

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SEVENTY-SEVEN)

“WALK IN LOVE”

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

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.

We will commence our study this evening with a quotation from a sermon preached by the American pastor and author, **Ray Stedman**:

“The task of Christianity is not primarily to get us ready for heaven. Though this has been the emphasis in past generations, it is, in itself, a relatively simple task as far as God is concerned. He gets us ready for heaven by an act of faith in Jesus Christ. The major task of Christian faith, however, is to equip us for life, to live life.

The message of the Scriptures, therefore, is how to handle life. I am not talking about ideal life, life as we can think of it on Sunday morning when we are removed from much of the rush and pressure of our days. No, I am talking about realistic life. Life with its pressures and problems, its joys and challenges, its heartaches and tears, its confusion and bafflement, its possibilities of greatness. We don't come here on Sunday mornings to huddle together and learn how to hang on. We come here to learn how to handle life so that we can go out and

face the worst and still stand, undefeated! **That is what Christianity is about.**

Therefore, the purpose of the church...is not to make the world a better place to live in-it is to make a better people to live in it.

Then, as a kind of by-product, and always as that, these better people will make the world a better place. So to the church is given the secret of life. Christians are the only ones who have that secret. I know that sounds conceited and arrogant, yet it is based upon the teaching of the Word of God from cover to cover. **Christ is the secret of life.**

Christians have Jesus Christ, **that is what makes you a Christian.**

Therefore, to Christians is given the secret of life. That is why the message of the church never changes no matter what the age, or the century, in which we find ourselves. That is also why it is always up-to-date. Only that message will meet the need of the world in which we live. **When the church forgets this and wanders off into peripheral paths, trying to produce the by-product directly, it loses its influence, its power, and its effectiveness.**

Now Paul is very anxious that his readers never forget this fact. As we have been looking at the fourth chapter of Ephesians together, we have seen how he works out in practical detail — the effect of this transforming secret in daily life. We learned that as this secret is put into practice — **not simply believed, but put into practice** — it makes a Christian stop lying and start telling the truth. It makes him stop losing his temper and start healing his relationships with those around him. It makes him stop stealing and start giving. It makes him stop talking dirty and start speaking wisely and helpfully and wholesomely. It even makes him stop harboring inner attitudes of hate, resentment, bitterness, envy, and malice and to start forgiving and being gracious and kind to those around him even when it is difficult to do so.

Yet the apostle never wants us to get so wrapped up in the results that we forget what produces them. That is the danger, isn't it?

So many times we are so anxious to get to the end that we forget the pathway that leads to it. So in the midst of this practical dissertation of Chapter 4, the apostle breaks off to restate the great secret of Christian living.

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (**Ephesians 5:1-2, Revised Standard Version**).

That is a great declaration. Perhaps we can analyze it best by gathering it in about four words: The first is to note the apostle's exhortation to us here. *'Be imitators of God,'* he says. He put it flatly, bluntly, openly: *'Be imitators of God.'* The word for *imitators* is the Greek word that means *'to mimic,'* to be a mimicker of God. Mimics are those who follow the pattern or the example of God. Here is what Christians are to be. If you want to put it in one word, you can say it this way, *'Be godlike.'* **That is the goal of Christianity. It is to produce men and women, boys and girls, who are godlike in the midst of an ungodlike world. That is what it is all about."**

In our previous Lesson, when we began our examination of the **fifth** chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we noted that in chapter 5, he continues the exhortations which he had begun in chapter 4.

In **Ephesians 5:1** he writes, *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children."*

The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

"Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children."

The word *"therefore,"* introduces a logical result or inference from what has gone before. In **Ephesians 4:25-32**, Paul provided the Ephesian believers with a list of specific sins which were characteristic of the **"old man."** These sins were to be **"put off."** He also provided a list of the contrasting virtues which were characteristic of the **"new man."** These

virtues were to be **“put on.”** The word *“therefore”* connects this **“putting off”** of the sins of the **“old man,”** and the **“putting on”** of the virtues of the **“new man”** with the command to be *“imitators of God.”*

Paul says *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”* The Greek word translated *“followers”* or *“imitators”* is **mimétés:** (**mim-ay-tace**) which refers to an imitator. It speaks of the process of observing and replicating the behaviour of another. Our English word *“mimic”* comes from this Greek word.

The word is used positively in the New Testament to describe the imitation that arises by admiring the example of someone who is deemed to be worthy of emulation. It is used of believers emulating a God-approved example. Paul is arguing here that children are like their parents. **If we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father.**

The word *“Be”* is the translation of the Greek word **ginomai:** (**ghin’-om-ahce**), which means, *“to become, to come into being, to bring into existence.”* The believers in Ephesus had already been *“born again.”* They had been justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They had *“come into being”* so to speak, in the sense that they had been saved and by virtue of that fact, had been **positioned** *“in Christ.”* But now Paul exhorts them to *“come into being”* as it relates to their **practice of Christ.** Beloved that is what Biblical Christianity is—the practice of Christ!

The verb is in the present imperative. It is a command calling for continual imitation! We are to continually *“mimic”* God’s attitudes and actions.

But how can we be imitators of God? We can only do so by imitating Jesus Christ, because He is the One who reveals God to us!

Paul says, *“Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children”* (**New English Translation**).

The words, “*dearly loved*” are a translation of the Greek word **agapétos**: (**ag-ap-ay-tos**’), a verbal adjective, derived from **agapé**, which refers to a love called out of one’s heart by the preciousness of the object loved. **Agapétos** is the word that the Father uses to refer to His Son (**Matthew 3:17, Matthew 12:18, Matthew 17:5**). Amazingly, **agapétos** is also applied to believers as being reconciled to God and judged by him to be worthy of eternal life. It is used to refer to persons who have personally experienced the **agapé**-love of God! In other words, God the Father sees us now and **forever** as His very own children, because we are eternally in His Son!

The word “*children*” is a translation of the Greek word **teknon** which refers to a child as viewed in relation to his or her parents or family. It describes those who are regarded as true, genuine children. Earlier in **Ephesians 2:3** Paul used the word **teknon** to indicate that, prior to our conversion, we were, by nature “*children of wrath*.” Now he uses the same word to speak of us as God’s “*dearly loved children*.”

As someone has observed, “**What a contrast 3 chapters make!**” Paul is saying in effect to his readers, “When you were “*children of wrath*,” you lived in obedience to the devil. Now that you are the “*dearly loved children*” of God, you should be continually motivated by a desire to walk in a manner pleasing to your new Father.

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that we cannot be imitators of Jesus Christ in our own strength. The only way to imitate the life of Jesus is by relying on the same power that He relied on to obey His Father. That power was, of course, the Holy Spirit.

In verse **2**, Paul writes, “*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.*”

Let us consider 3 other translations of this verse:

New English Translation

“and live in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.”

The Living Bible

“Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ’s love for you was like sweet perfume to him.”

The Message

“Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.”

Paul says, “**Walk in love.**” The word “walk,” is a translation of the Greek word **peripateó**: (**per-ee-pat-eh’-o**), which literally means, “to walk around.” Subsequently, **peripateó** came to mean, “to make one’s way, to make progress, to make proper use of one’s opportunities.” Finally, the word came to mean, “to live, to regulate one’s life, to conduct one’s live, to order one’s behaviour.” Most of the New Testament uses of **peripateó** reflect this latter meaning.

The word is in the **present imperative** indicating that Paul is issuing a command, calling on the believers in Ephesus to be constantly regulating their lives, and ordering their behaviour within the sphere of the unconditional, sacrificial love of God!

Perhaps, brothers and sisters, we are now in a position to appreciate a little better, the import of Paul’s plea in **Ephesians 4:1**: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*” In **Lesson 38** we made the following comments regarding this plea:

"Paul is saying in effect to the believers in Ephesus, particularly to the Gentiles, 'You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. You were once spiritually dead in your sins but now you are alive in Christ. You once were far off, but now you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He your peace. He has broken down the enmity that existed between you, and placed you into one body. You are all reconciled to God and to each other. You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are members of the family of God. You are a building of God, a holy Temple, a dwelling place of God. You are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise. And besides all these spiritual blessings, I have prayed for you to be enlightened to these truths and to be empowered by the Spirit. You have the truth and you have the power. Now, in view of all that you are and all that you have, I beg of you please, walk worthy of this high calling in Christ Jesus!'"

A part of this "*high calling*" is to "*walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.*"

The command is to "*Walk in love.*" The Greek word translated "*love*" is **agapé**. **Agapé** was chosen by the writers of the New Testament as the distinctive word to be used when speaking of God as love; when speaking of the love with which God loves; and when speaking of the love which the Holy Spirit produces in the heart of the yielded believer. It speaks of a love which is awakened by a sense of value in an object which causes one to prize it. It springs from a recognition, an appreciation of the preciousness of an object. It is a love of esteem, acceptance and approval. The quality of this love is determined by the character of the one who loves.

Agapé is a love that impels the lover to sacrifice himself or herself for the benefit of the one loved. It is the unconditional, sacrificial love which was so graphically dramatized on the Cross of Calvary. Paul chose this word as the one that would most adequately describe

Christian love, and in **1 Corinthians 13**, he poured into it its various elements.

Brothers and sisters, it is with this “**agapé**” love that we are commanded to love each other! (**John 13:34-35**)

But “how” you ask, “can we ever love our fellow believers with this kind of love?” Remember that we just indicated that **agapé** was the word chosen by the writers of the New Testament as the distinctive word to be used when speaking of **the love which the Holy Spirit produces in the heart of the yielded believer**. According to **Romans 5:5**, the “love (**agapé**) of God” has been poured into the heart of every believer through the Holy Spirit! “*And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (**New English Translation**). The fact that the love of God is poured out within the hearts of believers implies that it is the source of believers’ love **for** God and **for** each other!

Commenting on this verse, **Warren Wiersbe** writes, “When Paul encouraged his readers to ‘walk in love,’ he was not asking them to do something that was foreign to the **Christian** life; for we have received a new nature that wants to express itself in love. The old nature is basically selfish, and for this reason builds walls and declares war. But the new nature is loving, and therefore builds bridges and proclaims peace.”

Brothers and sisters, let us be very clear. What Paul is calling for here is not something that can be accomplished in our own power. **This “walking, or living in love,” is not a “natural” walk, but a “supernatural” walk, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.** If we are to consistently regulate our lives, and order our behaviour within the sphere of the unconditional, sacrificial love of God, we must rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to give us both the **desire** and the **power** to do what pleases God (**Philippians 2:12-13**). Paul is calling on believers to live a supernatural life of love.

If we strive to obey this command in our own strength, we will have to resort to legalism, and legalism is an abomination to God because it is an attempt to please God by means of the religious activity promoted by the flesh. Legalism is an attempt to accomplish, by human effort, what can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and it is therefore guaranteed to fail! To “*walk in love,*” we must abandon “**self-reliance**” and embrace “**Spirit-dependence!**”

Paul elaborates on this in **Galatians 5:16-26**: The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows:

16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,

21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

26 Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

Brothers and sisters, since we are a new creation in Christ, as Paul makes clear in **Ephesians 1-3**, we should demonstrate this new life by relying on a new power-the Holy Spirit, Who enables us to continually order our behavior in the sphere of supernaturally empowered “**agapé**” love.

Believers are to order their behavior, or manner of life within the sphere of the divine, supernatural love produced in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. When this love becomes the deciding factor in our choices, and the motivating power in our actions, we will be “walking in love.” We will be exemplifying in our lives the self-sacrificial love demonstrated at Calvary and explained in **1 Corinthians** chapter **13**.