

## **Ephesians 5v5-21**

Last week the Reverend Johnny told us everyone is believed to have a lookalike. Maybe. In 1996 in Corfu with Sophie I had very long, red, wavy hair. Every time some lads from Manchester saw me, they would shout "sing us a song Mick. I assume they meant Mick Hucknall of Simply Red and not Mick Jagger. Simply Red had a hit with "Holding back the years." 26 years on I wonder how Mick has fared, holding back the years. Has he fared any better than me? Is he still my lookalike: short, fat and bald. Before we explore today's passage, which is tough, let me apologise - not in any shape or form for God's word, by which we stand or fall, but if handle it in a clumsy or insensitive manner. I also apologise if I appear to be finger pointing.

Let me assure you that before I became a Christian, I was no paragon of virtue. Before I married Sophie, I had been in a complicated, and adulterous relationship. I had serious alcohol issues. But as a repentant and saved sinner I know that through Christ I am forgiven that past. Am I perfect now, sinless? No! But as I walk my journey of faith with Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit I aspire to sin less and less and less.

So to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul is addressing the Christian Church there, to people who have been redeemed from, but still living in the midst of, a pagan, sexually promiscuous and dissolute society. It couldn't be more relevant to Christians living in the 21st century. He is concerned they will revert to type, so he encourages them 1. Be imitators of God. 2. Behave like children of light. 3. Be careful how you live and 4. Be filled with the spirit. Let's take a look, at these points in turn. 1. Be imitators of God. This was dealt with in Johnny's sermon last week. He reminded us that when you become a Christian you're called to imitate Christ, to clothe yourself in Christ, to aspire to be Christ's lookalike. Johnny challenged us to ask ourselves are we living contrary to God standards modelled in Christ?

Before Paul goes onto his 2nd point, he issues this stark warning. It's unflinching directness comes as a shock to our 21st century ears because it is so countercultural. Western secular culture is firmly in favour of sexual liberalism and sexual expression without any biblical restraint. V5 "For of this you can be sure, no immoral, impure, or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Is Paul going off on one. No! Look at Rev.21v8 written by John, the disciple loved by Jesus, the apostle who uses the word love more than any other New Testament writer in his Gospel, 3 letters and in Revelation. I'm sure Paul had in mind Jesus' teaching in Matt. 7v21 "not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. I own a bass guitar. Will helped me choose it. I have a number of books on how to play it. I've read them. I can tune the base. I know the position of the notes on the frets. I am not a bass player because I don't practise. I can make excuses as to why I don't practise. God gave me chubby fingers. My moobs and gut get in the way if I stand to practise. If I sit the arthritis in my spine plays up. I can say I'm a bass player but in reality I can't play and I don't practise. If we call ourselves Christians, we must listen to Gods teaching and put it into practise. Acts26v21, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. In v6 Paul warns that we should not let anyone deceive us with empty words for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Beware liberalism don't be deceived by plausible arguments and clever speech about personal freedoms. Sexual immorality and licentious impurity isn't defined in the criminal courts or by secular society or by liberal bible-denying churches but by our creator God and his word. So beware empty words and deceitful teaching. Billy Graham warns the new morality is simply the old immorality dressed up. V7, therefore do not be partners with

them ie those that practise immorality, impurity and greed. This warning is not about ostracism or exclusion it's about not being tempted to share in the lifestyle of unbelievers. We are called to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. So we are to treat with respect, and love anyone who comes through our church doors genuinely seeking God. We should model our behaviour towards them on Jesus. I'm reminded of the woman caught in adultery and the woman at the well who had had five husbands and was currently living out of wedlock. Like Jesus, we don't condemn or condone, but care and communicate the word of God compassionately. If, however, people come to our church to foment trouble, lobbying to dilute biblical teaching to accommodate their own sinful lifestyle, then that is a different matter. Paul returns to his exhortations. 2. Behave as children of light. Paul says once you were darkness, note it's not once you were in darkness.

Before we turned to Christ, we contributed to making the world a darker place. Jesus says when you turn to him Matt.5v14 you are the light of the world. and v16 he instructs, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven. You may think to yourself, what can I do in such a dark world? Have you ever been to the Alvie caves in County Clare. "I don't believe it." Well about halfway through the tour the guide will ask you to extinguish all lights, mobile phones, torches etc. The lights in the Cave are then turned off and you're left in complete darkness. You cannot see your hand in front of your face. The guide turns on the smallest of Maglites. What a difference! Even a small light drives out darkness and it also attracts attention. Likewise, a child of light can lead the lost out of darkness and into God's wonderful light. Paul also calls us to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness. We don't do this by appointing ourselves as judge and jury of moral rectitude. We are not required to shout out, but to shine out. We reveal or expose darkness by engaging in the deeds of light. Eg Live honestly and you expose dishonesty. Live with integrity and you expose theft. VII Paul warns us not to have anything to do with fruitless deeds of darkness. As a moth is instinctively attracted to the light, so we seem inherently, to be attracted, tempted, and titillated buy risqué things. Paul encourages us to keep ourselves out of harm's way so that we do not succumb to temptation. Block the adult channels on your TV. If you're Googling for farm equipment and a dodgy site crops up, delete it from your browsing history in case there's a temptation to go back to it.(A wee bit of politics there.) Avoid the company conference, or you may be tempted to go out on the lash and end up in some bordello.

On the 13th of January 2012 the cruise ship Costa Concordia with 4252 souls on board hit rocks off the coast of the island of Giglio, Italy, capsized and partially sank. Captain Schettino was performing a sail pass salute to the island. He deliberately turned off the alarm system for the computer navigation system. He was navigating by sight so that he could move closer to the island. Apparently, he had done this, three or four times previously without mishap. At his trial it was suggested that he may have been distracted by his girlfriend who was on the bridge at this time. 34 people died, the ship had to be scrapped and captain Schettino is serving 16 years imprisonment for manslaughter. If we persist in sailing close to life's rocks, we will eventually come a cropper.

Since Christ has risen from the grave to reveal himself as the light of the world, we must wake up and live by his teaching. Behave as children of light. 3. Be careful how you live. Foolish people live as though God doesn't exist. Ps14v1 a fool says in his heart there is no God. He conducts his everyday affairs with no concern for God. I am reminded of George Colclough's favourite verse Prov.3v5- 7, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and shun evil.

A wise man reasons, if God has saved me, he has a purpose for my life. Therefore, the wise man tries to discern that purpose and live accordingly. Therefore, wise people yearn to know the will of God. They pray, seek God humbly, sincerely, and patiently with an open and willing heart and a listening ear. They consult his word prayerfully and thoughtfully. They seek the counsel of wise and seasoned Christians. Be careful how you live. Walk in wisdom. 4. and lastly, be filled with the Spirit. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a message of God's acceptance without change, but the message of God's salvation with the power to change. That power comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit. That power helped me overcome alcohol abuse. Paul says that drunkenness leads to debauchery. A better translation is possibly, drunkenness leads to dissipation and wastefulness. I can certainly testify to my lost years, wasted years and squandered resources. I can't get them back and that's a real source of regret for me. Alcohol is a seductive mistress. There's a sense of euphoria and release when you drink. Your troubles are gone, even for a short time.

During the early 70s, at the height of the troubles, the Belfast wit would have said "the quickest way out of Belfast on a Saturday night is to get drunk". But alcohol is also a cruel mistress because it is highly addictive. Sadly, the drunk is out of control, makes a fool of himself, draws attention to himself, his words profit no one and are often shameful and profane. He sings songs that reveal the corruption in his heart. In summary, a drunk is what my dad would have called a PINTA a pain in the ar\*\*. By comparison, the Spirit filled Christian is under control, God's control. He glorifies God and is willing to be a fool for the sake of Christ. He's a witness for Christ. His mind is clear. He sees Christ and all that he has done for him and is doing for him. He is inspired to have fellowship with his brothers and sisters in Christ, to sing and make music to the Lord, to be thankful, for all things at all times, and to be submissive to the needs of others. I'm no Greek scholar. I don't know any Greek grammar. But I understand the verb "filled" in this passage is present continuous which means we should keep on being filled with the Spirit. The verb is also passive which means we don't fill ourselves but permit the Spirit to fill us. In the NEB, the verse is translated, "let the Holy Spirit fill you." Fill is not related to quantity, like filling your petrol tank, but to control. When you ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you, (have a look at Luke 11:13) you're giving Him absolute freedom to control your mind, your emotions and your will. As we allow the Spirit to fill us, more and more of God's blessings flow. He empowers us and leads us into Christlikeness.

Let me finish with a brief story. David Pawson asked some men in his local, why they went to the pub instead of church. It's a much happier and easier place to go into than a church. Everybody is so quiet, and they just look at the back of your head. As a result, he invited them all to come to the opening of his church hall. One man came up to him and said, there's a great atmosphere. It's just like entering the pub. People are relaxed, they're chatting together, happy, loads of noise, fun and singing. David took this as a compliment. He goes on, some folk want God's house to be silent as a cemetery and think it's honouring to God. Sure, there is a place for quietness and stillness. But maybe church should be more like a public house in the truest sense - a house for the public - people who are drunk with God, tongues loosened, feelings released, songs of worship flowing. John Wesley said I want a bunch of God intoxicated men and I can turn England upside down. Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit.

To close, last week Johnny said God doesn't make good people better he makes dead people live. He asked us the question if we are living contrary to God's standards? Well! Be imitators of God, behave like children of light, be careful how you live, be filled with the Spirit and you'll be on the right track. Amen.