

# PM Ephesians 5:1-7 Foul or Fragrant

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[ 0 : 00 ] Ephesians chapter 5, we're going to, well this evening we're going to think about the first 7 verses of chapter 5, but we're going to read the first 21 verses together just to get the context of Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5, I'm beginning to read that verse 1, this is the word of God.

Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place.

But instead, let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous, that is, an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

[ 1 : 17 ] Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of the light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible. For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

[ 2 : 29 ] Addressing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Giving thanks always, and for everything, to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Submitting to one another, out of reverence, for Christ. Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and an errant word.

We'll turn to praise God again. Genesis chapter 8. Beginning to read at verse 20. We'll read down into chapter 9, and verse 17. Genesis chapter 8.

I'm beginning to read at verse 20. This is the word of God. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took some of every clean animal, and some of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man. For the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature, as I have done.

[ 3 : 35 ] While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea.

Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I give you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning. From every beast I will require it, and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

For God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth, and multiply in it. Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, Behold, I establish my covenant with you, and your offspring after you.

[ 4 : 45 ] And with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark, it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood.

And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is a sign of the covenant that I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.

I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you, and every living creature of all flesh.

And the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it. And remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth. Amen.

[ 5 : 55 ] This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let us turn again. Turn then in our Bibles again, please, to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5. In these first seven verses of Ephesians 5.

It was slightly difficult, slightly tricky, knowing how to break up this section. In Ephesians, there's not really sort of clear demarcations of which sections to take.

For better or worse, I've taken Ephesians 5, 1 to 7 this evening, and we'll see where we get to next week. But the section before us this evening is Ephesians 5, and verses 1 through 7.

One of our children has a very acute sense of smell. It really is quite phenomenal. You know, he'll be walking down the street, and he'll say to you, you know, what's that smell, Daddy?

What's that smell of paint? I can't smell anything, but sure enough, you'll walk around the corner, and somebody will be painting their garage, or painting whatever it is. I went into nursery with him one day, and the teacher said to him, I'm sorry, but the smell that was here yesterday is still here today.

[ 7 : 01 ] We can't seem to get rid of it. I just had this vision of him complaining about this smell that no one else noticed all day. And as we come to this section in Ephesians, it's all about smell, isn't it?

It's not a line that I've used in a sermon before, I don't think, but it is a legitimate sentiment.

Because you see, at the start of this section, what do we have? We have the sacrifice of Christ that's described as a pleasing aroma to God.

But contrasted against that, then, is what we see in the next section, where we see the foul stench of believers who don't live out their calling, of believers who don't live lives worthy of the calling they've received.

The foul stench of believers living like they still belong to the world. That's the contrast that's set before us this evening. This fragrant aroma, this fragrant offering, and the foul stench of believers not living up to their calling.

We want to see three things tonight. Think about this, these seven verses using three headings.

Firstly, we want to think about this fragrant offering. What exactly it means?

[ 8 : 14 ] What exactly is this fragrant offering that Paul speaks of to the Ephesians? Secondly then, we want to think about the foul stench and see how that applies to each of us.

See how that played out in the Ephesians' lives and how, in some senses, what Paul writes was particular to them, but also how what Paul writes is applicable to us even today.

And then thirdly tonight, we'll think about a futile word. A futile word that some people in Ephesus were obviously trying to deceive the believers. That some people in Ephesus were obviously trying to lead the Christians astray and Paul says to them, no, don't listen to the futile word that they speak.

Don't listen to the lies that they tell you. Instead, follow Christ. A fragrant offering, a foul stench, and a futile word. So firstly then, a fragrant offering, a fragrant offering, and we see that in verses 1 and 2.

We saw last week in Ephesians how we were called to live as believers, that we're called to be kind to one another, that we're called to love one another, that we're called as believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God who indwells each one of us.

[ 9 : 26 ] And we see then that as we come to verse 1 of chapter 5, we see that Paul begins this section with a therefore. In light of all that I've said, in light of all that I've said about Christian living, in light of all that I've said about not grieving the Holy Spirit of God, in light of all that I've said about how you live as believers, in light of the fact that God and Jesus Christ has forgiven you, this then is how you live.

Therefore, in light of the things that I've just said, then do this. And what does Paul tell us to do? What does Paul tell the Ephesians to do?

Therefore, verse 1, be imitators of God as beloved children. We know what it is to imitate someone. I can remember growing up watching the spinning image puppets. I'm pretty sure that I wasn't supposed to be watching them, but that was the advantage of having two older brothers.

Sometimes, it was probably the only advantage of having two older brothers, it has to be said, but sometimes you got to do things that your mum and dad probably weren't quite sure that you were doing. But you know the spinning image puppets, they mimicked people, they copied people, they picked on the traits of people and copied that.

[ 10 : 40 ] They were imitators of the people depicted. And of course, we're familiar in other places with Paul telling believers to imitate him. We thought about it a little bit yesterday morning at the men's breakfast.

But this is slightly different, isn't it? Paul here doesn't say, therefore, be imitators of me. He doesn't even here actually say, therefore, be imitators of Christ, which I think we can understand.

But actually, what he says to the believers in Ephesus is therefore, be imitators of God. Now what's Paul getting at here? What does he mean when he tells the believers in Ephesus to be imitators of God?

We always say, don't we, that when we come to Scripture, the key thing is always the context.

Where's the verse found? What's the flow of the passage in which the verse is found?

chapter 4, verse 32, what does Paul say? Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

[ 11 : 44 ] Then in verse 1 of chapter 5, he then says, therefore, be imitators of God. Follow the example of God if you like. What does that mean?

Well, it means what he says in verse 32 of chapter 4. Be kind to one another, be tenderhearted, be forgiving. That was how God acted towards them. That was how God displayed himself towards them.

And therefore, they're to imitate God, they're to copy God by being kind to one another, by being tenderhearted to one another, by forgiving one another, just as God in Christ had forgiven them. God is the ultimate example of grace, isn't he? Of mercy, of kindness. He had forgiven them their sins. He had forgiven them in Christ before they had ever asked for it.

When he made right relationship with himself possible through the death of his son, God was being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving to them. And Paul calls them here in chapter 5, verse 1, to imitate God in being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

[ 13 : 01 ] There are some things we need to, we need to be careful in a sense of what we say here. Because there are some things that as believers you simply cannot become imitators of God in.

For example, we cannot become an imitator of God in his omniscience. We can't become an imitator of God in his all-knowing-ness. We can't, because we're finite created creatures coming to an infinite God.

We can't become imitators of God in his omnipresence, in his presence everywhere. This side of death, we cannot become imitators of God in his eternity. We can't become imitators of God in his omnipotence, in his all-powerfulness.

So there are some things that Paul cannot be calling the Ephesian believers to here, because if he were calling them to that, then it would be impossible.

What Paul is calling the Ephesian believers to, and what he's calling us to tonight, is to become imitators of God in what's called his communicable attributes. His justice, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, his kindness, his justice.

[14:17] He's told them to do that in chapter 4, verse 32. And now in chapter 5, verse 1, he says, be imitators of God. By following what God does in chapter 4, verse 32.

And there's that lovely little phrase at the end of verse 1, isn't there? Therefore, be imitators of God. And how are they described, how are the Ephesian believers described? As beloved children. Beloved children, it's a lovely little phrase. It's a lovely phrase full of reassurance, full of hope. It's fascinating to watch your children, grandchildren, grow and develop.

Because there's so many things that you've never taught them to do, but they just pick up from watching you do, whether for good or for bad. They imitate all of the things that you do.

One of our boys enjoys walking around with his hands behind his back. I've never done that, but my dad would do it quite a lot, and somehow he's managed to pick that up from my father.

[15:25] They're imitators. And Paul here urges these Ephesian believers to imitate, to learn from, to follow God, to imitate God himself.

as they become more gracious, more merciful, more kind, more forgiving, more tenderhearted, more loving towards one another.

Maybe that raises the question for you tonight, well, that's okay for the Ephesian believers. I mean, you know, they had the Apostle Paul writing to them. What does it mean for us tonight?

How do we become imitators of God? How do we know how to become more God-like? Well, we study God's Word, don't we?

It's the Word of God that's the written revelation of God to us. It's the Word of God that shows us what God is like. It's the Word of God that shows us God's character. If we want to know what God is like, we read it in His Word.

[16:30] That's one of the ways that we become imitators of God. We know God's Word more and more. We become imitators of God as we pray and converse with the Father through prayer.

As you pour out your soul to Him in prayer, as you do that, and as you join with other Christians who are trying to be imitators of God. The older divines talked about using the means of grace. They meant by that Bible study, prayer, and Christian fellowship. They were the means of grace, and by using these means of grace, by devoting ourselves to these means of grace, to prayer, to Bible study, to fellowship, we become more and more like the one who's given us these graces in the first place.

We become more and more like God. But Paul isn't finished there, is he? So he's told in verse 1, be imitators of God. But then what does he say in verse 2?

And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Notice that he gives them the instruction, but he also gives them the spur.

[17:42] He gives them the instruction to walk in love, but he gives them the reason, he gives them the push on, if you like, walk in love, yes, verse 2, but he doesn't leave it there.

Walk in love rather as Christ loved you. That's to be their spur, that's the thing that's to goad them on, even when other believers don't seem especially lovable.

Why should they walk in love? Because they follow Christ who loved them. Why should they sacrifice for one another? Why should they be kind to one another? Because Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for them.

The sacrifice is spoken of here in Old Testament terms, isn't it? It's a fragrant offering, a pleasing aroma before God. It's a sacrifice to the Father.

That's what we see in Genesis 8. That's what we read from that passage. That after God has flooded the earth, that after the waters have subsided, as Noah offers that sacrifice, its aroma pleases God.

[18:50] It's perhaps not something we like to think about really. Somehow this sacrifice is a pleasing aroma, that somehow this sacrifice is a pleasant smell.

But yet it was that sacrifice in Noah's time. It was that sacrifice of Christ that guaranteed right relationship with God.

It was that sacrifice of Christ that paid the price for sin. It was that sacrifice of Christ that bought us right relationship with God. God. That's why it's a pleasing aroma.

Not necessarily because of the sacrifice element of it, but because of the result of the sacrifice. It's impossible to read anything that Jesus says.

It's impossible to read anything that Paul says and come to the conclusion that his death was anything less than a sacrifice. Anything less than a laying down of his life so that we might come to know God.

[ 19 : 55 ] Other ideas have been proposed. Other theories have come about. People like to talk about the cross as a moral inspiration story. It shows us how to sacrifice for one another.

Other people talk about the cross as cosmic child abuse. But yet none of that does justice to what Jesus himself says.

None of that does justice to what Paul says here. Jesus came and gave his life. He laid it down freely and took it up again freely. He laid down his life of his own accord.

Jesus Christ came to be the ransom for many. The sacrifice was a pleasing, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice to God so that we might come to know God.

God. Don't waste that sacrifice this evening. Don't overlook that sacrifice this evening. But rather come and put your trust in that sacrifice.

[ 21 : 00 ] Come and know God. So that's the first thing then we see this fragrant offering. Secondly then we think about a foul stench, a foul stench and we see that in verses 3 through 5.

So we've seen the pleasing aroma. We've seen the sacrifice to God that's described as a fragrant offering. But now if you like we see the foul stench and that begins in verse 3.

But Paul says to the Ephesians, in contrast to the love of Christ, in contrast to his sweet smelling sacrifice, in contrast to this pleasing aroma before God.

what is there? There's sexual immorality, there's impurity, there's covetousness. But it must not even be named among you as is proper amongst the saints.

The town of Ephesus we remember was a center, was a place for the worship of the goddess Diana. Diana's image, her motif, the symbol that would have went with Diana was a many breasted woman.

[ 22 : 08 ] Temple prostitution was encouraged and so Paul writing this letter to the church in Ephesus, writing this letter to a group of believers in Ephesus says look, this was your old way of life, verse 3.

This was how you lived, verse 3. Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, that was how you used to live. You used to live in impurity with the temple prostitutes.

You used to be covetous of another man's wife or another woman's husband. But that can't be so among the church. That can't be amongst the saints.

That's how you used to live. We live in days that are much the same, don't we? Days when affairs are common.

Days when sexual intimacy outside of marriage is encouraged. I was reading a report in a newspaper. I think the thing that showed me about this was that it was in the Daily Telegraph.

[ 23 : 10 ] There was a woman who'd written in to the agony aunt of the Daily Telegraph. She was married. But her husband was quite happy for her to have as many sexual partners as she saw fit.

You think, what kind of madness is this? What kind of world are we living in? men? But it's in such a world that the Christian sexual ethic will mark them out as different.

It's in a world that says that marriage doesn't matter. It's in a world that says, well, you can do whatever you want with whoever you want as long as no one gets hurt. It's the Christian's commitment to marriage that will make them different.

It's the Christian's commitment to their marriage vows that will mark the Christian out as different.

It's the Christian's commitment to celibacy and singleness that will mark them out as different. The world that we inhabit isn't so different from the world that Paul was writing to in Ephesus.

And he says to them, verse 3, well, sexual immorality and impurity or covetousness must not be named among you. And it must not be named among us tonight.

[ 24 : 26 ] Paul moves on from the sexual, if you like, in verse 3 to what the people are saying in verse 4. But notice that it's all kind of vaguely related.

There isn't to be any sexual immorality, verse 3, then verse 4. Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

The idea that's conveyed with all of these words are that these are words that don't build up. These are words that corrode. These are words that tear down.

These aren't words that edify. Rather, they're going to be words that are shaking the foundations of the Christian faith. You see, when we talk about these things, then they become normalized. When we joke and laugh about sexual infidelity, then it becomes accepted and normalized. We make it seem less serious than it really is. when we tell jokes that are a bit risqué or jokes that perhaps have some swearing in them.

[ 25 : 35 ] Again, it shakes the foundations of our Christian faith and our Christian life, doesn't it? It normalizes and accepts these things rather than the word of God.

one of the favorite things that I used to watch on TV was a show called Mock the Week, a show which looked at the news and tried to put a comedic spin on it.

But I have to confess that I had to stop watching it because everything in it was just so profane. It wasn't funny anymore. It was just rude, coarse. And that's what Paul warns us against here.

Don't be rude. Don't do those things. Don't be filthy. Don't be coarse. But maybe you're here tonight and you're someone who enjoys a joke.

You're here tonight and you're someone who enjoys a laugh. So is the Bible then against joking? Is the Bible against having a laugh? Well, not at all. The preacher in Proverbs remind us that a merry heart does good like good medicine.

[ 26 : 41 ] We're reminded it in the Psalms that God himself laughs. So what this is calling us to isn't a seriousness. It isn't a sternness that never shows joy or laughter or any kind of emotion.

But rather what Paul's calling us to here is an appropriate laughter and joy and emotion. Not the lowest common denominator sort of filth and sleaze body comedy but rather comedy that we can enjoy in all good conscience.

Rather than this foul stench. Rather than the filthiness, foolishness, crudeness. Instead let there be thanksgiving. This stuff isn't proper in the Christian life.

This stuff isn't right in the Christian life. But what is? Well there's thanksgiving for all that God has done for us. as he continues verse 5.

Paul makes the statement then that you may be sure of this. That everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

[ 27 : 49 ] Now if we take that verse in isolation and we take that verse on its own it seems to suggest to us that anyone who falls into sin in this way has no place in the kingdom of God. that anyone who sins in this way has committed the unforgivable sin and is cut off forever.

Is that what Paul really means? Is that what Paul is really getting at in verse 5? I don't think so. I think the key for us is understanding what he says in the middle of verse 5. Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater.

people who are idolatrous, people who have placed something else other than God at the centre of their lives, people who have placed something else at the centre of their hearts.

And what Paul is saying here is that there are some who make this a way of life, some whose way of life is adultery, some whose way of life is sexual immorality and impurity, someone whose way of life is covetous at their very core.

And it's these people Paul says who will not inherit the kingdom of God. It's these people who have no share in the kingdom of God. Those who have something else other than Christ on the throne of their hearts.

[ 29 : 08 ] There is always forgiveness tonight for the truly penitent, for those who genuinely repent and turn to Christ. There is not any hope for those who are idolatrous.

There is not any hope for those who continue to reject Christ and build their lives on anything other than God. Such people, says Paul, have no share, have no inheritance in the kingdom.

So we've seen the fragrant offering of Christ. We've seen the foul stench of lives that don't honour God. And then thirdly, finally, we want to think about a futile word, a futile word.

And we see that in verses 6 and 7. Having said all this, Paul says to the Ephesians then, verse 6, look, don't let anyone deceive you with empty words. Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty words.

Now what's Paul talking about here? Is he talking in general terms about empty words? Is he talking in general terms about being deceived? In a sense, of course, the answer to that is yes, but rather let's read it in context.

[ 30 : 12 ] Paul's just given them a new ethic to live by, if you like. Paul's just given them a new standard of Christian behaviour to live by. And you can see and imagine how these Ephesian believers turning their back on the way that they used to live, turning their back on all that they used to know.

They might have friends come to them and say, well what do you mean you're not coming to the temple anymore? What do you mean you're not engaging in the ritual prostitution anymore? What does it matter if you sleep with a temple prostitute? What does it matter if you come out with the lads and have a bit of laugh and a joke shirt? You don't really believe it anyway. And Paul's saying, no don't let anyone lead you astray by speaking these words to you. Don't let anyone lead you astray by making you think that it's not a big deal. People today might like to speak similar sounding words.

Well sure, love is love, isn't it? What does it matter who you love as long as you're faithful, as long as you're committed? I'm afraid those words are leading people astray.

[ 31 : 21 ] They're leading people not to the kingdom of God, but they're leading people away from the kingdom of God. And one day the people who speak those words will have to give an answer, give an account for these words.

It reminds us why our ultimate touchstone, our ultimate testing point must be the word of God. God. Because the words of men, however plausible, however pleasant sounding to our ears, if they don't line up with the word of God, if they don't line up with what God has shown us of himself in scripture, then they're empty words that are leading us astray.

Therefore, Paul says to them, verse 7, don't be partners with them. Don't be partners with those who speak empty words.

Don't be partners with those who speak useless words. Don't be partners with those who are seeking to lead you astray. Rather, instead, be partners with those who speak life, who speak light, who speak Christ.

It's a difficult line to tread, isn't it? Because if we take these words in isolation from what we read in the rest of the Bible, we'd cut ourselves off.

[ 32 : 39 ] We'd live some sort of monastic lifestyle in a cave somewhere. But yet the same apostle who wrote these words would also tell us that we are to be in the world, but not of the world.

We're called here not to monastic isolation, but we're called to be careful. not to cut ourselves off from the world, but to be careful that we're not listening to the world, that we're not imbibing the world's message, that we're not being conformed to the image of this world, but rather that we're being transformed, that we're being conformed more and more to the image of our Savior, that we're becoming more and more like Christ, that we're becoming, as Paul puts it, imitators of God. You see, we're being pressed tonight into one mold or the other. Either tonight we're being pressed by the world, into its mold that we're being shaped and having our values shaped by the world and what it says and thinks is right, or we're being pressed into the image and the mold of God and being shaped and conformed to his image.

The question for you tonight as you leave is whose voice are you listening to? Are you listening to the voice of the world that leads you astray, the voice of the world that leads you nowhere, or the voice of God that leads to life and light and life eternal?

Amen.