

In a SPIRIT *of*
PRAYER

Sermon Growth Guide

June 1, 2025

Marinated in Holiness



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Ephesians 5:6-20

Key Verse: Ephesians 5:

“For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

Big Idea: Live face to face with Christ so that we can reflect his light.

Foundations

The moon doesn't give off any light of its own. And yet, as it faces the sun, it shines enough light on the Earth that the ancients could find their way in the dark. Paul tells us that just like the moon, we were once darkness, but now that we are in Christ, we are light. By reflecting Christ, we shine the light of all goodness, righteousness and peace (Ephesians 5:8-9).

Still, Paul makes it clear that we don't reflect the light of Christ automatically. Through a series of contrasting metaphors, he exhorts us to live intentionally in the light of Christ: Do not be deceived, unwise, foolish or drunk. Instead, expose fruitless deeds, be wise, understand the Lord's will, be filled with the Spirit and be thankful always.

Here we see the mystery of the Christian life. We live wholly in grace. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:38-39). And yet it matters who we are becoming. Our transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, but we must posture ourselves to be part of that work.

Paul gives us the first step. As the saying goes, we become what we behold (2 Corinthians 3:18). And we behold whom we love most. It matters that we spend time beholding Christ in prayer and in Scripture. In order to be like Christ, we must open ourselves to the work of the Spirit by being with him. Like the moon forever gazing on the sun, it is only by living face to face with Christ that we can begin to live as children of the light.

Understanding God's Word

Read Ephesians 5:6-20 together. Consider reading all of chapter 5 for context. How does the opening of chapter 5 help us understand what Paul is saying in verses 6-20? Talk through Paul's series of contrasts. How would living this way open us up to the work of the Spirit in our lives?

Applying God's Word

Do you ever spend time beholding God in prayer? What would it look like to pray that way? What obstacles get in the way of your time and intimacy with God? What are some habits or practices you do which help you follow Paul's advice on how to live?

Witnessing God's Word

This passage offers a challenge to our witness. Paul exhorts us not to be partners with the disobedient (5:7) and to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness (5:11). Yet, we need to be in loving relationships with those who don't believe and with struggling believers in order to shine the light of Christ into their lives. Spend some time discussing how we do both things well in our everyday lives.

It's June. The rain stopped. Time to get the grill going. Meat plus fire plus sunshine equals joy. One tip: don't just throw the meat on the grill frozen. It needs to marinate. The worst cut of meat can be delicious with the right marinade. When I was a PhD candidate learning about the Church Fathers, one of the things we learned is that the Church Fathers marinated in Scripture, so words and phrases and sentences just seeped into their writings naturally. They didn't stop and quote, Scripture just dropped into the middle of talking about whatever they were talking about. The Easter Egg Hunt for us patristics nerds was trying to find Scripture the translators missed! That was a thrill when that happened. You guys don't know what fun is. They were seeped in the Word of God; they marinated in the Word of God. It just oozed from them, the flavor, the aroma, the holiness of God's word. How much of prayer is simply marinating in God's holy presence?

Holiness has a bad reputation. When we hear the word "holiness" we react a little. It feels awkward. It sounds like superiority, judgmentalism and a 'holier-than-thou' attitude. Or it seems focused on eliminating certain behaviors deemed immoral. Don't drink, don't chew, don't run with girls who do! It can sound legalistic. Maybe living by grace means just accepting we have foibles and turning a blind eye to sin. But God is not tolerant of sin. Sin deeply troubles the heart of God. God did not turn a blind eye to sin. God stared it down. Jesus stared it down, all the way to the Cross where the price was paid. God does call His forgiven people to pursue holiness. We need holiness. As we continue In A Spirit of Prayer, we want to look at this pursuit of holiness. We need to be Marinated in Holiness. At the end of this message, we will take some time in prayer to bathe in God's love and holiness.

Jerry Bridges' book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, he said holiness is a call and responsibility of every follower of Christ. "God has called every Christian to a holy life. There are no exceptions to

this call. It is not a call only to pastors, missionaries, and a few dedicated Sunday school teachers. Every Christian of every nation, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, influential or totally unknown, is called to be holy. The Christian plumber and the Christian banker, the unsung homemaker and the powerful head of state are all alike called to be holy. ...Because God is holy, He requires that we be holy. Many Christians have what we might call a 'cultural holiness.' They adapt to the character and behavior pattern of Christians around them. As the Christian culture around them is more or less holy, so these Christians are more or less holy. But God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like Himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God."

Ephesians 5 begins, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2) Follow God's example. God Who says, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16) In formal terms, we are talking about sanctification. That is different from justification. Justification is when you come to Christ and confess your sins and you are forgiven, justified. Now God goes to work on you. God loves you just the way you are and loves you too much to leave you that way. God goes to work on us, changing us, growing us, disciplining us, shaping us more and more into the likeness of Christ, sanctifying us. Holy simply means "set apart." Sanctification is being made holy, being set apart for God. Some say it isn't necessary. Paul tells this church in Ephesus it is. It is. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them." (Ephesians 5:6-7)

Since the Ephesians have been saved by Christ, since they are justified by faith and they are in a relationship with

Christ, and God dwells in them by the Holy Spirit in their inner life, they can now live differently. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8-10) There is a fruit to holy living. See, God is not just laying down rules on us arbitrarily. God is inviting us into fruitful lives, the fruit of light—goodness, righteousness and truth. Holiness is also wholeness, it is about integrity. Integrity comes from the word “integer” meaning a whole number. It is exhausting to have different aspects of yourself at war with one another. Holiness is about coming together as one whole person before the Lord.

The opposite of integration is disintegration. A disintegrated life is a painful strain. Wholeness is peace. “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.” (Ephesians 5:11-13) That’s disintegration. There are things I do in the light and things I do in the dark. What if you could be whole? Can you imagine the peace? Maybe you know the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control. They are all connected. Self-control, Goodness, Faithfulness, Peace. Holiness is peace. “Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.” (Psalms 119:165) “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (Ephesians 5:15-17)

All very good, but how? I have tried before to be holy. It didn’t work! Right? How? When we think about the pursuit of holiness, three thoughts must occur

to us. (1) I must be holy; I long for it. (2) I can’t be holy; it is unattainable to me. (3) Christ has won my holiness; I rest in Him. (1) I must be holy; I long for it. I want to be whole, integrated, solid. I want to be holy, but it seems beyond me. It is, in fact. Even when you are in Christ, there is still another warring party at work in you. Sin is not only an act, but a tendency, a sickness. It still runs through our veins. Paul wrote in Romans about this ongoing battle. “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:19) That’s true of us, even as believers. Forgiven and redeemed, we still battle with patterns and habits of sin. So, (2) I can’t be holy; it is unattainable to me. The more we see of the holiness of God, the more we see our inability to attain it. But the good news is that Jesus has done it for us. (3) Christ has won my holiness; I rest in Him. As Paul concludes in Romans, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25)

What is our posture then? To lay ourselves down before Christ, as if taking our lives into the Temple and laying them on the altar. St. Augustine of Hippo talked about the altar of the heart—that in this inner place, the inner sanctum, where we who know Christ can commune with God inside ourselves, there is an altar. It’s a helpful image. “To him we offer, on the altar of the heart, the sacrifice of humility and praise, kindled by the fire of love” (Augustine, City of God) Or, as we read in Romans, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1) The way to grow into holiness is to collapse into Christ. The way up is down. Lay your life on the altar before Jesus.

Then what? Then you will know what is holy and pleasing to God. You will want to please God. Look again at our passage. “For you were once darkness,

but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8,10) What pleases the Lord. “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (Ephesians 5:17) See, now you are not begrudgingly obeying laws you don’t agree with to try to prove yourself, or justify yourself before God, or earn God’s love. You are forgiven and free. And because you love God so much, because you trust God deeply, you want to find out what pleases Him, and, more and more, you want to do it. “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20) What would it look like to marinate in the holiness of the Holy Spirit? What if part of prayer, part of being made holy in prayer, is just steeping, marinating, bathing in the presence of the holiness of Jesus, like a sunbath? It is.

I want to teach you another pattern of prayer before we go to the table. We are not only studying prayer but learning to pray. Next week we finish our 40 Days of Prayer with Pentecost. At 12:30, we will take hands around the church and pray. So, this morning, one more pattern. This one allows you to just steep in the presence of the Holy Spirit a bit, to be marinated in holiness. It is called the Prayer of Examen. It comes from the Jesuit order in the Catholic Church, but it has been a real gift to Christians. Richard Foster included it in his book on prayer. There is nothing wrong about praying this pattern of prayer. There are lots of variations but basically it goes like this, five movements. (1) Rest in God’s presence, (2) Replay the day, (3) Rejoice in God moments, (4) Repent of rebellions, (5) Recommit to follow Jesus. Let’s try it together. (1) Rest in God’s presence. (2) Replay the day. Where were there places of consolation when you felt your soul in the stream of God’s purposes? Where were the places of desolation that challenged you? Was God still there? (3) Rejoice. “Lord, I give You thanks and praise for that moment when I saw You breaking through.” (4)

Repent. “Lord, I know I was against you when... Forgive me Lord.” (5) Recommit. “Whatever else I am, I am wholly Yours, my Lord, my Savior, my God.” Amen.