

Ephesians 5 (Part 1): 1-2 • A Life Pleasing to God

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We're in Ephesians chapter 5. We're going to take a whopping 2 verses today, and it goes like this.

“¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, just 2 verses I know, but you have packed so much into these verses, as far as just the application goes, walking this out in daily practice. And Lord, we just confess to you today that what we're reading here is easy to read and very, very hard to do.

We pray for your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts, to have a greater understanding. And then also, Father God, to put into practice all that we learn here today. Be with us, we ask, in Jesus precious name, amen.

Why was Paul writing this particular statement to the church in Ephesus? You need to understand that the city of Ephesus was considered to be the most accessible city in all of Asia because of land and seaports that were plenty. And what that means is, there was a huge amount of trade that took place in the city of Ephesus.

And that caused the place to just abound in people. And whenever there's people that come and gather in a particular area, you're going to have all this sin that's going to abound just as much. And it did, in the city of Ephesus. Not only that, but you'll remember that Ephesus was the headquarters of the temple of the goddess Diana. And the people of Ephesus were very proud about that.

And of course, that caused the city to even draw in a vast number of worshippers who wanted to come and worship Diana. Well, because of all of that, all of that influx of people and all that influx of stuff and, and sin, Paul felt it important to write to the church at Ephesus and warn them against being

sucked in to that same lifestyle that they had come out of when they came to know Jesus Christ.

And the reason Paul is writing that to them, and to you and I, is because it's an ever-present danger. Just because we're Christians doesn't mean we can't fall to sin. We all know that. But just because we're Christians doesn't mean we can't go back and live the life that we lived before we were Christians. Doesn't make us any less Christians. It just makes us disobedient, sinful Christians.

And the very real possibility exists for you and I, if we're living close to the edge, and the influence of our lives is coming from the world more than coming from the Word, that we're going to be drawn back. It's as simple as that. It's a very simple equation. Where's the greatest influence in your life taking place? Where's the greatest impact? Who are you hanging with?

Because, whoever we hang with, we have a tendency to adopt their ways, adopt their words, their actions and so forth. To clarify this warning, Paul begins by saying, *"Therefore."*

You guys know, because we've hit this so many times, whenever you see the word, therefore, that means that Paul's about to make a statement based on something he had previously said.

And you'll remember what he said in chapter 4, is that we are to put off the old man, put on the new man. That is, being made in the image of Christ, live and walk out that reality of the new person that is being created in Christ. So, therefore, since we have said these things in the past, now he goes on to say, look with me in verse 1, *"be imitators of God as beloved children."*

I want to let that sink in for just a minute. It's such an easy thing to read. *"Be imitators of God."* Wow.

And you read it and you, if you really think about it for a minute, it's almost like you're hit with unbelief. Imitate God? Did he just tell me to imitate God? Isn't that a tall order?

I've been really good at imitating other people. But imitate God? Wow. Well, let's start to think about this and let's begin by remembering what imitate means. Let me put the definition up on the screen just in case we all need to be reminded.

Imitate (verb)

- to take or follow as a model.
- to copy a person's speech or mannerisms.

It is a verb and it means to take or follow as a model, or to copy a person's speech or mannerisms.

Now, you and I both know that if you spend a lot of time in the world, you're going to imitate the world. And, and that's just the way it is. But there's another reality here too. And that is that, if we spend time with the Lord, and spend time in His Word, and soaking in His Word, and allowing that Word to bathe our hearts and so forth, it's going to be easier to begin to imitate Him.

Alright, well if that still sounds a little steep to you, this whole idea of imitating God, let's read on and see what Paul has in mind when he gives us this exhortation. Verse 2, he says, "*and walk in love.*"

Ah, this is where he wants us to imitate. He says, and here he, and notice these words, "*as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.*"

By the way, it was a, "*fragrant offering,*" Paul writes, and "*a sacrifice to God.*" And this is the first way Paul wants us to imitate God. And this is actually all we're going to talk about today. We're going to deal with the other areas of imitation as we go on, and deal with the rest of what it means to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

But he says here that he wants us to imitate God, and then he refers to Jesus. Isn't that interesting? And he says, "*as Jesus loved you.*" Did you know that this is really a declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ?

Imitate God, how? By following Jesus and doing what He did. Isn't that interesting? Well, anyway, that's more of an aside than anything else, because he says, "*as Christ loved you,*" or us, you and I are to imitate that kind of love with others.

How did Christ love us? He goes on to say, "*and gave himself up for us.*" And that means He loved us sacrificially. That's a very key word, sacrificially. Jesus sacrificed Himself in order to show His love for us. And Paul is telling you and I to go and do likewise. Simple, right? Okay, let's close in prayer. Wouldn't it be nice if it was that easy? Hey, imitate God by loving others as Christ loved you. There you go. Yeah, right, deal. Let's go for it.

Now, I need to tell you before we move on that Paul is going to use this same idea in his exhortation to husbands loving their wives later on in the chapter. And we'll get to that in probably a couple of weeks.

But for right now, this Word is given to all of us. Men and women, whatever position of life you're in. He is saying to you and I, love one another just as Christ loved you. And what he has just told us is probably the most challenging thing that we will ever receive in terms of an exhortation from God. And the reason it's so challenging, I think, is, twofold.

First of all, it calls us to do 2 of the toughest things that we are told to do. One, love even when we don't feel it. It's very, very hard for us to do. And two, sacrifice or give up something we value in order to love others. And that's really, really challenging. Let me, let me talk about each one of those things.

First of all, Paul is telling us to love one another in the body of Christ, not because we feel love, but because we are commanded to love them. Now, of course, that flies in the face of everything you and I have learned from the world. Because we all grew up in the world, didn't we, for the most part?

Even if you grew up in a Christian home, the world seeped in. And we learned things from the world. And what we learned is that love is a feeling. And when the feeling is gone, what are you going to do? Right? What are you going to do when the feeling is gone? Love is a feeling, man.

If you don't feel love anymore, what are you going to do? What are you going to do? It's like, pastor, what do you want me to do? You know, I don't feel love anymore. I don't love...

God says love this person. You can! I don't love him. What happened? How am I supposed to follow the command of the Lord to love when I don't love? I don't love that person. In fact, it's more the opposite so what do you, what am I supposed to do? There's nothing there. There's nothing in my heart.

They'll say to me, pastor, you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip. How are you supposed to make that happen?

Well, those, all those arguments come from what we learned in the world. Love is a feeling. God wants you and I to understand that love is a determination of the will that comes from obedience to the God who commands us to love. Let me reiterate this command as the Apostle John wrote it down for us.

Let me show you this on the screen from 1 John chapter 3. It says,

1 John 3:23 (ESV)

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

And this is his commandment. (That's a strong word.) that we, first of all, believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ. And (second of all), love one another, (and here it is again), just as he has commanded us.

We repeat that command at the beginning and at the end. We must love. Just that way. And I don't know if that sounds cold to you. I imagine to some people it does. Because again, we've been taught so much that love is a feeling. It's a warm ooey gooey and so, when somebody comes along and says, I command you to love...

It's like two people getting married that never met one another before their wedding day. And the minister saying to them as they're getting married now, I command you to love one another. It's like, well, yippee. I mean, that sounds like a pretty hard way to start a relationship.

And we're going to talk about how God can make that love anything but cold in just a bit. But I want to talk first about the second thing that we find difficult about loving the way Jesus loved. And it has to do with that whole idea of how he loved. And that was sacrificially.

You remember Paul said we're to love “*as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.*” And again, we come back to that idea of sacrificial love. And if you look up the definition of to sacrifice. Let me show this one on the screen What is a sacrifice?

Sacrifice

Noun

- The act of giving up something of value for the sake of something or someone else

Well, it's an act of giving up something of value for the sake of something or someone else. The act of giving up something that we value to sacrifice. To give up something that we value. And it has to be something that we value because if we don't really value it, it's really not much of a sacrifice.

If I have 14 TVs in my house and somebody needs a television and I go, yeah, you can have one of mine. Big deal. You understand what I'm saying? Sacrifice is what Jesus did for us. And it is what He commands us to do for others as we love them. And that is how we show our love - through sacrifice.

Wow. Now God is really meddling in our lives now, isn't He, here in the Word? Because not only is He asking me to love when I don't feel love, but He's also telling me to give up something that I value in order to do it. And, that hurts. I mean, that hurts. Because I don't really love this person.

Do you know how easy it is to give up things that we care about when we adore people? We do it just because it's so much fun, right? I mean, yeah. When Sue and I were dating, I hardly had two nickels to rub together. Because I worked part time at a gas station, and part time at a little tiny Podunk radio station.

And I mean, I was making peanuts, but I loved giving her gifts anyway. You know, just buying her things. And, I just, it was so delightful, it was so much fun. Now, ask me to take that same hard-earned money and spend it on somebody I don't like. Now it's a different equation, isn't it? It's a completely different thing.

But this is what, this is what we're talking about as it relates to loving people in a sacrificial kind of a way. Let me, let me remind, us all of what Jesus said on this. Let me show you a passage from Matthew chapter 5. It goes like this.

Matthew 5:43-46 (ESV)

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same?

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same?

What's Jesus talking about here? He's talking about showing the kind of love that doesn't come natural. He says, even tax collectors love people that love them. That comes naturally, right? When I love somebody, I love loving them. When I don't like somebody, I don't love loving them. In fact, I don't like doing pretty much anything that is nice toward them.

And what Jesus is saying in that particular passage is we need to love those people who we even consider to be our enemies, people who are even actively hurting us. Because it's a sacrifice.

Before we move on, I want to address this issue of the apparent coldness of the command to love. Because on the surface, it seems like loving others out of obedience is a pretty inferior kind of love. It seems that way, doesn't it? Again, because we're so convinced that love is a certain thing. That the world is defined for us. And so we think to ourselves, gee, loving because I love, and loving because I'm commanded. Which is better?

We immediately think, well, certainly it's loving because I love. Because, you see, that's it's easy. May I suggest to you that loving because you've been commanded to love is not inferior at all. It is the superior form of love.

Here's what we forget along these lines about love and this is why we struggle with the idea of loving because we've been commanded to love. We forget about, about putting God in the equation. And I mean this, God comes along and he says to you and I, I want you to love this person.

And we say, but Lord, I don't love him. He goes, I know that. Because I can see your heart, but I want you to love them anyway. And we're like, "God I don't. I'm trying to tell you I don't have love for this person.

God goes, I know that too, but I want you to step out in obedience and act lovingly toward this person.

And what we forget is that when we set our mind and our will to obey God in love toward others, even when we don't feel it. I mean, in fact, we might even be feeling the opposite. We forget that God meets us there at the place of our obedience in ways that we can scarcely understand. And that's the part we forget.

How many times have I read for you guys over the years the story of Corrie Ten Boom when she met her prison guard face to face? A dozen, and the reason I've read it to you so many times in the past is because it's so apropos when in so many ways of communicating this whole idea of obedience and the result that God has upon our lives when we step out in obedience and so forth. I'm going to read it again at the risk of dragging it through the mud because again, it is so good.

And I wanted to just, for those of you that may not know who Corey Ten Boom was, she's with the Lord now. She was a lovely lady who lived many years ago. Well, I think she probably died in the 70s. I'm not sure, maybe the 80s. She was quite elderly when she passed away, but she and her family were arrested for harboring Jews from the Nazis in Holland, in occupied Holland.

And, and they were found out and arrested. The night at her, they were arrested, her and her sister were carted off one direction, her father was carted off another. She never saw her father again. It was the last she saw of him. And while they were in a prison camp called Ravensbrück, her sister, Betsy, passed away.

And through a clerical error, Corey was released from Ravensbrück and sent home. And about a week or so later, all of the other women in that particular camp were killed.

Anyway, you guys know the World War II ended in 1945. She's telling a story that happened about two years after that. And I want to read it to you, from her book. She says,

“It was in a church in Munich that I saw him. A balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. Moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.

It was 1947, and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed out land.

And I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I like to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown. When we confess our sins, I told them, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe.

There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People simply stood up in silence, in silence collected their coats, and in silence left the room. And that's when I saw him working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat. The next the blue uniform with the visored cap with its swastika. And it all came back with a rush. That huge room with its

harsh overhead lights. The pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the room. The shame of walking naked past this man.

I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath her parchment skin. Betsy and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. This man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now, he was in front of me, hand thrust out.

“A fine message, Fraulein. How good it is to know, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea.”

And I, who had just spoken on forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course. How could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him, and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood froze.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard there. But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there. But I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein.”

Again, the hand came out. “Will you forgive me?”

And I stood there. I, whose sins had again and again been forgiven, and could not forgive. Betsy had died in that place. Could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking? It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out. But to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it. I knew that.

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war, I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars.

Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that. And still I stood there, with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion. I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will. And the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Help!”, I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. Lord, you supply the rest.” And so, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder. Raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother”, I cried with all my heart. For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did that day.”

Isn't that a lovely story? I share it again with you because it demonstrates the two things that I've been talking about, that we find so hard about loving others.

And that is the commandment of love, or the commandment to love when there are no feelings associated with it, or when those feelings are very negative, as in Corrie's case.

Then, sacrificing something very dear to us. Now, in Corrie's case, again, she had every, probably, worldly reason to be bitter toward this man and to hate him with all her heart. And nobody would have condemned her. Nobody.

You were in Ravensbrück, a German concentration camp. You have a right to hate every single person who abused you in that place. And yet, she knew she had a commandment from the Lord. And she also knew, from helping people in Holland who had been brutalized by the Nazis, when you don't forgive, you don't heal.

When you don't choose to love, the love of God doesn't flood into your heart and bring healing with it. She knew that so she had to be willing to lay all of that down. But that, that sacrifice that it took... You see Corey had to be willing to sacrifice her justification for bitterness. It's one thing to have bitterness. She had to be willing to set it aside to lay it down and say, Lord I'm going obey you instead of nursing that grudge. You know what I mean?

And again, nobody would have said that you don't have a right to do it, but it was hers to sacrifice. And as she even admitted, what went through her mind in that, in those seconds that flew by was her sister and her sister dying there. And does this man think he can wipe all of that away with just an apology?

See, she had to be willing to sacrifice that. That's where sacrifice often comes in. To lay it all down. To let the Lord do a new work in our hearts. And believe me, people, God needs to do a new work in our hearts. I even wonder often how many Christians are still captive to the past and captive to feelings of hurt and offense because they are unwilling to sacrifice those things and to lay them down out of obedience to the Lord.

Can I share again with you just for a moment the words of the apostle John from 1st John chapter 3? It says,

1 John 3:14, 16, 18 (ESV)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and look at this and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Little children, let us love, not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. By this we know love that he laid down his life for us and, (look at this and) we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (And that's the sacrifice we're talking about.) Little children, let us love, not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

Isn't that a powerful passage? He laid down his life for us. We ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. That's what Corrie did that day. She laid down her life. And that's what he's talking about there. He's talking about that sacrifice.

That's something that we value. *"I value my memory of my sister,"* Corrie was thinking. *"I value that and I'm not going to lay that down. And even the bitterness that goes along with it."* But yet she was willing to be obedient. And what love came upon her heart. Let me end by telling you why this is such an important command, that God has given us in his word.

It's important for you and I to hear this, and it was important for the Ephesians in their day too, don't get me wrong. But it's important today, perhaps even more so, because I happen to believe that we are in the final times of the last

days. I believe because the last days really began with the inauguration of the church as we see in Acts chapter 2 as the spirit fell upon the church and, and so forth, and the beginning of the, the outworking of the growth of the church. That began that period of time that we call the last days.

It's been going on for a long time. I happen to believe we're in the final times of the last days. And the apostle Paul told us what would characterize the heart of mankind in the final times of the last days. And believe me, it's the opposite of what we've been talking about here today. Let me show you what Paul said because it's given for us in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and it goes like this,

2 Timothy 3:1-4 (NIV)

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

But mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of (one another? No) lovers of themselves. (They will be) lovers of money. (They will be) boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (look at this), without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, (and they will be) lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

I believe that what we're reading there in 2 Timothy chapter 3 is a description of the character of the world that you and I are living in right this moment. And because that is the fact, there is a great danger in our lives, just as there was a great danger in Ephesus, that the people will be drawn back into that sort of thing.

It is very common. And it happens. And we have to be very careful. How are we being influenced? By whom are we being influenced? By whom are we receiving input? Or from whom, I should say. Who are we imitating? This whole thing is about being imitators of God.

You're going to imitate what you're hanging with. You're going to imitate what is having the greatest impact on your lives. And I'm here to tell you that 2 Timothy tells us what our imitation is going to look like if we're not being in, if we're not being influenced by God. We're going to be imitating the world. And we're going to be sucked back into that sort of a thing.

And yet, our call is to be completely opposite that of the world in which we live. In fact, Jesus said that the people of this world would recognize us as his disciples by the love we have one for another. Because it's going to be so contrasting of what's happening in this world.