



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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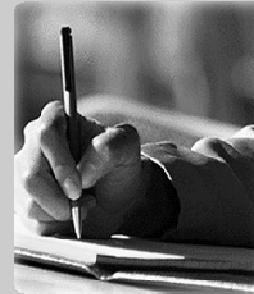


HG116: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season
GOODNESS: Love's Character

Ephesians 5:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

10 January 2016 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Have you noticed any ways that your children's lives have imitated your or ways yours have imitated your parents?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: With practice most of us can do a good Tommy Cooper impersonation but how do you practice imitating the examples Jesus gives us? Do you have examples?

2: Very few comedians tell only clean jokes, should we avoid watching them and bearing in mind sexual images and bad language are commonplace in our newspapers and programmes do you think it matters what we read or watch?

3: Have you been in a group of people and the conversation becomes racy? What have you done or could you have done in these situations which Paul says are out of place for Christians?

It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us who helps us to shine the light of Christ through us. We can't do it on our own, we cannot live up to the expectations that God is demanding of us without the help of the Holy Spirit but with his help we are able to reflect his goodness to others. We are to become light bearers in God's world resulting in our lives shining with all that is good and true because that is the fruit of the light, or the fruit of the Spirit and it will mean going against the flow and at times lovingly speaking out and making a stand for what is right. He tells us to wake up from our sleep, or our former condition of death and darkness and everything that Christ has rescued us from. Christ wakes us up, he raises us from the dead and brings us out of darkness into his light. Is it any wonder that we are called to live differently.

6) The Fruit of the Spirit

Finally we are to live wisely and take care how we live. When things matter to us we take time over them so here he tells us to take care over our Christian life, we are to be serious about it. We are to make the most of our time, we can never get back lost time. We are to discover God's will, not only his general will which applies to all his people but what God's will is for you as an individual, it will be different for all of us. He makes two demands of us, we are not to get drunk on wine and we are to be filled with the Spirit.

There are superficial similarities, we can be under the influence of alcohol and lose our self-control and we can be under the influence of the Holy Spirit where self-control is one of his gifts. Alcohol is a depressant, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate stimulant, he stimulates the mind, the heart, the will and the soul so choose the Holy Spirit every time because when we do he places a song of joy in our hearts and when we come together Spirit filled public worship is a joyful celebration of all that God has done leading us to give thanks for a loving Heavenly Father and the revelation he has given us through His Son Jesus Christ.

7) Submit to one another

Paul ends this passage with a plea to us to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. It seems an odd and abrupt way to end but it follows on from his command to "*be filled with the Spirit*" because we can only submit when we are filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is humble, always pointing away from himself to the Son or the Father and only those who are filled with the Spirit will display his qualities of gentleness and meekness and be able to submit to others and draw attention away from themselves. Those who are truly subject to Christ find it easy to submit to others and if we are filled with the Spirit we will together worship God with thanksgiving and joy, we will love God and each other.

It could be said that Christians have a bad reputation for being negative about sex perhaps a hangover from our Victorian forefathers who came close to seeing sex as sin, rather we are to have the view that it is one of God's good gifts and like all his gifts we should treat it with thanksgiving and not allow it to be cheapened. He talks about the wrath of God coming to those who are disobedient and he is not just referring to a day of judgement in the future because there are certain ways of behaving that are out of line with the way God made the world and they bring their own consequences, sexual misbehaviour falls into this category.

4) Called to be different

Sexual sin is not to be tolerated – not personally, and certainly not in the church as a whole, we are to remain faithful in our relationships and ultimately show others by our example and in a non judgmental way that we have something... or rather, *Someone* in our lives that makes us want to be different and who is calling us to live by a different set of moral standards and no matter what happens in the world, we as Christians, as imitators of God, are to be different.

Paul is not telling us to avoid non believers and have no contact with them, that is the very thing we do need to do, in fact Jesus Himself was always mixing with people that he referred to as sick or sinners, Luke 5 31-31 *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* God wants us to befriend people in order to lead them to Christ but we must also be wise and not be gullible. In wanting to befriend people and not offend we must be careful not to condone peoples bad behaviour. We must also be aware that some people simply do not want to change and they purposefully and deliberately oppose all that Christianity stands for and if we are not careful they can influence us more than we are able to influence them. It goes without saying that we must confront any bad behaviour or ill-advised lifestyle choices of people within the church as this can quickly pollute the church and endanger its unity and mission.

5) We are to reflect the light of Christ

The reason we are to be different is because a fundamental change occurred in us when we accepted Christ as our Saviour. Its not about the threat of the coming judgement, its about our past and our present and about what we once were and what we now are. We went from being full of darkness before Christ to being full of light with Christ. Naturally we ourselves are not the light, only Christ Himself is the light John, chapter 1 describes Christ and tells us that *"in Christ was life and the life was the light of men."* Christ is the light and we are to reflect his life when we are reborn in Him, our behaviour must conform to our new identity.

4: Do you routinely reflect on your behaviour in all areas of your life to check that it is worthy of your Christian calling... and why is getting drunk a sin?

5: Paul tells us to *"submit to one another"* v 21. Why do you think this is beneficial?

6: Look around your group and spend some time sharing what values you see in each other that reflect God's call on your lives.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



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Home Group Sermon Notes

10 January 2016 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction

The world that Paul and we in the western world live in have one major thing in common, an obsession with sex. Sex is the greatest tool advertisers have, if you want something to sell, call it sexy, if you want something noticed, use beautiful scantily clad models. All kinds of practices flourished in Ephesus at the time Paul was writing and today, certainly with the internet, there seems no limit to what is available for people to indulge in and satisfy their cravings. From the evocative and suggestive, to graphic, exploitative and degrading, its all available.

The book, 50 Shades of Grey sold over 100 million copies and at one time 1 book was selling every second somewhere in the world, the film topped 500 million dollars. People today are interested in sex. In Paul's time casual sex and all manner of curious practices flourished and many of the pagan religious ceremonies included sexual practices among their rituals which amounted to little more than prostitution but it was generally accepted by those who considered themselves to be civilised and enlightened that it was ok to do whatever they wanted with their bodies. Paul addresses this issue now and instructs the Christians to behave as people whom God has set apart and allowed his Holy Spirit to dwell in and among, and it is the same message to us today.

1) Like Father like son

Children quite naturally imitate their parents, it's one way in which young children learn, they will imitate their parents behaviour and speech. You can often hear a parent's opinion on something being spoken by a child as if its their own, its learned behaviour. Sadly, even parents bad behaviour can be imitated by children, a simple example from my own childhood could be the fact that as both my parents smoked when I was young it seemed the natural thing for me to do in my late teens, but worse behaviour such as violence inflicted on a child by a parent can lead them in some cases to imitate that behaviour themselves when they grow up.

Here Paul tells us that we should imitate God and follow his example in everything that we do because He is our heavenly Father and we are his children. In v 1 we are described as his "*dearly loved children.*"

2) The character of Love

The ultimate display of God's love for us was when he gave up his life for us in His own Son Jesus Christ, and because of this we should follow his example and love others in the same way. Love is a choice to do what somebody else needs to have done, even if it involves a sacrifice on our part and so our love for others should go beyond a simple show of affection, it should also be practical and shown in ways of self sacrificing service. When we imitate God, we try to do for others what God has done for us. We are to do so because we are distinguished, set apart, Paul refers to us as "*God's Holy people*" v 3. He wants others to see God in us and to remind them of his goodness in the way that we live and treat them and goes on to give us a list of things we should avoid in order that our lives may reflect His goodness and presence in us. This is because we are destined as "*Inheritors of God's Kingdom*" v 5. Paul writes to the Galatians, "*Since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.*" Galatians 4:7

3) Love perverted

Just as in Christ we see the supreme act of sacrificial love and love at its purest, Paul now turns to its very opposite, self indulgence, or from genuine love to its perversion which is lust, and warns believers that because we are God's children he expects us to behave differently. We will all have been in the situation with non Christians (or even Christians) and the conversation gets a bit racy, perhaps turning to something immoral or impure, maybe a rude joke is told, what are we meant to do? Should we get up and walk away, try to change the subject or do we confront people and question their values? Do we not laugh at their jokes, - not always easy. We certainly won't win any popularity contests doing those things, but then we are not called to be popular.

It is very difficult, none of us would have TVs if we wanted to steer clear of all things immoral and impure and bad language is so common in the programmes we watch and in the literature we read that it is difficult to avoid hearing or reading it. We need to live in the world but God expects his children to be different because how can we remind people of His goodness or show them that he is in our lives if we join in with the coarseness and immorality that is taken so much for granted today. So although at times we will fail, our intention needs to be to avoid and dislike vulgarity, sexual innuendo and crudeness and not to get involved because these things defile us and render us an ill fitting place for his Holy Spirit to live. He is not telling us not to have fun, laugh or joke around but there are many things that we as Christians should not be laughing at.