



Be Imitators of God

Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God

Ephesians 5:1-2

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The text that we are going to look at this morning serves as a summary statement of what has come before it and as a transition statement for the instruction that comes after it. You remember that Paul was getting at the truth that how we walk individually reflects on the worth of Christ, on the power of the gospel, and on the body of Christ as the Temple of God.

Paul has labored to show us that becoming a Christian involves a radical change – conversion or re-creation. It is the rejection of our former self, our fallen humanity, and the taking up of the new self, the re-created humanity. Salvation, as Paul has explained it, is a multi-faceted jewel which includes such wonders as the exchange of a heart of stone for a heart of flesh, the exchange of the old nature for the new, the exchange of our sinfulness for Christ's righteousness, exchange of guilt for the decree by God that we are not-guilty, the exchange of fleshly desires for holy and eternal ones; the exchange of wrath for favor with God, and it is the exchange of the old life – which is really death – for the new life, the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Salvation, experiencing the grace of God in Christ, must change us.

Now I want you to see that there is a reason for Paul to place these encouragements as he does. He has been giving us a list of ethical instructions and he knows our tendency to hear these ethical instructions and turn them into a new list of laws and rules to follow. There is only one thing that motivates true obedience – not law, not accountability partners, not preachers begging you to hear the Word of God, not good results, not appearance, not duty, not craven, but love. The love of God known, received, learned, enjoyed and lived out. The love of God applied to our souls and minds is what motivates true obedience which pleases God. So Paul says to us first:

1. Be Imitators of God because you are children of God (v.1) Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph 5:1)

Paul is calling us here to imitate God – literally to mimic God. That is the word that is used here – *mimetai*. Now certainly there are characteristics of God that we could never hope to imitate --

His glory, holiness (His being entirely set apart from all of creation), eternity, majesty, omnipresence and omniscience and omnipotence. We cannot mimic His sovereignty – these things are what make God alone God.

But, we can imitate God in such things as his holiness -- in the sense of His moral perfection and purity, righteousness, justice, goodness, love, compassion, giving, faithfulness, mercy, graciousness, patience, forgiveness. These are all characteristics of God, attributes of His character that we can imitate, that we can display and attain to as His children and we must. We must. That is Paul's point here.

We are not to merely talk about God's love but to imitate it, not talk about holiness but to be holy, not talk about righteousness but to be righteous; don't tell people that you are faithful, be faithful; – live it, express it -- we are called to be godly people – those who imitate God. Do you see? It is not enough for us to be a people who meditate upon the truths of God and His Word – to think about God as He is revealed in His word without any consequent application to our lives – what I call theoretical theology. The call is not be merely admirers of God in the contemporary sense of the word – to pay a compliment to someone -- but to truly admire Him in the sense of copying Him. True worship demands this. Charles Spurgeon said: Worship unattended by imitation is fake—true adoration dwells not in words only—as it comes from the heart, so it affects the entire nature and shows itself in the daily behavior. Let us spread our adoration over all the day till, from the moment when we open our eyes till we close them again at night, we shall be practically worshipping the Lord by reverencing His law, delighting in His Commandments and imitating His Character! Paul is calling us to imitate God. And why is that?

We are to imitate God because He is our Father and we are His beloved children. That is the grounds of this command. We are to imitate God because, by His grace, out of His incomparable love, He has made Himself our Father and we are His children. Listen now, because this is important. We need to see ourselves as we are. We are not merely believers. We are that, you cannot be a Christian without believing the gospel, but we are not just a collection of people who have believed certain truths and doctrines. Neither are we merely forgiven or pardoned. We are forgiven, our sins taken away, and we are thankful for that because we would have no hope apart from the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. But being a Christian entails more than being forgiven. We are not merely new creations --- we are that – the old has passed away and the new has come at the moment of our regeneration and our response of faith to the work of God in Christ. But we are more than re-created clay pots.

We are the children of the Living God. No longer are we children of wrath, no longer children of Adam, no longer children of the Devil – we are God's own sons and daughters – born again to a living hope, according to His good purpose, delivered from the futile ways of our forefathers

and raised to new life. Has that not been Paul's message throughout this letter? In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph 1:4-5) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph 2:19) – children of God, adopted into the family of God, belonging to God, related to God. We are his children, but not only that; we are his beloved children, children upon whom He has showered His love – His peculiar treasure, and the apple of his eye. We are His children, but not in a cold, mechanical and impersonal sort of way, but we are dear to him. To miss the glory of being the beloved children of God is to miss the whole point of the Christian message and to fail to understand the nature of Paul's command to godly living.

As the Apostle John wrote: See (or better – Behold!) what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1Jn 3:1) Be amazed, be gripped and be in awe at the love of God that we would be His children. And that is the sense behind what Paul is saying here when he calls us beloved children. The heart of Paul's appeal rests in the astonishment and wonder that we should be called the children of God.

So I take Paul to be emphasizing two necessary things here– that to imitate God we must know the depth of His love to make us His children and we must draw near to Him so we know how to walk in manner that reflects His character.

First we need to grasp the love of God that He would make us His children. It is a love, quite honestly, that is beyond measure. Can you conceive of it? The fact that we who by nature were the children of wrath even as others, we who were without hope, we who were separated from God because of our sinfulness, that we should be called the sons of God is a wonder of God's love. Do you think we deserved it? We lost our right to relate to God as anything but judge when Adam sinned and as we have followed Adam in a life of sin. We were rebels, enemies, and dead, haters of God, deserving only wrath and hell and death. We deserved nothing good from God at all. Paul has already spoken of it here: (Eph 2:1-5; Rom 5:8) The astounding wonder of God's love is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners, still ungodly, still weak, still enemies with God. He did not die for his friends; He did not die for His family. He died to make us His friends, to make us His family. That is how God makes His love conspicuous; that is how God puts His love on display. That is how God defines the depth of His love.

It was no simple thing for God to lavish His love upon us. It was a deeply costly love that required the death of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. It required the suffering of His precious Son under the weight of His wrath for our sin in our place so that we could be the children of God. It required the Father to turn His face away from His Son and pour on Him His full wrath. It is not just that God loves you, but that he loves you at the cost of His Son. Beloved,

God has loved us, brought us into His family, placed His name upon us, purely by an act of His grace, not based upon any good in us, but according to the good pleasure of His will. Paul as told us -- He has loved us with an everlasting love. Before the sun or moon or stars existed, He had chosen you and loved you in Christ; He had made every provision for your salvation, ordained and numbered every day of your life, and purposed to bring you to Himself in faith and to fashion you for glory. Since you have come to know Him, He has never wavered in His love to you. You cannot escape it. (Psa 117:2)

Our love for God, born of His love for us is what drives as us beloved children to want to know him and to want to be like him. Our imitation of God springs out of our relationship with God, the relationship of love that God has initiated by His love to us in Christ.

Gripped by the love that has made us God's beloved children, we are called by Paul, like children do their natural fathers, to imitate our heavenly Father and to do that we must know Him so we know how to walk in manner that reflects His character.

To imitate God, we need to know God as He is revealed in His word. We must know Him as He has revealed Himself to be in Holy Word – not as our culture portrays Him or as we would like for Him to be, but as He is. To know Him means that we must spend time with Him. A father that spends little time with his children will not have great influence upon them. We see that sad reality repeated over and over again in our society today. But when a father spends time with his children, they will pick up his character – his moral standards, the way that he speaks, the manner in which he deals with people, what delights his soul, what displeases him, what he values, what he despises. No-one can imitate whom they have not seen. Someone who does not know God can never hope to imitate Him. To know God requires that kind of time. David wrote: (Psa 25:4-5) So imitating God requires that we understand His deep love for us as His beloved and that we know Him so that we walk in a manner that reflects His character. So we walk as imitators of our Father. Be imitators of God, beloved children. So Paul calls us to be imitators of God and then, in a like manner, he calls us to

2. Walk in Love Because Christ Loved Us and Gave Himself Up for Us (v. 2) What is the heart of this command? First, let me remind you that the Bible never leaves the word “love” undefined. The very same Bible that exhorts us to walk in love defines what that kind of love looks like. The Bible never leaves love as something vague and general. The word love is not open to deconstruction and reinvention as we see so often in our culture today. No doubt, most human beings would say that what the world needs now is love, sweet love. And Paul would agree. In fact He would insist on true love permeating and defining the church, but not the world's defective and insubstantial, flimsy, frail, self-serving version of love. Rather he would insist on a robust, substantive, sturdy, strong kind of love – real love that defines our living.

He described that love well in 1 Corinthians 13 (1Co 13:1-8). This is the kind of life that Paul is calling us to here – a life of love. Love like this takes shape and definition from the right understanding of Christ's work on the cross. The Apostle John tells us that: (1Jn 4:9-10) Paul says the same thing here, but he define the love that is to define us from the perspective of Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Love is defined by Christ's giving himself up for us as fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Paul is saying a mouthful here. Just as he established his call to us to imitate God on the fact of God's love for us as His beloved children, so now Paul establishes his calling for us to walk in love on the love which Christ has lavished upon us in giving himself up for us. He gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice, in our place. He gave His body to be broken, His blood to be shed, for His enemies, for vile sinners. We had earned death, wrath from God because we had broken His Law, violated His glory, sinned against Him and made ourselves worthy only of His wrath and judgment. There was nothing that we could do to save ourselves, but Christ stepped into the gap for us, in our place, in our stead. He became our substitute. The perfect Son of God took upon Himself the guilt of the sins of all who would believe and willingly endured the wrath of Father God, the fury of God against sin, dying in the place of sinners and became the substitutionary sacrifice for all who would receive Him, taking their sin upon himself and granting to them His perfect righteousness and standing with God...that is love.

He is the perfect fulfillment of the all of the OT sacrifices that pointed forward to this final sacrifice and offering for the sin of God's people. Our sins transferred to Him, upon His head, Jesus died upon the cross, an offering and sacrifice to God far greater than any and all of the burnt offerings and blood offerings ever made to God by the priests in Israel – His is the true offering for our sins. The Lord Jesus Christ, as He hung at Calvary's cross, was the true burnt offering. He was the total, complete, obedient sacrifice for sin to God - and that sacrifice there at Calvary ascended unto God as a sweet smelling savour. The sacrifice of Christ in our place to redeem His people was perfectly satisfactory to the Father.

We have to see that Christ's death on the cross of Calvary is a two-fold sacrifice. It is a sacrifice for sinners. In love, Christ died on Calvary for our sins. He sacrificed Himself for us, for our benefit. Second, Christ's death on Calvary was a sacrifice prompted by love for the Father. His sacrifice was "a fragrant offering," one that gave the Father pleasure. That is the essence of the love that drove Christ's obedience and is be the foundation of our own.

It was Jesus who commanded: (Mat 22:37-40) But this is not a case of Christ saying, "Do as I say but not as I do," Is this not exactly what Christ did? He loved God the Father with all of his heart, soul, and mind, and Mark adds, with all of His strength, completely fulfilling the Law and fulfilling the words of the prophets – fully pleasing the Father with His fully obedient life and His wrath-extinguishing, holiness exalting death and resurrection. And He has loved His neighbor,

you and me, as Himself – securing our eternal good at the cost of great sacrifice, the giving up of Him for the sake of our souls. It is this kind of living to which we are called.

Walking in love is nothing less than loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself. If we do that, we fulfill the Law and the Prophets, we walk as Christ walked, we model Him and the way in which He has loved the Father and loved us, we walk in love and bring glory to God in the way that we live and in the way that we love. That is what it means to walk in love.

So Paul calls us to imitate God and to walk in love – both of them commands that are rooted in our comprehension of God’s love – the Father’s love toward me that he should make me His own beloved child and the love of Christ toward me that he should love me and give himself for me. It is comprehending this love that stirs within my soul love to God and His Christ and which masters my will and motivates my obedience.

So if I would imitate God and walk in love, if I would be obedient, I must be convinced and I must grow in my comprehension of and delight in God’s love. How do I do that? How do we do that? What was it that fostered that first love in any case? Do you remember? It was that realization of Christ’s grace and love despite our own sin and His grace and forgiveness through His sacrifice on the cross. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:7-8) Forgiven much, we love much. Spiritual realities— Christ, grace, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, service, living for the glory of God—fill our vision and seem so large, so desirable that other things by comparison seem to shrink in size and become bland to the taste.

Only when grace is still “amazing” to us does it retain its power in us. Only as we retain a sense of our own profound sinfulness can we retain a sense of the graciousness of grace, the great depth of God’s love for us to sacrifice His Son in our place, that Christ would love me and give Himself for me – that will drive my soul in obedience.

Let me ask you – how is your love to God today? You can only love God, you can only obey God if you know the love of God to sinners in Jesus Christ personally. Do you know that love of God?

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