

Series: Ephesians
Title: As Dear Children
Text: Eph 5: 1-2
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Ephesians 5: 1: Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

FOLLOWERS OF GOD

The word “followers” is “mimytace” which is where we get the word “imitate.” Believers are exhorted to be imitators of God. The purpose of God in salvation is to make his people like God.

In eternity, when God chose his people in Christ, in his Son, his elect were conformed to the image of his Son. In Romans 8, the italicized words are added by the translators. If we take those words out we get the meaning, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom 8: 29) All God’s elect were conformed to God’s image in Christ in the garden.

Then when God created Adam, he was created after the image of God, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Gen 1: 26-27) But due to the fall and due to our being conceived after Adam’s image in natural generation we died spiritually. We became guilty before God and the image of God was corrupted within us, the carnal mind became enmity against God. So the image of God, the image of his Son, must be recreated within his people by God. So it is also true of God’s elect, that God did predestinate us “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” This is the whole purpose of God creating this world, allowing Adam to sin, so that God might show his glory in Christ in conforming us to his image.

In our experience of it, this work begins in regeneration. By the Holy Spirit forming Christ in us, God’s people are recreated after God’s image in the inward man. By God’s work of grace we “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph 4: 24)

God grows his child in the new man. Our new man is continually transformed into the image of his Son, by the Holy Spirit. When we have already put on the new man, the new man “is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Col 3: 10) This is what we are taught in 2 Corinthians 3: 18, “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [metamorphosed, transformed] into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The Holy Spirit does this work as we behold Christ more and more, by faith, in the gospel we preach. This is not growth in holiness; we are holy if we are born of the Holy Spirit. This is growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Son of God in the inward man.

Finally, when we see Christ face-to-face, by seeing him perfectly, we shall be perfectly conformed to his image, within and without. So John said, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 Jn 3: 2-3)

We do not expect to make ourselves perfectly pure in our life. This is a heart work by the Holy Spirit. But the believer who has this sure hope, imitates Christ who walked in holiness in his life and conduct. Christ is

the pattern we study. We seek to walk as Christ walked, putting off the old man, putting on the new man. Our motivation is that we are now sons of God, his dear children.

So having been recreated after the image of God and having been made the righteousness of Christ through faith, “even as God, for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.” (Eph 4: 32; 5: 1)

Hearing the gospel is sitting at the table and eating. It is wonderful to hear what God has freely done for us—to meditate on these things. Imitating God is getting up from the table and using the strength we get from the food. He says go further than eating—use the strength Christ gives to imitate Christ, to follow God, to walk after the pattern Christ has set before us. “Be ye followers of God.”

AS DEAR CHILDREN

Secondly, we follow God “as dear children.” Dear children are children beloved of God. What a privilege, what great love of God toward us, to make us a child of God! So he says be followers of God as children chosen of God our Father; adopted by God our Father. He says be followers of God as children redeemed by Christ our Everlasting Father; forever the children of the last Adam our everlasting Father. We are to be followers of God as children born of incorruptible Seed by the Spirit and Word of God

John 1: 12: But as many as received him, to them gave he power [privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We were dead in sins: not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of will of man. We have been born of God.

1 John 3: 1: Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

So when this precept says “as dear children” it teaches us the spirit with which we are to follow God. This is not done by a spirit of law but in the spirit of grace. The child who most loves his father and mother will seek most to honor his father and mother. Which child will this be in the spiritual family? Remember the woman with the alabaster box of ointment? Christ said, “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” (Lu 7: 47)

Illustration: The traffic stop.

When you know how great your guilty is, mercy makes you not only rejoice to be a child of God, but mercy makes you want to obey as a dear child, not as slaves, not compelled by law, not as being drudgery to obey, but as dear, loving children. This will be natural to the child born from above. We delight in the word of God in the inward man. A child of God has no greater ambition in the world than to be like our heavenly Father.

1 John 3: 6: Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 7: Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 8: He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 9: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10: In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

Spurgeon said, “Worship unattended by imitation is feigned; true adoration dwelleth not in words only, but 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.”

A father loves to see his child imitating him, seeking to walk as he walks. John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (3 Jn 1: 4) And just as we help our children, God helps his!

Now, we need a form to copy. In grade school, we learned to write by copying the alphabet above the blackboard. In college I was taught that one learns to paint by first copying old masters. I was taught to write by copying the best writers. For young preachers, a good way to learn to preach is to first copy the outlines of faithful preachers of the past.

THE COPY WE FOLLOW

He gives us the one copy we are to follow, “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” (Eph 5: 2) We cannot imitate God our Redeemer in most of his attributes: not in his power, or omnipresence or omniscience. But what we are called to imitate is his love.

HE GAVE HIMSELF

First, Christ loved us and “gave himself.” To give himself meant giving his heart, his will, to do the will of his Father. Repeatedly, he said, “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (Jn 6: 38) He was an exact copy of his Father--“He that has seen me hath seen the Father.” It was because he was doing exactly the Father’s will.

And Christ recognized his true family, as being those who do the will of his Father. He said, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Mt 12: 5) “To obey is better than sacrifice.” (1 Sa 15: 22) Those who resign their will to God, as dear children, give him everything, they give themselves. This is what God means when he says “My son, give me thy heart (Proverbs 23:26).

Now, notice, Christ did not merely say he loved us, he loved us and gave himself for us. To "walk" in love, is not merely to talk of it, but to exercise it; and to do all from a heart of love. And we should seek to advance, to increase, and to abound more and more in love.

Philippians 1:9: And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

1 Thessalonians 4:1: Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more....4:10...we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

See brethren, to follow after God is not merely to be innocent of wrong. We are to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.” But God is more than that. Christ did more than that. And to follow him is to do more than be blameless. It is to give ourselves. Look at the next point.

FOR US

Secondly, he gave himself “for us.” We were unlovable, unkind, haters of God; in our minds he was our enemy; of us there was none righteous, no, not one. But Christ loved us and gave himself for us when we were yet enemies in our minds by wicked works. He loved us and called us when we were in that state. Here is the point. Those Christ has yet to give life, who are redeemed by his blood, are in that same state, even as we were. We never know, but that one who appears to be the greatest enemy of God and our greatest enemy, may Christ’s redeemed. That is why he teaches us this:

Luke 6: 31: And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. 32: For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. 33: And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. 34: And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35: But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil. 36: Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

That was our case and that is what he did for us. Let’s not forget the context. Paul is exhorting the church at Ephesus. The whole point in this exhortation to love each other is so we can continue to have the gospel preached to our brethren and so that we can love Christ’s redeemed who are yet dead in their sins, by sending forth the gospel to them.

AN OFFERING AND A SACRIFICE TO GOD

Thirdly, Christ gave himself for us “an offering and a sacrifice to God.” Christ offered up himself a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of his people, to expiate the sins of his people, to make reconciliation and satisfaction for our sins.

In order to do so, that meant Christ had to come to where we are. He had to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He had to bear our sins. Christ had to bear our judgment. He had to bear our shame. Christ had to bear our death. But in the garden, when he went forth to meet his enemies who had come to lead him to that shameful cross, Christ said: “But that the world may know that I love the Father: and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I; arise and let us go hence (John 14:31).

So he tells us “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ”—the law of love. (Gal 6: 2) It may mean we have to go out of our way; it may mean we have to do for others what they cannot do for themselves; it may mean we have to overlook their sins or bear them spewing out hatred against us; it may mean we have to bear shame. But get this: it will mean we have to lay down our lives, lose our comforts, and lose our ease. That is what Christ did for us.

You fathers and mothers do almost everything you do for your children. Faithful parents lay down their lives for their children—even for their disobedient children. And a dear child will honor their father and mother for doing so. God teaches us here that is what he has done for us. He teaches us to honor him by doing the same for one another, even those who appear our enemies. They just might be a child of God he has yet to call.

A SWEETSMELLING SAVOR

Lastly, look at this, that which Christ did was “a sweet-smelling savour.” Christ is the burnt offering—a sweet-smelling savour unto God. Christ was the offering and sacrifice which answered all the demands of God’s justice for the sins of his people. By one offering, Christ put away our sins forever. He finished and made an end of our transgression. Christ perfected his people forever by his one offering. (Heb 10: 14)

What makes this a sweetsmelling savour? Do you remember when God first made you to hear this good news? Do you remember how you felt when you first met your brethren? Have you noticed how many times in this epistle to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit moved Paul to speak of love? There is no doubt in my mind it is because God, who knows the hearts, knew this was needful for the Ephesian church. Remember, the Lord's letter to the Ephesians in

Revelation 2: 2: I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4: Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;

He says, "Never lose that first love for Christ and for your brethren." If you find yourself leaving your first love, Christ says, "remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." He is saying what our text says, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." Always be that little child before your heavenly Father. "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour."

Romans 12: 1: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2: And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Those who find fault with us will just have to find fault with our copy—Christ Himself!

Amen!