



5. 'Playing your part'

Ephesians 5.¹⁻³³

Background

Back in the days when literacy was far from common, the truths of the Bible were often communicated 'visually': stained glass windows are an instance of just that – as were the 'plays' put on, in which the actors played out the drama of the Bible's story before the eyes of a fascinated public.

Ours has become, once again, a very 'visual' culture – where the 'eye' gate as often as not takes precedence over the 'ear' gate. Communicating truth demands a visual dimension.

In some ways that's the sort of perspective Paul was recognising here in this chapter. Whereas in chapter 4, he used the picture of the church as the 'body' of Christ, here he uses a slightly different picture: it's not a picture to which he explicitly alludes, but certainly *implicit* in all that he says in this chapter is this picture of the church as the 'troupe' of Jesus, through whom He rehearses the great story of the gospel on the stage of their daily living.

We are part of Jesus' great 'drama company'; our lives as believers are a great 'open-air theatre' production, a 'play' which displays in a visual form the central truths of Scripture: who Jesus is, what He's done, how He works, why He matters.

The opening words of the chapter get as close as anything to spelling this out as Paul exhorts the believers at Ephesus to "*follow God's example*" (NIV), or, more to the point, '*mimic God*' – in much the same way as an impressionist will 'mimic' a well-known public figure. Except this is not comedy; this is hugely serious. Our lives are not to be an 'act', or a performance in the sense that we're merely *pretending* to be something we're not: rather, because we are the children of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are bound, as such, to reflect and display the family likeness – and to be careful to show the nature of God and the essence of the gospel.

Each of us, therefore, has a part to play, and it's important that we 'learn our lines' and 'get our act together'! A careful study of this chapter should help us all do that.

'Days' (1), (4) and (5) are the ones with which to start if you're short on time. You'll find it helpful to keep this picture of the church as the Lord's 'troupe' in mind: although not stated as such in so many words, it is the controlling thought of Paul's argument here and helps you navigate the passage.

1) Monday 6th February – impressionist

Read [Ephesians 5.1-2](#)

“.. Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ..” (Eph.5.1)

Believers are to ‘mimic’ God: they’re called to be like ‘impressionist’ painters who portray on the canvas of their daily lives something of the glory of God. That means a life of love, marked by a constant self-giving that is as attractive as it is willing.

How do ‘impressionists’ (usually comedians) go about ‘mimicking’ different well-known people?

What plays/films have left a powerful impression on you?

What message or truth were such dramas conveying, and what was it about them which conveyed such a message?

Why does Paul appeal to the fact that we are ‘dearly loved children’ as a way of motivating his readers to ‘live a life of love’??

Christ’s sacrificial love was unique: in what sense and in what ways are we being exhorted to reflect that in our own living?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You’ve called us to rehearse each day the drama of Your own great, gracious dealings with us, and to show the wonder of Your sacrificial love.

2) Tuesday 7th February – thanksgiving

Read [Ephesians 5.3-7](#)

“.. these are improper for God’s holy people ..” (Eph.5.3)

Immorality, impurity and greed (however they find expression in what’s said, what’s done, or what’s savoured in a person’s mind and heart) are the converse of the character and kingdom of God. ‘Impersonate’ God, instead, with true thanksgiving.

Why are those who are ‘immoral, impure or greedy’ to be understood as ‘idolaters’ (v.5)?

Immorality, impurity and greed is everywhere in our culture: when you breathe that air each day how can you avoid inhaling such things?

Prayer: Purify my heart, Lord, let me be as gold and precious silver. Refiner’s Fire, my heart’s one desire is to be holy, set apart for You, Lord, ready to do Your will.

3) Wednesday 8th February – light

Read [Ephesians 5.8-14](#)

“.. now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ..” (Eph.5.8)

Over against the immorality, impurity and greed that marks the kingdom of darkness, the 'light' of God's kingdom plays out as goodness, righteousness and truth. As the moon shines when exposed to the sun, so our lives are to be light in the light of Christ.

What does Paul mean by 'exposing' the 'fruitless deeds of darkness' if it's shameful even to mention them (vv.11f)?

We live as children of light by living *in* the light (v.13): what does 'living in the light' involve (see [1 Jn.1.5-2.2](#))?

Prayer: *Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon me; set me free by the truth You now bring me: search me, try me, consume all my darkness: shine on me.* ([G Kendrick](#))

4) Thursday 9th February – wonderful

Read [Ephesians 5.15-21](#)

".. always giving thanks to God the Father for everything .." (Eph.5.20)

Our lives are to be lived 'towards' the Lord, pointing to Him and displaying in our lives and in our relationships both what He's like and why He's altogether wonderful. Seek to learn His will, to be filled with His Spirit, and to proclaim in all things His glory.

What will being 'careful how you live' mean for you?

What might 'making the most of every opportunity' mean for us *as a church*, with the 'opportunity', for instance, of a building fronting onto Union Street?

How can you 'be filled with the Spirit'?

How does Paul's exhortation to the believers to speak 'to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit' apply to us?

Why should we *always* be giving thanks to God the Father, and how can we give thanks to Him for *everything*?

Prayer: *How blessed I am, so bound with love, surrounded yet so free: in doubt or blessing, life or death, You, Lord, remain with me.* ([New Scottish Hymns](#))

5) Friday 10th February – submission

Read [Ephesians 5.21-24](#)

".. submit to one another out of reverence for Christ .." (Eph.5.21)

The exhortation is addressed to every believer, because 'submission' (when properly understood) is one of the core values of the kingdom. This submission is not some 'power-play', but a glad readiness to put the interests of others before our own.

Your submission to others points to the loveliness of life lived under the lordship of Jesus: how do you display that strikingly submissive spirit?

However tempting it is for us to jump in at v.22, why is it so important to read v.22 in the light of v.21 (and indeed the previous verses)?

How are you able to be truly submissive without being effectively a 'doormat'?

In what ways does the metaphor of the church as the 'troupe' of the Lord Jesus help us both benefit from, and rightly apply, these verses, whether or not we're married?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You show me so clearly the beauty and dignity of a submissive spirit – grant me grace, by Your Spirit dwelling in me, to show such submissiveness today.

6) Saturday 11th February – gospel

Read [Ephesians 5.25-27](#)

".. Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy .." (Eph.5.25)

The heart of the gospel lies in the love of Jesus for His people, and His people's delight in His lordship over their lives. This is the great gospel 'drama' which, in every sort of situation – marriage not least – we seek to play out in the way our lives are lived

In what ways are you able to show both the beauty of Jesus' sacrificial love and the blessing of being submitted to His lordship?

How are you helping others to become 'holy and blameless'?

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace: live through me today, in all I say and do, in such a way that those I'm with experience a growing wholeness.

7) Sunday 12th February – united

Read [Ephesians 5.28-33](#)

".. the two will become one flesh .." (Eph.5.31)

Marriage, like so many of our 'fairy stories' and their climactic happily-ever-after weddings, is itself but a picture of a deeper more glorious reality – the Son of God leaving His Father and being united forever to His bride. Let's all be telling that story!

In what ways today, in the worship of His people, will you be conscious of Christ feeding and caring for His body and His bride (v.29)?

'The two will become one' – Jesus and His bride, the church: what difference does it make to you, knowing that you are now one with Him?

Prayer: You left Your Father's throne above, so free, so infinite Your grace: emptied Yourself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race. 'Tis mercy all, my Lord! (*)