



NG Study Guide: Eph. 5:1-17 "Imitators of God" [12.17.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Where can you find contentment? This is the great philosophical quest of the ages. The world's two primary paths are: The pursuit of sensual pleasure (e.g. food, drink, sex) or indifference to pleasure and pain. Neither way provides contentment, but there is a way to experience true contentment. We'll discover that contentment is available as we follow Christ.

A. Christ's love [1-7]

We are to imitate God as His dear children [1]. The Greek *mimites* is related to our English mimic. The term "walk" [2] speaks of lifestyle (cf. "Walk worthy" and "walk not as the world" [4:1, 17]). Oscar Wilde observed that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Copying someone or something is an implicit way to show respect or pay homage. What does it look like to imitate God? We'll discover how to imitate God and be content by looking at and learning from Jesus. Jesus is the most content person who ever walked the earth.

Jesus' love is selfless and sacrificial [2]: He has given Himself for us as a sacrifice to God [5:25]. Jesus' example of selfless sacrificial love is revealed in His incarnation, life with us, and His death on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. However, before we follow His example, we need to truly appreciate God's love for us. Jesus' followers are God's *dear* children [1]. Appreciating and appropriating His perfect love, holiness, and goodness is the source of contentment.

Jesus' love is pure [3-4]: Fornication refers to sexual intimacy outside of marriage, uncleanness refers to sexual immorality generally, and covetousness generally refers to all greed, but here the focus is lust [3]. The issue isn't AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases [STDs], unwanted pregnancies, or abortion. And the issue is not rules, or don't do this, or even abstaining, but we'll discover that it is contentment.

God's ideal is for marriage to reflect the union between Christ and His church [5:25-33]. Husbands and wives are to experience emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy and that glorifies God and satisfies man. Sexual impurity is an obstacle to intimacy with God and your spouse; and indicates of a lack of contentment in God.

Sexual purity reflects your love for God, contentment in Him, obedience to His will, and love for others [1Th. 4:3]. Remember, this is written to people in Ephesus, where Diana the goddess of fertility was worshipped with orgies at her temple. Similarly, in our country pornography is a multi-billion-dollar industry. Culturally, so-called safe sex is encouraged, but God's love is selfless, sacrificial, and pure. You are not only impacting yourself, but another person created in God's image. You can't discover true contentment in sex any more than you can find it in drugs, things, or people. Lusts don't deliver what they promise, that is why they are deceitful [4:22].

The opposite of lust is not purity, but contentment in God

Jesus' words are pure. Similarly, our words should not be dominated by profanity, sexual innuendo, off-color jokes or remarks [4]. Instead, we should be expressing thanks [4], and later in this epistle (letter) we are encouraged to give thanks always for all things [5:20]. The expression of gratitude to God regardless of circumstances is the fruit of contentment that flows from knowing God's love in Christ.

Contentment is learned from intimacy and time with Jesus [Phil. 4:11-13]. Godliness with contentment is great gain [1 Tim. 6:6-8], because you'll discover that God is the only One who can satisfy.

In contrast, if you are ruled by lust, not Christ's love, and there is no remorse or desire to repent then you are likely not saved [5-7]. If your master passion is the world or the flesh then sexual sin, and greed dominate and God is not Lord in your life. Don't be deceived by empty words [6]. In Paul's day, the Gnostics were Greek philosophers who argued that the physical body was inherently evil and the spiritual was inherently good and thus sin in the body won't harm the spiritual nature. These empty words were contrary to the gospel and pervert the grace of God [Rom. 6:1-2]. In our culture, neo-atheists argue there is no God, and agnostics argue all people go to heaven. And liberal churches ignore or avoid confronting sin. If you are going to imitate God, and Christ's love than don't have anything to do with false philosophies, because they alienate you from God in this life and the life to come. And you never discover the true contentment you crave, and that is available in Christ.

2. Christ's light [8-14]

Jesus' light is reflected by His followers [8-10].

Before you received Christ and His life, your life was characterized by darkness, but in Christ you reflect the light or glory of God [8]. In the Creation account, we see that God said, "Let there be light and there was light" [Gen. 1:2-4]. Thus, before the Sun, the glory of God was manifest as light.

Jesus is the light of the world [Jn. 8:12], and His followers reflect that light [Mt. 5:14].

Christ's light is described as: goodness [9] or moral excellence, righteousness [9] which is giving people what they are due or doing the right thing, and truth [9] which relates to honesty reliability, and integrity. Those seeking Christ's light are seeking to please the Lord [10]. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness" [Is. 5:20].

Jesus' light reveals God's glory and exposes darkness [11-13].

We are to engage, befriend, and build relationships with people who know Jesus and those who don't know Him, but we are not to engage in behavior that God has declared out of bounds (the unfruitful works of darkness) [11]. Instead we expose them [11,13]. You remove darkness in a room by turning on the light not pushing out the darkness.

We should seek to reveal the light to encourage people to be restored in their relationship with God. Jesus said that we should live in such a way that people see our good works and glorify God [Mt.5:14].

And when we speak to people about God's standards, we should do so with love, respect, and humility to encourage restoration with God that always produces greater contentment.

"This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" [Jn.3:19-20].

3. Christ's purpose [15-17]

Jesus' followers make God their priority [15]. We are called to live circumspectly or carefully as it relates to God. Being wise rather than foolish means honoring God with your life and choices. This is where contentment is found.

Jesus' followers seize God's opportunities [16]. The Greek term translated "time" is *kairos* a word associated with opportunities or seasons in contrast with measured time which is the Greek term *chronos*. Kairos was depicted as a cherub with a long forelock and bald backside. So, you couldn't grab him once he past. Opportunities are precious, because the age we live in is dominated by immorality [Mt. 24;11-12, 2Tim. 3].

Jesus' followers live to know and do God's will [17]. To understand God's will is to seek to know and do it. This is the key to contentment. The Bible reveals God's will. As you study, and learn the word of God, and allow God by His Spirit to conform you to the image of Christ you discover contentment in Christ as imitators of God.

Study Guide Qs

Q1 If you could go back in time, and speak to early adolescent you about sex and God's ideal of love as opposed to the culture's standard what advice would you give?

Q2 How are you learning to be content in Christ regardless of your circumstances? How is contentment in Christ the key to overcome lusts rather than a set of rules, warning of dangers, or urging obedience?

Q3 Consider some of your experiences of trying to expose sin in a way that tried to help another person come to Christ. Describe something that seemed to work well and something that didn't.

Q4 What are some opportunities that you seized that you didn't regret, and/or some you missed that you did regret?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. How did you make God a greater priority in 2017?

2. How would you like to make God a greater priority in 2018?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?

3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

[Pray for your unchurched neighbors, and invite them to join you at your local church's celebration of Christmas.](#)

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?

2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.