

**Ephesians 5: 1 & 2; “Be Imitators of God”, Message # 39 in a series entitled –
“The Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study prepared by
Pastor Paul Rendall for August 10th, 2022.**

There is no chapter division in the original letter written by Paul, and so we should be able to see that the “therefore” of verse 1 is referring to the words of verse 32 of chapter 4 – “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” We should be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another, Paul is saying, for in this way we will be becoming imitators of God.

So, here in these verses we find instructions concerning what it means for us as Christians to imitate God. To imitate God you must, 1st of all – Remember that you are His dear child, and learn to act towards others as God does towards you. 2nd – You must remember to walk in love, even as Christ has loved you. And 3rd – You must remember that there is a fragrance in the offering of Christ and in any sacrifice that You make for Him.

1st – Remember that you are His dear child, and learn to act towards others as God does towards you.

It is good for us to think about the fact that the God who we worship and adore is unchanging in His Being in His Wisdom, His Power, His holiness, His Justice, His Goodness, and His truth, as the 4th Question of the Shorter Catechism’s answer states. In terms of His Infinitude, we cannot be exactly like God, but in terms of His Perfect Moral character, we can by the grace of Christ move by degrees, towards perfection. We can become imitators of God because it is God who has made us His dear children. He gave us the Son of His love by His sending His dear Son into this fallen world of woe.

It is God who has given us the One who is most precious to Him, His only Begotten Son, so that through Him we might become His dear children. It is by faith in Jesus Christ that we have become dear to God because Christ His Son is most dear to Him. The Father, then, holds us as dear to Himself, and will view us in this light, forever, for Christ’s sake. God looks upon us fondly as His children because of what Christ has done for us. Look with me over at Colossians 1: 13 and 14. “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” (or, the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, it says in the NASB)

The power of darkness here, is the power of Satan. The Father has delivered every believer in Christ from Satan’s power, by freeing them from their bondage to sin and from being slaves of Satan, by calling us to the perfections of Christ through the gospel. The Light of truth and grace is shined into the darkness of the sinner’s heart, and that illumination and the work of regeneration leads to spiritual life being created there where there was none before. No longer can Satan hold the ignorant and sinful person captive any longer in His dark kingdom, when you are delivered from His domain and transferred into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

When the light of truth invades your heart, the darkness there is dispelled, and you are a New Creature in Christ. A real change takes place in your affections. You no longer dislike being around Christians. You love them and you hold them to be dear to yourself. Even as God sees you as dear, you know He sees them as dear, and you begin to act towards them as God acts towards you. Look at Colossians 1: 3-8 – “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth

fruit, as it is also among you since the day that you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us you love in the Spirit.”

Now, I want you to notice that when a person becomes a true Christian it is because they have heard the word of truth in the gospel, concerning Christ and His love. You hear about the love of the Father in the sending of His dear Son to suffer and die in your place. You believe in Him, and it produces a real change in your heart and mind concerning other believers in Christ. You see them as beloved brethren, now that you are in Christ. You begin to speak of them like Paul does here of Epaphras, who he calls “our dear fellow servant”.

You begin to think this way and you begin to use this kind of language because that is the way that you really see other believers; as dear to you. You have become one of God’s dear children, and so since you now see other believers as dear to Him, they become dear to you also. Other Christians come to know of your love for them in the Spirit. This love for them is the actual love of Christ which now exists in your heart and it will develop in you as a grace of the Holy Spirit which will lead you to truly care about other people around you and show them the same love and kindness that you have been shown by God.

Look at Romans chapter 5, verses 1-5 – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character, and character, hope.” “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Now, I think that when most of us think about the word “tribulations” we naturally think about persecutions. But the word can also mean anguish, trials and difficulties of various sorts; those things that will come to us which trouble us, especially difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

But these difficulties God permits, with the design that they will lead to your persevering in your faith in Christ. If we learn to love people around you, even when you are going through these trials, then you will develop proven character and this proven character will give you an established hope in realizing more and more the glory of God in your life, in your having the Holy Spirit in your life, who is pouring out the love of God in your heart continually. Since this is the case, you will go from being a babe in the faith, to being more mature in the faith, when you learn to love your neighbor as yourself.

2nd – You must remember to walk in love, even as Christ has loved you.

To walk in love is to learn to learn to interact with other believers and even unbelievers in the same way as Christ has loved you. What does this mean? It means that you learn to keep all the commandments of God in relation to other people with real love in your heart for them, and real love in your actions towards them. What is it that we sometimes go through, either with other believers, or people that we rub shoulders with every day? Is it not that we run into difficulties of various sorts with them? What are we to do? Well we are to learn to love our neighbor as ourself.

Let’s look over at Leviticus chapter 19, verses 9-18. Now, when I read these verses to you, I want you to remember that Christ fulfilled all of these commandments perfectly. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.” “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God.” “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.” “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” “You shall not

defraud your neighbor, nor rob him.” “The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.” “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord.”

“You shall do no injustice in judgment.” “You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty.” “But in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.” “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.” “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.” “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

I hope that you can see that each of these commandments had a moral responsibility for the person under the Old Testament law to fulfill. And even in New Testament, New Covenant times, these moral commands and principles would apply to us as well. They all flow out of the 10 commandments and understanding them in the particulars. Not gathering everything from the field in which you are growing something, but leaving some of the gleanings of the harvest. This would be your learning to help the poor and the needy; showing them compassion, and giving to help those in need. You would do this, not only to help the poor, but to become more like your Savior.

Not stealing, or dealing falsely, or lying to other people around you, which would be a violation of the 8th and 9th commandments of the 10 commandments. Not swearing by God’s name falsely, or profaning the name of God; a violation of the 1st commandment, the 3rd commandment, and also the 9th commandment as well. In the New Testament the commandment is put positively in terms of speaking the truth in love, and being careful of the words which come out of your mouth. Mention is made here in Leviticus 19 of not unnecessarily withholding the wages of someone under your employ; learning to deal faithfully, fairly, and uprightly with those whom you employ. Being truthful and honest and thoughtful of the welfare of people around you; that is what is being taught here.

Then mention is made in verse 17 of not hating your brother in your heart, not bearing sin because of him, not taking vengeance, not bearing a grudge; all of these are taught in the New Testament, as well, in terms of rebuke and forgiving the one who has offended you when you are asked to in Luke 17: 1-5. The real principle that encompasses them all is that you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is what Christ did perfectly when He walked the earth and was fulfilling His earthly ministry; being righteous in every way on our behalf. But He went even farther than that.

Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 5, verse 43 – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” “Do not even the tax collectors do so?” “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” There is your imitation of God as one of His dear children.

But you must realize that only Christ has done this perfectly. This is why it says in our text in Ephesians – “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us. This is exactly what he did while He walked the earth. He walked in love toward every man around Him; even His enemies. And He was not imitating God, but He was God made manifest in the flesh. But in

the days of His flesh He had to learn obedience through the things that He suffered as a Man. He had to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 3 – “For consider Him who endured such hostility (such contradiction) from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” So, as we read the gospel accounts of this unreasonable hostility of all the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees against Himself, we also read that He was patient, He was kind, He was loving towards sinful men.

Many of them hated Him without a cause. They had no real reason to hate Him at all. They should have rather admired Him, respected Him, believed in Him, and worshiped Him. They should have received His words to themselves. Instead, they mocked Him, scourged Him, and crucified Him. He walked in love towards them, spoke the truth to them, rebuked them, corrected them, taught them the way of truth and righteousness. He showed them that He was the only way to God, and that they must have His righteousness in order to be saved.

They hated Him even in His showing them this greatest of love, the love of God. God’s purpose was to overcome their hate by means of His love, so that they might believe in Him and find everlasting life. He used their crucifying of Him as the very means of saving us from our sins. Romans 5: 7-11 – “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.” “But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”

And 1st John 4: 10 – “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.” We ought to be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.

3rd – You must remember that there is a fragrance in the offering of Christ and in any sacrifice that You make for Him.

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” We see here that Christ’s walk and His love for all mankind sinners was demonstrated to us in that it led Him to the cross, to suffer there, and die there on our behalf. What an awful thing it was that men did to Him. To God the Father, all this that Christ did, and all that He endured was a sweet-smelling aroma, a pleasing sacrifice to Him, so that He could accept us. “Father, forgive them, Jesus said on the cross, for they do not know what they are doing.”

This is how you and I have to think when people sin against us. Not that there is not a place for rebuke. Not that we do not try to bring them to the place where they will repent of their sins. It is not that we are looking for them to believe in us. But rather, we are hoping that by showing them love, doing them good, being patient with their unloving attitudes and actions towards us, that we might preaching the gospel to them, that they will turn from their sins to God, and see the love of Christ in us, for them. This is a fragrance, a sweet smelling aroma to God, even if it is not, at first, to them.

2nd Corinthians 2: 14-17 – “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”

