

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. June 25<sup>th</sup> 2006

## Live a new Life! – 'Sex as God intended?'

### Ephesians 5: 1 - 14



#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Eph 5: 1-14 examines some of the high goals that God has called us to imitate. The reading divides into two parts - who we are to be like and what we are not to be like. It opens with the words 'be imitators of God'. To imitate is to copy or reproduce the exact same characteristics; and so the first characteristic we are called to copy - is to 'live a life of love, just as Christ loved us.' Sex without love is meaningless; it's self gratification and even abuse.

In the beginning God created humankind and in Genesis Chapter 2 we have the story of God making woman from the rib of the man and in the KJ version it continues: *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.* The word cleave is an old English word which means to stick together like glue. It's a picture of unity, of lasting and deep friendship, which makes sexual intercourse, of becoming one flesh, deeper and lovelier. This is how God intended our sexual lives within the bounds of marriage to be. The passage on love from 1 Cor.13 has become over-familiar because it's used so often in marriage services, but defines what love is. Ideally a sexual relationship within marriage should bear all of these hallmarks. To live a life of love – unselfish love - is the key to being like God himself. This has to be the driver that enables everything else that Paul says in this chapter to happen. It's about being like God – letting his HS help us to be like him and to have the same unselfish qualities. For Paul the theme of imitation is a recurrent one and more than once he recommends his own example to his converts for their imitation – only because he was so careful to be an imitator of Christ himself. His converts in Ephesus would have seen no example of Christian living before Paul and his companions came among them. In teaching them how Christians ought to live, he made use of practice rather than precept –that is, being and acting the way Jesus would want him to, because the spoken word would have been useless if it had been contradicted by the way he lived.

But the surprise in our text from Ephesians is what then follows who we are to imitate. It is not a further list of things to imitate, but a list of things that we are NOT to imitate. For those who argue for sexual freedom verse 3 to 14 make salutary reading. God's moral standards, as clearly outlined in the Bible, are incredibly high in every area of our lives. When it comes to sexual morality, 'the bar is very high for Christians.' It's probably true that no Christian today really enjoys the constraints placed on his sexual freedom by God's requirements. The single person doesn't like having to wait for sex until marriage, married people don't always like having to be faithful within marriage, and the homosexually orientated person doesn't like having to live a celibate life. But no one is given 'carte-blanche' to be sexually active on the basis of simply 'expressing his or her feelings'. All of us have to exercise self-discipline, and this is increasingly difficult in such a publicly, sexually aware society as our present one. But in the light of this, I believe that as Christians we need to be very careful to talk about what we are **for**, rather than what we are against. So, we are **for** sexual purity; we are **for** living up to God's standards. We need to keep teaching these standards, to heterosexual and homosexual alike, to those who are single and to those who are married. Each of us individually needs to keep examining ourselves to ensure we are not falling prey to temptations( to lust, to adultery); and we also need to try to help each other within the body of Christ, to live in the way God has created us to live and that he requires us to live. In doing this we must always be full of mercy for those who fail, and who want to change; but at the same time we cannot teach as 'normal' those things which are outside God's glorious desire of sexual purity for us.

#### Witness: Questions to discuss



1. vs 1-3 command that we live a life of love and holiness. Have you ever found conflicts between these two concepts when you apply them?
2. What have you discovered are some of the things that "please God"?
3. Given the pervading culture we live in, how can we help each other to live as God requires us?
4. How do we support those who are not married and wish to remain celibate?
5. How can we respond in love to those who appear to disregard God's standards in sexual relationships?
6. vs 11-14 What is it that this section is telling us to do? What are appropriate and inappropriate ways of doing it?