

CCUA, SS Initiative

May 10, 2026

## Maturing the New Humanity Ephesians 5:1-20

### *Introduction:*

Our lesson for today treats a passage that continues what we began last week. In fact, the construction beginning with Eph. 4:17 and ending with 5:20 is a particular literary construction colloquially called a “sandwich” construction. It’s called that because at the beginning and the end we hear the same thing as the two slices of bread with what’s between them as the filling of the “sandwich.” The two slices of bread are built around the verb “walk” which is used figuratively to speak about patterned behavior of life. For one slice of bread, Paul exhorts us to no longer walk in the futility of our former minds (following inappropriate desires [4:17]). For the other, in 5:17, he says, “don’t be unwise or foolish, but become wise, knowing the will of the Lord. With this kind of construction, we are called upon to understand the topic of the bread slices, by working them together with what’s in between—in other words, consuming the sandwich as a single combination of flavors. Most of us recognize that there’s more to a hamburger than just a beef patty on a bun. In today’s text, everything that’s presented must be considered in the context of walking in wisdom.

In light of this idea, I want to begin this lesson by thinking very carefully about wisdom.

QUESTIONS: How do we learn wisdom? How does one become wise? Can wisdom be taught? Or is it only caught?

One of the things that brought this question to the forefront was a discussion my son, Stephen, and I had on Monday about the difficulty of ministerial training, because of the demands placed on any curriculum by the accrediting agency of the church itself. There were so many skills that had to be learned, plus a solid grasp of our theology, that some things were given lesser importance than others, since it was assumed that ministers would learn those lessons over time. One was wisdom. In the years that Stephen and his family lived in Wheaton they had difficulty encountering wisdom in either the strategy or the preaching, or both, in the churches they attended. In our passage for today, Paul isn’t talking about a trained ministry. He’s talking about every believer—everyone who makes up the “New Humanity.” Thus, the question, and how do we develop wisdom.

Let’s work with that question before we go on to the text. Because the text isn’t going to make sense without some clear understanding of wisdom, and how to develop wisdom.

CLASS DISCUSSION ON WISDOM

### *I. Children imitating their father. Ephesians 5:1-7*

The title I gave to this sub-section of the lesson, “children imitating their father,” is close to a literal way of translating verse 1. It is the only verse in the Bible that suggests we are to imitate God. It says literally, “like children, become imitators of God [understood as ‘father’].” This would have been easily understood in the 1<sup>st</sup> century world as common practice. Jesus became a carpenter like his father. James, John, Peter, and Andrew were all fisherman, like their fathers before them. And as our pastor reminded us last Sunday, not only Jesus, but the other disciples, followed in the footsteps of their fathers for several years of their lives before he began his ministry.

The difference here is that we’re talking about “the New Humanity,” where the father to mimic is not the biological or social father, but the father of Jesus. Gentile believers are not to model their lives after their Gentile, non-believing fathers. Jewish believers are not to model their lives after their Jewish, non-believing fathers. In the New Humanity, we model our lives after our father, God. Thus, the text gives us both the positive features we are to follow (v. 2), and the negative features that are not to have any place in our lives (vv. 3-4). In v. 5, the metaphor is completed by saying that failure to live this way removes us from being heirs of the kingdom (further father-child relationship language).

Furthermore, the action of v. 2 is presented as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person imperative—you, live like this. Live by expressing love in the same way that Jesus did, by giving himself for us as a sacrifice to God. That’s what we learn from God, and that’s our active role in imitating God. The verbs in verses 3 & 4, however, are third person prohibitions. They are things that are not learned from God, but from our surrounding society, or perhaps even our biological fathers. By using third person prohibitions, Paul recognizes that these things come to us from outside God’s influence and would attach themselves to our lifestyles if we do not hinder them from doing so. Paul recognizes that sin is an active agent in the world, against which we must put up a defense through our faithfulness to Christ. In other words, as members of the New Humanity, we are under attack. Be prepared for it; deflect it; defend ourselves from it.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How is it possible to become imitators of God?
2. How would we relate to people around us if we imitated God in the process?
3. How do you think Pastor’s illustration of the former student who decided to live consciously for God in keeping his business fit this idea? Maintaining the same business, but consciously serving the Lord in doing so?
4. Our lesson writer used the expression “muscle memory” referring to unloving, ingrained responses to negative situations. How can those be overcome or overturned in our lives?

### *II. Light exposing what’s hidden by darkness. Ephesians 5:8-14*

In the first seven verses of chapter 5, the “New Humanity,” this whole new creation that God is creating, is being given one concept of who we are to be—children of God who imitate his character of love and sacrifice. From there, we’re given the charge to protect ourselves from

the onslaught of sinful attitudes which may try to come into our lives, or which may have residual effects in “muscle memory.” We need to protect ourselves from that onslaught. For the “muscle memory,” we need the Holy Spirit’s work of habituating ourselves to our new identity.<sup>1</sup>

In these verses, Paul gives us a new word picture to work with—that of darkness becoming light. And as I worked my way through the text, the one word that spoke to me was the word “expose.” Two things drew me to that word: one, a very funny vignette in our family’s history; and the other the very sad way that the two verses with this word in it are often misused in the church.

Let me tell you the story first. On a day off, our family went to the national museum in Naples, Italy where we lived at the time. We were about to enter the hall of classic, heroic statuary. The large sign next to a statue of a naked figure read, *non toccate gli oggetti esposti*—don’t touch the objects on display. However, the English translation printed on the sign mis-translated the last word. It read “don’t touch the objects exposed.” Both of the boys immediately bent over, and crossed their arms in a position of protection.

The other thing about this word that caught my attention is the fact of how easily it is for believers to openly and blatantly criticize other people both within and outside the church for behaving in ways they think are inappropriate. But in this text, before mentioning anything about light exposing that which is hidden by the darkness, verse 9 states that the fruit of light is goodness, justice, and truth.<sup>2</sup> But above all, this whole topic falls under the opening command to imitate God by our love. Whatever “exposing the ‘works of darkness’” means, it is the deeds themselves that are to be exposed for what they are and not necessarily the persons berated or condemned. Exposing works of darkness is to be done in the context of goodness, justice, and truth—the fruit of light. Without that, it’s another form of darkness.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. As you read this text, how do believers act as agents of light exposing ‘works of darkness’ in a context of love?
2. What might that look like when helping new believers? When working with outsiders?
3. Read verses 8 and 10, skipping v. 9, then respond to what ‘living as children of light’ means.
4. What kind of relationship can, or should believers have with unbelievers?

### III. *Wisdom and time.* **Ephesians 5:15-20**

We’ve come full circle and are back to our subject of wisdom. The Greek language has two words for time. To illustrate what the difference in meaning between the two of them is, let me quote the words of a song by Chicago from decades ago, which most of us know. Here’s the line, “Does anyone really know what time it is? Does anyone really care?”

<sup>1</sup> An illustration of “habituating” from the animal kingdom will be presented in class.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word is the same for both righteousness and justice. It has to do with what is right, whether it is an aspect of personal integrity, or of social ethics.

QUESTION: What does “time” mean in that line of the song?

Most of us are more familiar with the King James version of v. 16, “redeeming the time.” The Greek word *chronos*, from which we get the word chronology, has to do with time as sequences of events, and measured periods of the day and beyond. The Greek word *kairos* speaks to specific and/or memorable periods of time. The NIV translation, ‘opportunity,’ is quite a good rendition of the idea expressed in v. 16. It most likely has more to do with opportunities that come our way than our filling every minute with something specifically witness related.

There is no way we can dictate how to accomplish this concept of “making the most of each opportunity.” The Holy Spirit’s gifting is involved, including that of discernment, other standard gifts we may have, and any gift of the moment the Holy Spirit might want to give as needed. What’s important is that we be who we are in Christ and let the Spirit do the work that only He can do. And if an apology may be needed for what appears to come across offensive, make the apology—it would be the loving thing to do.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are intentional ways of reflecting God’s light when you around people you don’t know in public?
2. We are warned not to participate in the works of darkness, but we know we are going to be in contact with, and hopefully influential on people who do them. How can we shine the light of Christ on non-believers?
3. Is there a line of association with non-believers that we should not cross? If so, what is it?

*Conclusion:*

For this lesson, I want to draw the conclusion from George Lyons’ commentary on this paragraph.

True wisdom entails finding and doing what the Lord Christ wants. The Lord’s will here is not about specific divine guidance for making sound, personal, vocational choices or decisions . . . and so forth. . . Wisdom allows us to grasp God’s saving intentions for us as individuals, corporately as churches, and collectively as citizens of the world God created. Wisdom amplifies our attention to the potential good in every opportunity God grants us. Paul’s parallel command, “be filled with the Spirit,” probably points to the divine empowerment we need to walk in the light and in the way of wisdom. [Thus,] we can encourage one another in worship with songs of thanksgiving and readiness to surrender selfish interests to serve the needs of one another. (George Lyons, *Ephesians*. NBBC. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, p. 188.)