21). An eschatological point of view is given in 1 Peter, where the current sufferings of this age are viewed as temporary considering the imminent "eternal glory of Christ" awaiting those who walk in obedience to God. In Philippians we find Jesus being in the form of God, equal with God, who made himself of no reputation, and came in the likeness of man to earth. He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross and God exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name, that all should bow to Him and confess He is Lord (Phil 2:5-11).

Thus, we can see from other NT scriptures that God and Christ are one and the same Lord, and the instruction to "imitate God" has a role in informing Christology in the NT.

b. and walk in love

Here is the third instruction "to walk."

- First, believers must walk worthy of the call (4:1),
- then they must walk in holiness and not as the Gentiles (4:17),

- and now they are instructed to walk in love.
- The present imperative conveys a customary idea to “**make this your habit**” and does not indicate whether the action has been going on.

Believers are instructed to imitate God is by walking in love, the type that was displayed through Christ's sacrifice (4:32). Therefore, God's length, depth, height and breadth of forgiveness (4:32) out of love (3:18-19) is the model believers are to imitate (5:1). God displayed this love and forgiveness for man even whilst man was still in sin (Rom 5:8). This standard of forgiveness matches the standard Jesus set when he taught His disciples to pray (Matt 6:12). In fact, Jesus went further to assert that we receive our own forgiveness upon the condition that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

2. Ephesians 5:3

*But among you there must not be even a hint of **sexual immorality**, or of any kind of **impurity**, or of **greed**, because these are improper for God's holy people.*

a. Sexual immorality

The ESV, NIV and NLT translate “Πορνεία” as “sexual immorality”, whereas the NKJV and ASV translate it “fornication”. The definition of the Greek word includes “any extra-marital sexual relationships” (marriage here being defined as between one man and one woman) and indicates a wide range of sexual misconduct. Considering this, the Greek word used here encompasses more than merely fornication. The Graeco-Roman world within which Paul wrote was one in which fornication was common and widely accepted in the prevailing culture. This word translated “sexual immorality” “Πορνεία” is rare in classical literature but refers to prostitution, homosexuality, extra-marital relations, adultery, incest, or any aberrant sexual conduct. Thus, the term “sexual immorality” encompasses a wide range of activities all which should not be part of the lifestyle of a believer.

b. Impurity

The word translated “impurity”, “ἀκαθαρσία”, refers to any kind of ritual or moral impurity or corruption. It indicates general defilement and is reinforced with the phrase “any kind of”. Some theologians maintain that it is referring strictly to sexual

impurity because the term sexual immorality immediately precedes it, however, many consider it applicable to all sorts of impurity as in Ephesians 4:19 because this word for “impurity” includes any vileness or filth. The context also broadens the meaning of the word with the phrase “any sort of”.

c. Greed

The final sin mentioned in this verse is that of greed, “*πλεονεξία*”. Most commentators believe that greed and impurity were mentioned together in this verse as two distinct forms of sin to which many in the Graeco-Roman world were enslaved, one external and one internal. Other commentators understand greed to be an expansion of impurity in that it highlights the insatiable nature of the sensual greed to which Paul was referring. The term means covetousness or greediness and is an extreme expression of selfishness, which in the form of self-gratification can be tied to sexual immorality.

Regarding the three sins listed in this verse, Paul was not intending to be exhaustive but rather use broad categories to illustrate the sins to which he was referring.

3. Ephesians 5:4

Nor should there be **obscenity, foolish talk** or **coarse joking**, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (NIV)

All three terms refer to vulgar conversations with sexual connotations.

a. Obscenity

The first of the three vices listed in this verse, “*αἰσχρότης*”, means that which is shameful, disgraceful, base. The definition includes defiance of “social and moral standards with resulting disgrace, embarrassment and shame” (Merkle 2016, 181). Although Ephesians 5:3 primarily deals with the believer’s conduct, and Ephesians 5:4 deals with believer’s speech, the use of this noun in this case cannot be restricted to speech. Rather, this word serves as a transition from the previous verse.

The ESV, NKJV and ASV translate “*αἰσχρότης*” as “filthiness”, the NIV as “obscenity” and the NLT as “obscene stories”. Various academic sources define it as filthiness or obscenity, behaviour that is obscene, or any manner of acting which in defiance of

moral standards results in shame or embarrassment. It relates primarily to sexual immorality, drawing from Old Testament imagery of uncleanness in the eyes of God.

b. Foolish talk

The second of the vices listed in v. 4, “*μωρολογία*”, means “silly, foolish, senseless talk”. Its use in the current context with the other words probably gives it meanings regarding talk that is empty and speculative, and such as detracts from the Christian faith and edifying discussion. It may have connotations of the type of speech that would arise in banquets where drunkenness and sexual immorality were common.

c. Coarse jesting

Hoehner (2002, 656) comments that the third vice listed, “*εὐτραπελία*”, most likely refers to excessive jesting that may have gone too far. Thus, humour that has become sarcastic, belittling of people present, or even humour in bad taste. Given the context of the use of the word (sexual sins), it may refer to sexual jokes, or jokes with suggestive overtones. The word most likely refers to witty humour used in sexually vulgar ways.

d. Thanksgiving

The word for thanksgiving, “*εὐχαριστία*” may intentionally provide a contrast with the types of speech previously mentioned. He notes how it does denote speech that honours God for who He is and what He has done, as opposed to the flippant type of speech previously mentioned.

The two words “eutrapelia” (base jesting) and “eucharistia” (thanksgiving) could have been chosen intentionally as they are rough homophones. This would have been a marker of emphasis in the original language.

3. Ephesians 5:5

*For of this you can be sure: no **immoral**, **impure** or **greedy** person—such a person is an idolater—**has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.***

a. Immoral, impure, greedy

Here, the three nouns describe the persons who commit the acts mentioned in verse 3. Paul deliberately refers to verse 3 as seen by his use of the same word roots and employment of the same order.

Greedy

This person is one who is insatiable in their appetite for more, especially but not limited to wealth. Interesting to note is that some academic sources define this person as greedy, with connotations of this greed being the root of the sexual sins mentioned in the same verse. The concept being described may include a grasping after someone else's, whether its material things, person or spouse. This word in the Pauline era had connotations of sensual greed. Covetousness lends itself more to material connotations, whereas greed can have broader implications including food, power, sex as well as wealth.

d. has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God

The grounds for the prohibition regarding these sins incompatible with walking in love is then spelled out: those who persist in these sins will have no inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God. Lopez (2011, 82) provides greater detail, exploring the possible meanings of the phrase "will not inherit the kingdom of God". She posits that this phrase could mean one of six different things:

- Christians who forfeit their salvation
- people who never had salvation, but simply professed it
- people who remove themselves from relationship with God
- Christians who will not enter the kingdom although they have eternal life
- Christians who forfeit rewards in the kingdom and will not rule with Christ
- and lastly, Christians who live like unbelievers and will miss the kingdom.

The tense of the verb likely indicates that those who practise these vices do not presently have any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. It could also be referring meaning that they will not have any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. The word "inheritance" here is that which is obtained from the believer's redemption as opposed to a reward based on faithfulness. Hoehner (2002, 661) explicitly says that this passage is a contrast between those who inherit and those who receive the

wrath of God, not between those who are faithful and unfaithful. Neufeld (2002, 234) echoes this understanding of the word “inheritance”, commenting that it may be referring to both the present reign of Christ as well as the future kingdom of God.

e. in the kingdom of Christ and God

In the NT the kingdom of God is mentioned in sixty-five verses (e.g., Matt 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 2 Thess 1:5) and the kingdom associated with Christ occurs at least ten times (Matt 16:28; Luke 1:33; 22:29, 30; 23:42; John 18:36; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; 2 Pet 1:11), but only in the present verse are the two persons of the Godhead mentioned together in relation to the kingdom. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that Christ is mentioned before God. Paul may have chosen this order because Christ’s sacrificial love on our behalf is the focus (5:2).¹

4. Ephesians 5:6

*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things **God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient***

Hoehner (663) notes how the use of the negative pronoun “μηδέίς” emphasizes that not any person, neither believer, nor unbeliever, is to deceive them into believing that worldly living is of no consequence.

a. God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient

Hoehner (2002, 663–4) also notes that the phrase “because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience” is emphatically worded using the conjunction “γάρ”, or “for,” and with the prepositional phrase “διὰ ταῦτα”. He comments that the pronoun “ταῦτα” refers to all the sins mentioned in the preceding verse. He also notes that the present tense of the verb “ἔρχεται” indicates a “solemn present” nature of the wrath of God. Thus, as there is a future aspect to this wrath, he concludes that there must be a present and future aspect to this wrath of God even as there is a present and future aspect to the Kingdom of God.

This additional command is given regarding not being deceived by those who teach anything contrary to what he had specified in the previous verses. Permissive teachings should not replace God's standards, and those who teach such along with those who become deceived by such will be subject to the wrath of God. The "wrath of God" refers both to ongoing current judgement as well as future judgement and is directed towards "sons of disobedience" as opposed to "sons of God". Those attempting to deceive could have been either unbelieving Gentiles, or members of the Christian community refusing to take these sins seriously.

5. Ephesians 5:7

a. Partners

The conclusion to the first portion of the pericope regarding walking in love is an instruction to not be partners with those who practise the sins mentioned above. The word "partner" means one who has communion with or is an accomplice in something. The notion is participation or sharing in the sinful behaviour. It doesn't refer to complete separation without contact, rather not embracing false teaching, worldviews and lifestyles of those who practise the sins.

It can be translated as partaker or partner and can mean to have communion with or be an accomplice in something. The idea conveyed by this word is a participation or sharing in sinful behaviour. Merkle (2016, 184) defines it as "one who shares in a possession or relationship". Thus it doesn't refer to complete separation without contact, rather that believers should not embrace false teaching and the lifestyles of unbelievers associated with it. Paul's primary point is that embracing and participating in the worldview and requisite conduct of unbelievers especially with respect to sex and money is incongruent with God's standards for His people. Therefore, this word is not meaning that believers should not associate at all with unbelievers, but rather refrain from participating in their sinful behaviour.

Conclusion

The controlling purpose of Ephesians 5:1-7 is for the Ephesians to imitate God as His beloved children by living a life of love (v. 2). The standard and model given for living a life of love is emulation of Christ in His self-sacrificial offering to God for us.

Having provided this standard, Paul then highlights what is incompatible with this. Two sets of sins are provided, the first set being sins of sexual immorality, impurity and greed. The word translated “sexual immorality” covers any extra-marital sexual relationships. Marriage in this case being defined as between one man and one woman. Therefore, any sexual activity before or outside of this type of marriage is included. This also includes fornication and prostitution, homosexuality, adultery, incest, or any aberrant sexual behaviour and includes a wide range of sexual misconduct. The word translated “impurity” speaks of filthiness or obscenity, or any manner of acting which in defiance of moral standards results in shame or embarrassment. It indicates general defilement and is reinforced by the phrase “any kind of”. It is applicable to all sorts of impurity as in Eph. 4:19. It includes any vileness or filth and its meaning is broadened with the words “any sort of”. The word translated “greed” means covetousness or greediness and is an extreme expression of selfishness which in the form of self-gratification can be tied to sexual immorality. Paul was not intending to be exhaustive and specific with this list, but rather use broad categories to illustrate the sins to which he was referring. Paul was communicating that continuing in any of these sins was incompatible with walking in love.

And so we see:

- Christians are to imitate God by living a life of love (Eph 5:1).
- Paul provides specifics of what is incompatible with walking in love: sexual immorality, including any extra-marital sexual relationships and homosexuality, any form of sexual impurity and greed (Eph 5:3).
- Paul also included obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking (Eph 5:4) as sins incompatible with walking in love.
- Walking in love and celebrating homosexual relationships from a biblical perspective is incongruent.
- Walking in love and co-habitation before marriage from a biblical perspective are mutually exclusive.
- Paul is also clear regarding the consequences of these sins: that those who persist in these sins will have no inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God (Eph 5:5).

- Paul is also clear that Christians are not to be deceived by anyone who teaches anything contrary to this (Eph 5:6).
- Permissive teaching no matter how loving, inclusive, kind and tolerant it feels to the emotions cannot replace God's standards of truth.
- Those who teach these things and those who become deceived by such will be subject to the wrath of God according to Paul (Eph 5:6).
- Christians are to refrain from partnering with those who subscribe to these ideologies and/or continue in these lifestyles. As discussed, this does not mean a physical separation of Christians from those who practise these things, rather, it involves rejecting this deception as well as the lifestyles of those who practise these sins.

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