

# You Owe It To Yourself

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In the church calendar we celebrate Easter all the way to Pentecost, which means that today is the Second Sunday of Easter. The question I want to ask you this morning is, “What now?” How shall we live NOW, in light of the Resurrection?

From our text this morning I want to offer you three Bee’s, in honor of springtime.

Three Bee’s: Be Imitators, Be Aware, Be Thankful.

Ephesians 5:1-21

5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 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. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

“Wake up, O sleeper,

rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Intro:

One of the silver linings of shelter-in-place orders has been an emphasis on self-care. This is a marathon not a sprint, so we get encouragement from all sorts of places to do little things to keep ourselves healthy. For instance, I got this in an email from my orthopedist of all people.

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He is encouraging me to take 1 minute to meditate, swap 2 junk foods with healthy ones, take three minutes to laugh, and take four deep breaths – at least once a day.

On one level, this is kinda cute and not intended to be taken too seriously. Will any of these really help with the tendonitis in my right shoulder? It even says on the bottom, “This is not a real prescription. It is for entertainment purposes only.”

But on another level, it is saying something incredibly important. It reminds me that, when life is especially hard, little choices can make a huge difference.

Maybe you’ve noticed a shift in your behavior over the last few weeks like I have. The day shelter-in-place orders took effect I was in Target – NOT finding any toilet paper or eggs. So I bought the next best thing: An extra-large box of Lucky Charms. (It was nearly Saint Patrick’s Day after all.)

What about a pandemic led me to buy a box of cereal I haven’t eaten in decades? Suddenly, an unhealthy breakfast food from my childhood felt like exactly the thing I needed. I may or may not have also purchased pop tarts.

But four weeks later, the Lucky Charms have been replaced with oatmeal. I'm not sleeping through my alarm anymore. Since my boot camp coach loaned me some weights and posts a workout ever Mon, Weds and Fri morning on Facebook live, I don't have an excuse to skip exercise anymore. The longer sheltering place lasts, the more important it becomes to live wisely and to focus on the opportunities we have now. As Paul says in verse 15:

5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

### Theme

In light of the resurrection, we owe it ourselves to be mindful of how we live, especially in light of the huge challenges we face now and will face in the future.

We are in the heart of the second half of Ephesians. The first half is about identity – This is who we are in Christ. The second half is about activity – This is how we are able to behave because of who we are. How shall we live in light of the Resurrection—that is, the transformed life now available to us?

Paul's answer is:

5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us...

When the days are evil, you owe it to yourself to be imitators of God.

Maybe your first thought is, "I can't do that!" I can't possibly be as good as God, as holy as God, as righteous as God. Isn't that why Jesus died on the cross?

Well yes and no. We celebrate the cross as the means of our justification – getting right with God. Justification = Just-as-if-I hadn't ever done wrong.

But it's not just that. The cross is also the means of our righteousness – being in right relationship with God and with others.

When it comes to how we are to live in light of the resurrection, this isn't a matter of us asking Jesus, "What can I do to pay you back for what you did on the cross?" Instead, "How am I free to live as a loving person now because of your love?"

Ephesians 5 is not a "you owe it to Jesus" text. It is a "you owe it to yourself BECAUSE of Jesus and Resurrection" text.

You owe it to yourself to...

Express your sexuality in healthy ways that honor God and honors others as beloved children of God - not as objects or as a means-to-an-end.

Be grateful for what you have instead of nurturing an insatiable desire for more and more.

Use your words to edify – that is, to build up and make better – instead of using them to down or get a cheap laugh.

Live your life openly and in the light of integrity in which your private, interior life matches your public life.

Paul says that these are the hallmarks of a well-lived life – a First and Second Commandment type of life – and that people who live contrary to this are idolaters. He is drawing directly from Moses and from Jesus himself here. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied first by reciting the shema, the foundational belief in the unity of God: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Then he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' ... (Mk 12:29–31).

Resurrection people worship no other god than God, and don't make idols for themselves. As they love God well, it naturally flows that they will be able to love their neighbors well. That is why...

When the days are evil, you owe it to yourself to be aware of your idols.

So what is an idol? An idol is any good thing that takes God's place... which is a bad thing!

John Calvin, one of our founders of Reformed Christian faith, put it succinctly in his Institutes of the Christian Religion (I.11.8) – "... the human mind is... a perpetual forge of idols." Nowadays we say, "The human heart is an idol factory." Calvin agrees with Paul who agrees with Jesus that we are naturally predisposed to grab onto something – anything! – other than God and make that the center of our hope, our happiness, and our heart's desire.

"Not me!" we say to ourselves. Other people may have idols, but not me! But as Rosaria Champagne Butterfield puts it her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*:

"One very difficult aspect of sin is that my sin never feels like sin to me. My sin feels like life to me, plain and simple. My heart is an idol factory, and my mind is an excuse-making factory."

The more we invest in defending our excuses, the duller our minds and hearts become. It's like we are sleep walking through life, totally unaware of the compulsions that drive us. That's why Paul quotes a line from the baptismal hymn, *Wake up, O sleeper/ and rise from the dead/ and Christ will shine upon you.* To descend into the waters of baptism is to bury the old self and coming up again alive in Christ as a new self. For Paul, being aware of our idols is a critically important part of living wide awake.

Here's the thing about idols. They are super easy to detect. If you wonder if someone has made something an idol, just take it away from them and see how they react. Do they shrug, adjust to the loss, and go on with their lives? Not an idol.

But tell me I need to shelter-in-place and stay away from others (to save lives, no less!) and suddenly all I want to do is take long drives and stand in large crowds. Tell me I need to limit my trips to the grocery store, and I rush to fill my cart with Lucky Charms. I may tell myself that I my heart is centered on God. But as soon as my sense of control or comfort or choice gets infringed upon, I get angry and look for someone to blame. If I'm being rational about it, I know my worst day sheltering in place would be the most peaceful and abundant and luxurious day for most people in the world. But I'm NOT being rational about it. There is nothing rational about putting our trust in things that are not God.

The good news that there is a simple-yet-powerful antidote to idolatry: Gratitude. You can't be grateful and greedy at the same time. Paul mentions thankfulness twice in today's passage. Look at verses 19-21:

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

When the days are evil, you owe it to yourself to be openly thankful.

Apparently, it is not enough to simply be quietly grateful in the privacy our own hearts. We need to speak up and sing out and submit to one another as expressions of this gratitude. We need to live our gratitude out loud, generously sharing our hope in God in good words and good works.

It would easy to focus on all the things we CAN'T do and miss the huge opportunities for what we CAN do, and even GET TO DO now because of the pandemic. I was on a Zoom call with pastors from around the country, and each of us was asked what our congregations were doing to respond resourcefully to the needs of the larger community. While each pastor could talk about how their church has adapted the way they worship together, what really got the pastors excited was the way they have been able to work together with their city leaders and other service non-profits. Overwhelmed and under-resourced city managers were reaching to them for help in food distribution, outreach to shut-in's, and supporting blood drives. And more than one pastor said, “When the non-profits got together on a video conference to talk about ways of working together, they asked ME to begin with a prayer!”

We have a lot to be thankful for, and that includes all the new opportunities we have to do good.

Yes, the days are evil. That's when the light is most needed and most noticed. That's why it so important that we behave, be aware, and be thankful.

Let us pray.

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