

Be Imitators of God as Beloved Children

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I want to begin reading in Ephesians 4:30. We're going to read five verses through Ephesians 5:2. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. 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."

Father, help us, change us, have mercy upon us, in Christ's name we ask, Amen.

Sanctification

Brethren, this portion of Scripture, this portion of Ephesians 4, it is some of the most profound teaching on sanctification anywhere. And I know there's other places you can go, but just the basic formula that Paul lays down in 4:22, 23, and 24, it can revolutionize a life. Think about it. Because a lot of Christians don't approach life this way. They approach it defeated. "I'm helpless." "I can't do this." "I just need to pray to God about this." And Scripture says: No. That is not true. You can and must consciously, purposely put off the old man. And you are capable of replacing that that you put off with that which accords to the new man created after the likeness of God, true righteousness and holiness. You can do that. And verse 23 interjects in here this reality that we are to let ourselves be transformed - to change, be renewed in the spirit of our minds. So there's got to be thinking. This can revolutionize it. You just need to think about the biblical reasons as to why you ought to be putting off the old man and his nature and be putting on the new man qualities. That can revolutionize things.

And here's the thing, here's the thing, as Paul is moving along and he's saying: Okay, you put away falsehood. You put away corrupt speaking. You put away bitterness, etc. etc. What I love about this is that Paul is under inspiration, which means God is moving Paul to say: Paul, tell them when it comes to not stealing anymore, tell them, from My own infinite mind, what the best truth of all right at this point to these people is to help motivate them in their thinking. Now, I know, I know, you can look other places in the Bible and you can find other motives for the same conduct. And we ought to be able to do that. You ought to be able to come up with 10 reasons why you shouldn't steal. But the thing is right here, we're given very choice, very select reasons when God wants me to get rid of that wickedness that corresponds to my former manner of life and put on it its place that which is truly righteous and holy, God doesn't leave me to myself to figure out what sort of truth is most calculated to help me on in this victory. He gives us the reasons.

Now, that brings us to today. We're in these five verses. Out of everything that God could say to try to convince us not to be bitter people, and to put on kindness, to walk in love, these are the things. So what it makes me recognize is this: (incomplete thought). You see the words, but if somehow I can make you feel these truths more than you presently feel them, then I would guess that I'm being successful. If you walk out this door and you've actually felt the

weight of the truths that are meant to motivate us and renew the mind. Because I recognize this, if you don't feel it, you're not going to be impacted; you're not going to be moved by it. You're not going to change if you're not moved by it. That's the reality.

So let's break down these five verses. There's a reason I picked these five and I think you'll see it in a second. But what I want to do is break these five verses down into their component parts. And by component parts, I mean referring back to 4:22, 23, 24, because you remember what Paul's been doing. Paul gave us the basic formula and then he specifically works it out in all these different categories. That's what he's doing here. He's showing us the putting off, the putting on - the motive - all the way through here. And it's going to continue into the weeks ahead. And so what I want us to do is I want us to look at these five verses and ask us: what is it that we need to put off? What is it that we need to put on? And what sort of motives are being given to us in order to do it?

Now here's the thing, if you boil it all down, I believe you can see from 5:2 that what we are to put on here is love. Now, if you just think about 4:32, you could see several things here that you're supposed to put on. You're supposed to put on kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiving, in 5:1 you're supposed to put on an imitation of God. And then 5:2, "walk in love," but here's the thing: Love is kind. When you talk about kindness and tenderheartedness and forgiving, what does love do? Love covers a multitude of sins. You see, love is forgiving. Love is kind. So we basically have expressions of love there. And then what he's saying is this: 4:32, "As God in Christ forgave you." So you're supposed to do this as He did, therefore, imitate Him. In what? Primarily, in love. When we're called to imitate God, you'll remember in the Sermon on the Mount it's right there - it's loving our enemies. God does this. He lets His sun shine and His rain fall, and therefore you be like Him. Be imitators of your Father in loving. That seems to be the issue. What do we put off? Obviously all the things that are contrary to love. The bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. That's what we put off. The unloving aspects.

But here's what I really want to focus on today: What are the motives? Well, you see the first one in the verses that I've done here, that I've included here, we don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit. Okay, well, what does that have to do with? Does that really have to do with anything that's unloving? Does it really have to do with bitterness? Well, it has to do with this, it has to do with that which grieves the Spirit. And you figure that out. What grieves Him? What's the context here? You know, the context is really what Craig was talking about. It's how we treat one another.

So, here's a motive. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit with the stuff that grieves Him like bitterness. Okay, two, right there at the end of 4:32, here's another motive: Consider God forgiving your sins. Be melted by that and do the same. Okay, brethren, we've already covered those two. The last two sermons we covered those two items. So I'm not going to belabor that today, but let's go on from there.

Remember who you are. This is 5:1. You're to imitate God why? Because you're beloved children. Okay, you see that. That should motivate you to be like your Father. And then here's a fourth one: This is 5:2, consider the greatness of Christ's love for you. Therefore walk like that. So that's a fourth motive. Fifth motive: consider how fragrant Christ's sacrifice is to God and

seek yourself to be fragrant. These are basically the five motives that you would find from these five verses.

Now, I don't want you to miss something. Each of these truths that God Himself inspires Paul to set forth as a motivation to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, loving, each mind-renewing truth that I just read to you, all 5 of these, if you have eyes to see, every one of them connects with either the Spirit, the Father, or the Son. You say, so what? Just this: I want you to see how the Trinity fits in with sanctification because clearly, we need to be renewed in the mind if we're really going to be effective in the putting off and the putting on. We have to think right. And these five verses show us this: that if we're going to think right about sanctification and how we live practically, we need to be thinking not on God generally, but on each of the specific three Persons because there are reasons - look, there are reasons to walk in love that go to the Son that just aren't true of the Father. And there are reasons as to why we should live this way that connect with the Spirit that just don't connect with the Father or Son. That's what you want to see. We need to recognize this. We need to see this.

The Role of the Trinity in Sanctification

Read these five verses again and take note of the Trinity. Take note of all three Persons as They come up here. Ephesians 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 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."

Now, I'll just point something out. It is standard Pauline nomenclature to use "God" with respect to the Father. Just look at chapter 1. You know this already, but look at chapter 1:2. "Grace to you and peace from God - God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing." You see that. The Father is regarded as God. That is very standard in Pauline [writings.]

We become familiar with things. I think that's one of the things about preaching that as we're preparing, we recognize - especially I think about guys like MacArthur who have pastored in the same church for what? Like over 50 years? And he's actually preached through some books more than once. (incomplete thought) I recognize there's always new people, but one of the things that you want to do is you want to shake people out of thinking: "Oh, I've heard that before" and so they shut down. I would just say this: Cursed familiarity! Where we get to the point where we become so accustomed to seeing the three Persons in what we read or in the songs that we sing that we miss it. We don't want to miss it! Don't miss this! There are certain great motives behind our sanctification that are directly connected with each individual Person in the Godhead. Not just God generally. So the question is this: Do you contemplate? Here's the thing, we're supposed to be renewed in the spirit of our minds by truths like these. You know what that means? That doesn't mean that you just hear it right now. That doesn't mean that you just hear the preaching on any given Sunday. Because the reality is that the kind of life that's

being called for here isn't being called for just on Sunday mornings. This is something that you're being called to live your life. And if you're going to live your life this way, you have to be thinking throughout your life this way. You know what this means? This means that the Christians that fight sin and put on holiness most effectively are those who are contemplating the three Persons of the Godhead. We should be thinking about each Person and how that impacts our life. Certainly that's what's happening here.

I mean, I would just ask you this: Do you contemplate the Father? Do you give times where you're thinking about the Father? Times where you think about the Son? Times where you think about the Holy Spirit? If you're doing devotional reading from the New Testament - this is in the Old too - but especially in the New Testament, if you look for the Trinity in the Pauline letters, it is there; it is stark; it is real. It is pronounced. You can't miss it. You don't want to just read about all these three Persons and you know, you get: "Through Him by one Spirit, we have access to the Father," and you just had all three Persons, and it's just like, oh, whatever. It's theological sounding. No, you don't want to do that. You want to isolate each of those three Persons. You want to see what They're doing. What is this? The Trinity in many ways is mysterious, but we do have a lot revealed. And I'd just ask you this, do you think about the three individual Persons? How do you answer that? Because look, if you don't think that way, you will never feel the weight of these motives. And if you don't feel them, you don't respond. If you don't respond, there's no change. The most godly think such thoughts.

God is One

Now, let's just think about the Trinity for a second. Trinity. If you know about the theological arguments, the theological realities, the theological propositions - proposition is basically a statement of fact. It's a statement of truth. There are three statements of truth that we want to embrace with regards to the Trinity. The first is there is one God. Can anybody give me a text that says that there's one God? (from the room) Deuteronomy 6. Tim: Yeah, Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." And there are many others, many others.

The Equality of the Persons of God

But then the next thing is that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each God. Fully God and equally God. Now, John 1:1. You have God the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Right there, you have God, and the Word is God. And the classic text for the Holy Spirit is: Ananias, the devil's filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. And he specifically says, "You have not lied to man but to God."

The Three Persons of God are Distinct

The third truth is this. The first: there's one God. The second truth is that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully and equally God. And then the third truth is this: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons. And I'm sure I came across this somewhere probably in one of the systematic theologies or somewhere, but, I've always thought the best way to define three Persons is three centers of consciousness. You actually have individual Persons that are interacting. You have these centers of consciousness. Christ isn't two centers

of consciousness. He's not God on one hand and man somehow mysteriously - He is the God-man. But He can talk to the Father and He can pray to the Father and He can be sent from the Father. He can love the Father. He talks to Him. And the Spirit - the Son and the Father sends the Spirit. Jesus leaves so that the Spirit can come. Clearly, if we see what's happening in Scripture, the authors of Scripture are not modalists. They're not saying: Well, the Father is the Son and the Son and Father are the Spirit. They don't talk that way. They talk about them as three independently distinct Persons. And in fact, we see it right here. Look at Ephesians 4. In the very same chapter, if you go back to 4:4, "There is one body and one Spirit. Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call." "One Lord." There's the one Holy Spirit of God. There's the one Lord Jesus Christ. And then there's one God and Father of all Who is over all, through all, in all. There's one, one, and one. There's one God, but there's one Spirit, one Lord, one God the Father. You say, yeah, I'm confused. Look, this is what Scripture teaches. And it's not that the theologians through the ages have actually figured out all the mysteries. But what we do recognize is this is how God is presented in the Scriptures. And so we bow to that.

Consider Each Person

Do you want a motive to be holy? Okay, then consider the Father. But consider Him distinct and separate. And consider the Son and consider the Spirit. There are reasons attached to each of the Persons as to why we ought to live holy lives. Consider this, when a Christian sins, when a Christian sins - that happens and we're all familiar with it - what ought to be most aware in our minds? It's not so much simply that we've done something wrong. Of course, we've done something wrong. Or even that we've broken God's law. Or it's not: Oh no, I've sinned. Now I'm going to go to hell. It's not that. What we ought to be most aware of when we sin is that we have offended against love. But here's the thing, each Person of the Trinity expresses His love to the Christian in different capacities, in different ways. We see this plainly in the verses before us. Look at 4:30. What do we see there? The Spirit seals us. A seal is upon a person. He comes upon us with His presence and His power. What does Scripture say about the Father? 4:32, It's the Father Who forgives us. It's the Father Who designed the way to forgive us, pardon us, set us free while at the same time upholding His justice and His holiness. It's the Father Who sent the Son. It's the Father Who makes us children (5:1). When you get to 5:2, it's the Lord Jesus Himself Who - He expresses His love to us by giving Himself up for us. The Father didn't give Himself up for us as a sacrifice. But the Father gave His Son. The Son gave Himself up. The Spirit didn't do that. The Spirit seals us. Christ doesn't seal us. The Father doesn't seal us. The Spirit - we're sealed with the Spirit. These are the realities.

And when we ourselves do not love, we offend against that love. Look, the very term "grieve" from 4:30, it confirms that. We hurt the One Who has embraced us. We throw Him into sorrows. That's how Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines that. The Father says this: I forgave you and made you one of My own children. And we would say this, what then should be our response to that? You see, if you're really gripped by that: Wow, I'm forgiven! Yeah, we dealt with that last week. And I'm made one of His children. How then should I respond? Ingratitude? "After what He's done for me, I don't want anything of His image on my life. I don't want to imitate Him."

The Son says this: I gave Myself up for you. And what He comes back to us with is what is our response to that going to be? How do we respond? If I walk around bitter and slandering and unforgiving, unfeeling, what it really says is this: I don't really have any appreciation for that. I'm not impacted by that. You see, if you're really deeply loved by somebody and you know the love of that person, it impacts. Even on the human level, somebody can be going wayward; somebody can be wandering, but if they had that person in their life that really loved them - I mean really loved them; not just said they did, but the person knows it's real - it's hard just to turn your back on that. It produces a response in people.

I remember MacArthur telling the story one time about something happened between he and his son. And he told the story that he was out washing the car and his son came out and apologized. And his son was telling him something like "Dad, what makes it most difficult when we're at odds with each other is I know the love that you have for me." And MacArthur was talking about how that held sway with his son. Well, how much more here? How do we respond to this? Do we show that there's an appreciation or there's a lack of appreciation? A lack of highly valuing? Not very affected by these expressions of love to me. How do I respond? That's the issue.

Like I said, we dealt with verses 4:30, 31, 32. So I'm going to just jump right in here to this reality in 5:1. Look how 4:32 ends. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God..." See, we're supposed to be like Him. As God. He forgave and as He did, so should we. And that takes us right into 5:1, "Therefore..." These chapter divisions aren't in the original. And there's that "therefore" right at 5:1. See, he's tying back to this. Just forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you, therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.

We are Beloved Children

Beloved children. We hear about that. But again, it's like we need to be reminded of it. We take it for granted. We take it for granted. We don't appreciate it. It doesn't impact us. If it doesn't impact us, it doesn't motivate the kind of love that not just Paul, but God Himself is wanting to produce. It's impossible to be motivated by truth if we don't feel the truth. And there's no result.

Consider what forgiveness might have looked like. Just think with me. I know I'm just being creative here. Imagine if you were in hell for a billion years. And after a billion years of suffering unimaginable torment, somebody was sent to you and said: Christ is going to pay for you to be annihilated. If the damned in hell should have such hope as that, hell would be set to rejoicing right now. What makes it so unbearable is its eternity. Oh, it would be unbearable if it was for a billion years, but you know what the people would always have? Hope that it's going to come to an end. And if they were told right now, Christ died to give you a reprieve after a billion years - and it's annihilation - but it's like it was before we were born. We stop suffering. We just go to sleep forever with no dreams. They would rejoice over such a thing as that.

You know what? If God came along to sinners and said I sent My Son to the cross so that there's no hell. You're just going to cease to exist when you die. That would be a mercy indescribable. I don't know why, I have this picture in my mind of like a rock out in the middle of the ocean where you can't see any other land. There's just this one rock. And you're set on that rock. If a person were put in that place for eternity, you might call it hell, but that's not hell. If

you're allowed to be there and be fed and breathe and watch the sunrise each day, somehow be sustained... but you see, God didn't do that either. He doesn't send us to the moon to live outside of His presence.

Or what if God simply said to us: My Son died on the cross and I'm going to allow you to live in this world forever. I mean, basically, the way that we're hindered from seeing Him and having the kind of fellowship with Him, it's just going to be like this forever. We're never going to have more than we have right now. Just forever and ever.

Or what if God said to us I'm sending My Son to the cross. and you can go live in Frisco, Colorado in the mountains. Or I've got a South Seas island paradise waiting for you and it's forever. But, it's going to be just like now. You'll see My fingerprints in creation. You're never going to look on My face. That's what Jehovah's Witnesses are all about except for the 144,000. See, a lot of people love it here. That to them would be absolutely glorious.

Or what if God came along and said I sent My Son to the cross. And I'm going to allow you into Heaven once in awhile, but only once in awhile. Or what if He said, well, you can come into Heaven, but you're going to be a beggar.

Well, you know where I'm going with this. The thing is we're going to be welcomed into the new heavens and the new earth not just as an honored guest. We're going to be welcomed into Paradise forever as a child of God. But now you look at the relationship between some parents and their children - especially step-children, adopted children - do you know what it says? You are going to be allowed forever into the very presence of God as beloved children. If you begin to recognize the stock we come from and that God would do this. This is actually what it means to become a Christian.

I mean, Christian, do you know this? You are greatly beloved. Three translations say: "dearly loved." You are dear to God. Even if you're one of those Christians that I described last week who's bitter and needs to put it off. Think what we have here. The very people being spoken to in 4:31 are the same people being spoken to in 5:1. You who need to be exhorted not to be bitter because there's too much of the old man quality about your life right now, you are the one. You may have been here last week and you felt convicted, like this poison, this cancer is still within you. But you know what God says to you? I dearly love you. That's why He sent that exhortation to you to put that off. And I want you not to be like that. Beloved. It is to God's beloved children that He says this.

Brethren, Christianity is not some moral code that's pressed upon us. Here's a reason for living the Christian life. Why? We talk about sons and daughters of God. But let that word "beloved" sink in. That means you are greatly loved. You are dear to the heart of God. This is no mechanical relationship here. God gives us our own children - some of you haven't had children yet, but when you have a child, you just ask any of the parents who are watching their children begin to walk for the first time or talk for the first time, and how they feel about it. They delight in those children. Why do you think God did that? Why do you think He made that happen in our midst? That's a shadow. He says look at how you feel towards your children; how you delight in them; how you have affection for them; how you love them; how they are dear to you. That's the shadow. You are dearly loved by Me. He takes an intense personal interest in His children.

How Do We Respond to God's Love?

And what we have to ask is this: What should my response be to that? What does God expect to happen? I might have forgiven your sins and confined you to the desert. I might have forgiven your sins and left you to just be a beggar. But I didn't do that. I've made you sons and daughters. Sons and daughters! Have you ever read? When we get there, we're going to sit down at table. Scripture says we sit down at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And have you ever read in Luke's Gospel? It says that Jesus the Master is going to come and He's going to gird Himself. You talk about washing feet. Do you know He continues to do that kind of thing in Glory? He girds Himself like a servant and He comes and serves us. I think sometimes, rightly so, we have this picture in our mind. We enter Heaven and there He is high and lifted up on a throne. And we all fall down and undoubtedly there's going to be reality to that. But can you imagine? Can you imagine if you're ushered into Glory and the first sight you have of Jesus Christ in all of His glory is He's girding Himself to come and serve you? And yet, that's what Scripture says. Being a Christian is the greatest reality on the face of the earth.

I'll tell you, to be served that way and have just come through judgment - and you know what that's going to be like? Wait, I went to college with that guy. And I was worse than him. Wait, that's the cousin that I grew up with. I led them into sin. Wait, I sinned against them. And here is Christ coming to gird Himself. Why? Because God made us His dear child. (incomplete thought) Nothing is greater than this.

So how should we respond? You see, Paul wants us thinking about what the Spirit and what the Father and what the Son have done for us. Don't grieve Him. Don't despise that love of the Father Who has made you this son. How should you respond? We should respond by wanting to please the One Who loves us. That's what happens. That's what happens on a human level. That person that most loved us, we don't want to disappoint them. We want to please them. And nothing gives God greater joy over you and me than when we respond to this love by saying if God has done this for me, I want to please Him. God is not more pleased with us than when our greatest desire is to please Him. The supreme desire of our life should be exactly this: to please Him and give Him joy. There's no greater privilege than being a Christian. And if we believe this, then we don't talk like so many do. You have so many people that want to come along and they want to identify with Christianity. Why? Well, I don't want to go to hell. Of course I want to be saved. Of course I want to be a Christian. Of course I said the little prayer. Of course, I'm in. I don't want to go to hell. But don't expect me to live the Christian life. Don't expect me to live in purity.

What is that? You're a child of God, greatly beloved. See, if you believe this, if you're impacted by this, if this holds sway with you... Do you walk through the world with the right perspective? Craig hit on it. You are of the royal family. Do you realize, Christian, sometimes it's hard to realize. Sometimes we still too much classify ourselves like the world classifies - by beauty, by wealth, by degrees, by where you live, what you drive. When you walk through this world, you're the royal stock. There's no one higher in the world. You're the most favored, most chosen, most honored, special, most loved by God. And so what should your response be when He calls you: forgive. Be tenderhearted. Look at what I've done. Our response should be: I want nothing more than to please Him. And He says would you please Me? Well, nothing gives Me

greater delight and pleasure than that you imitate Me. There it says it - 5:1, "Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children."

You remember how Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount? He said this, calling us to imitate God - and we could go lots of places: be holy because He's holy. But there's a text probably that Paul is drawing from right here. Same truth is here anyway whether Paul knew it or not. "I say to you..." Just listen to this. "Love your enemies." Be a lover of men. Not just of each other, but of your enemies. Why? "Pray for those who persecute you." Why? "So that you may be sons..." That's the reason. "...Of your Father Who is in Heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Now listen to this, "...For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." See, be like Him. Imitate Him. He's perfect. How? In love. The way He loves.

But did you catch that? Don't the tax collectors do the same? In other words, what are you doing more than others? Do you really know who you are? Is your life special? Is your life different? There's nothing wonderful in that. There's nothing wonderful in loving those who love you. There's nothing special about that. His point is this: there ought to be something special about you if you're a son of God. You shouldn't be living like a Gentile, living like a tax collector. Don't think that just because you love your children or love your dad or your cousins, the lost people do that. What's special about you? That's the issue here. There ought to be nothing - nothing - there ought to be nothing ordinary about the Christian. Why? Because the Christian isn't ordinary. The Christian is a child of God. What is there special about you? That's the issue. Think about this. What is special about you? You say, well, I love my child. Yeah, okay, the tax collectors do that. Well, I mean, I uh... Because you're a child of God, how does that move you? (Incomplete thought) You have to transpose this to your life. His sun shines. His rain falls. You could say, well, I don't control the clouds. I don't control the sun. No, but Jesus brought that up not expecting you to control those things, but take the things that are in your control like God takes the things that are in His control and He causes them to be good to all sorts of different kinds of people. He's saying take what's in your life, take what's at your disposal and use it in the same way that God does. Imitate Him. You don't have the sun, but you have certain money, funds, home, vehicles, certain wealth, certain possessions, certain gifts, certain abilities that you can do the same with that He does. Life isn't just called for you to live however you want. You're being motivated here.

What is there special about you? Think about it. Our whole life is to be special because our God is special. And we are beloved children. After all that He's done for me, what are you going to do? Are you going to walk around saying: I'm ashamed of God's image. I'm ashamed of the way God is. I don't like that. To walk like He walks, to look like He looks, to act like He acts, talk like He talks, think like He thinks. I'm ashamed of that. I don't want to do that. You remember what Jesus said. Jesus said you're of your father the devil. And he was a murderer from the beginning. And you do the things he does. But you see, the same reality, you can flip that thing on its head. The opposite is true. If God is your Father, then you're going to do the things that your Father does. That's always the issue. When they said: We're offspring of

Abraham's. He said: If you were, you would do the things he did. You see, that's always the issue. You can always tell who you belong to by what you do.

And then you have this: You have this reality in v. 2. "Walk in love as Christ..." You see, before, "don't grieve the Spirit." You're to put these things off as God - being imitators of God. Now, the big thing is this: Don't grieve the Spirit and live like the Father and live like the Son. It's an imitation of the Father and an imitation of the Son and a not grieving of the Spirit. That's the issue here. Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Brethren, we're reminded all over again. You know what He does? He produces the doctrine of the atonement. Doctrine matters. Don't think, oh, theology class. That's just for preachers. Don't think doctrine... doctrine is deep and that's for the theologians. No, doctrine is that which directs our thinking. It's that which we believe. It's the teaching. It's the truth. And the teachings that we find in Scripture are supposed to be motivational. If we believe the doctrine, it's going to shape our behavior. You can always tell what a man truly believes. Always. Just look at their life. You can tell what a man believes. You can tell what he values most highly. You can tell what most influences his life at the deepest level. Just look at his conduct. Our behavior is always a result of our thinking. If your life begins changing, I mean, one time you were really devoted, really dedicated, really seeking to serve the Lord, and now you're serving more yourself and you're kind of given up to pleasure and given up to relaxation (incomplete thought) it's because your thinking is changing. It goes hand-in-hand.

Consider this: "Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us." There's no use speaking vaguely about love. Love can be a very nebulous thing. The concept of love can be like fog. It's mysterious. Hard to pin down. But there's no vagueness here. It's like Paul says you want to know love? You just consider what Christ did. And yes, He washed feet, but He would take us even higher. He gave Himself up for us. No vagueness here. The standard - he plants it in front of us, right in our face: God loved us. Listen, the standard here is not how much Christ loved His Father. "As Christ loved us..." You know, when you think about the Father, the Father - you might put it this way, I know we use the term loveable almost as "cute" like a puppy, but God is lovable. It means there's that about Him that calls forth love. For Christ to love the Father is easy in a sense. Because there's an attractiveness and there's a glory about the Father. But you think about this. Christ loved us. There's a place where the Apostle says: Look, for a good man, somebody might dare die. The problem is we weren't good. He loved us. You want a standard for measuring love? Right here. There was nothing about us to draw forth His love. Nothing commended us to Him.

Another thing: He gave Himself. You know, it's one thing when someone gives money. Or somebody gives the extra coat hanging in the closet. He gave Himself. Not just some precious jewel from His safe. His own self. His own life. It's not the life of some animal. It's not the life of some criminal. God, Man, perfect, pristine. He gave Himself.

And the thing that Scripture says is He gave it. He gave it. It was not extracted from Him, forced from Him, taken from Him. "I am the Good Shepherd." The Good Shepherd what? Lays down His life for the sheep. That's what we're taught. If we don't have a right doctrine of who we are - "He lays down His life for the sheep" - but what sort of sheep were they? We fell short of the glory of God. Lost sheep. Lost. We were wandering. And He loved us and gave Himself up

for us. "For this reason the Father loves Me..." Why does the Father love Him? "Because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord." See, the point I'm making is this: He gave Himself. He gave Himself for us. And He gave. He willingly did this. He. "I lay down My life." "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." See, the point I'm making here is this is no passive submission. He was active. He was deliberate. Do you ever read in Scripture: He set His face to go to Jerusalem. Why? They told Him they're going to kill Him there. Eventually, Thomas had to say: Well, we're going to go with Him and die. He set His face to go there. Why? There was a purpose. He must go there. It says He must go to Jerusalem. Did you ever hear, Peter draws out the sword? Whack! He looks at him and says: Peter, put it away. Don't you realize I could call down more than 12 legions of angels right now? I'm not doing it because I must go. You find those "must's" in Scripture. It must be so. What? That the Scriptures be fulfilled. "As Moses lifted up the serpent..." You know. "...So must the Son of Man be lifted up." "What shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour?" He says: No! It's for this very thing that I have come. I must needs go. He set His face to go. Why? To purchase a people. He could have appealed to His Father for those angels. But He didn't. Scripture must be fulfilled. When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face and He went. He didn't demand [his rights]. He could have. There was no sin on His part. He could have demanded His rights. He didn't demand His rights. He could have pleaded His own innocence in this thing. He didn't do that. He didn't consider His own comfort, His own ease. Obviously, it was not going to be comfortable where He was headed. Think it out. See, this is the thing we have to do. We have to think it out.

The Danger of Familiarity

I guess after walking with the Lord for 30 years, I remember when everything was new. You know, there's something about familiarity - like I say, cursed familiarity. Familiarity breeds, as they say, contempt. And we begin to forget. The longer you're a Christian, you can forget the stock you came from. You can forget what you were. You can forget how you lived. You can forget the sins that you did. You can forget the amazement that you originally experienced by being brought into the family of God, by the extent of the sacrifice of Christ and what it is that He paid for you. You know what's being said here? You're being called to live your life a certain way, and you're being called not to forget these things. You're being called to think these things through. Think these things out. Consider what is done. Where do you see love like this? He became the victim upon Whose head our sins are laid. Our sins couldn't remain on us or we were in trouble. They had to be put somewhere. And here He is. Where would they go? One had to be a victim in our place, to be killed in our place. Scripture said behold the Lamb of God Who takes away - He takes it away - the sin of the world. He came to do that. He offered Himself up on our behalf. He must bear those sins in His own body upon the tree. This is what Scripture tells us. This is no vague manifestation of love.

Those ladies wept when He was going to the cross. What did He say? Yeah, you do right in weeping. This is a very sad moment. He doesn't say that. "Don't weep for Me." Don't weep. Of course not. This was no defeat. This was actually something not to sorrow over. It

must be so and He willingly went and this is a reason to shout in triumph. He came to lay down His life and take it up again. So, walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.

And He goes on to say this: "A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Now if you have eyes to see here, what He's saying is this: That when an act of love is performed like this, it is a fragrant offering and sacrifice. And that if you do as He did, it will go up to God the same way. Because we are a royal priesthood. What do priests do? Priests offer sacrifices.

You just think with me here. You remember such a man by the name of Epaphroditus? Epaphroditus was sent from the church of Philippi. Not only did he go himself to help Paul, he took money with him. And you know what Paul says? "I am well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." Brethren, don't miss this. Great acts of love and sacrifice are the things that God finds to be a sweet smelling savor. You just knowing right doctrine - yes, we need that. But see if that right doctrine doesn't produce this kind of love, then what good is it? What do you do more than others? "Well, I know the Calvinistic doctrines, and I can spell out the five points." Yeah, you can go to hell like that too. That doesn't save a person any more than it makes for a good child of God. Look, big acts of love, big acts of sacrifice - this is no meager standard. It's almost like can we really embrace this as a reality? That we're actually being called to imitate God the Father and we're actually being called to imitate Christ? And not just in any old way. The way God forgave us and the way Jesus offered Himself is the standard. You might say: Well, if it was just Jesus putting the towel on and washing our feet... but I'll tell you this, if you're really seeing the one standard, then it probably would be a lot easier to imagine putting a towel on and washing feet.

You say: Is this even something I can believe? I'm supposed to imitate God like this? I'm supposed to imitate Christ like this? But you see, brethren, it's with what we have at our disposal. Should we be willing to lay down our lives? Yes. We should be willing to sacrifice our lives, but what that looks like... That may be different for all of us.

Consider Your Life

Christian, what I want you to do just as we wrap this up, I want you to consider your life. When you get done, what are the great sacrifices you have made? Not because of a legal requirement, but because you look at your Father, and He's made you His child. You long to delight Him and cause Him joy and you want to be like Him, and the sacrifices that that has produced. And you look over at Christ and there is such gratitude that you want to live for Him. You want to follow Him. You want to identify with Him. You don't want to get as far away as possible. I would just ask you this: Consider your life. Consider your life. At what point are you most glaringly not imitating Christ? I mean think through your life. Are you going to say: Well, yeah, I am trying to imitate Him at every single point? Or are there some points where you can say: I fail. I would say this: When is it? Where is it? Where are those times? Isolate it. Face it. Look at your life. We already talked about: let the thief no longer steal, how we have givers and takers in the church. But brethren, do you realize the magnitude of giving that we're being called to? And I would just say this: You're not ordinary people. You are not like Gentiles and tax collectors. You are the children of God. And a price has been paid for you that is staggering. It is unimaginable. You are the royal family. And you are here to let your good works shine before

this onlooking world. And yes, by that, they'll know you belong to Him. You need to look. We have to look. What would God do? How would God act? And yes, it goes from circumstance to circumstance. But it's this big picture of your life. What are you living for? What are you sacrificing for?

And sometimes we can have just misconceptions about this. We have to be reading our Bible, listening to a sermon, praying, fasting, being a missionary, if we're really doing the things that are Christ-like. That is so narrow. You might provide wine for a wedding and be doing what Jesus did. A man may embrace his wife and be consistent with 1 Corinthians 7. You may be playing with your children on the floor and doing exactly what Christ would do when He said let the little children come to Me. You may be out under the stars and beholding the glory of God and be very much consistent with Psalm 19. Life isn't all Scripture reading and listening to sermons. That's not the issue. Oh, those things are essential. We want to connect with our God. If we're His children, we want to be talking to Him. We want to be praying to Him. But this isn't some legal thing where you basically have this checklist. Oh, I prayed today. I read my Bible today. Check, check, check. Is that how you want your children to relate to you? I hugged dad today. Check. Brethren, we're being called to love.

And I would just say this, as we move forward in the life of this church, brethren, it's not just that we are warm towards each other and learn how to give a socially appropriate kiss. Brethren, you know what they did? The church at Phillipi, all you have to do is read about the Macedonian churches. These people were poor. And they not only sent Epaphroditus with funds for Paul, those Macedonian churches also gave liberally to the needs of the saints in Judea. And when you hear, it's like Paul's staggered by these guys. It's almost like Paul has to tell them to stop because their love was over-the-top. Brethren, when the annals of our church are opened up, I hope that it will say on Judgment Day when it's read: Oh, this was no common people. These people did such acts of love and sacrifice. And I know there's a place where like when David made an offering to the temple - it was very public. And then there's a place not to let one hand know what the other hand's doing. Some things are going to be out there. Some things are going to be hidden. But when it's all brought into the light, we want to be a people who based on what God has done - He loves you. You are dear to the heart of God. He's interested in you. And He wants you to be like Christ in the sense that Christ came to do the will of His Father. He delighted to do the will of His Father. And that is a delight to Him when you're like that. You delight to please Him and cause Him joy. It's this kind of sacrifice. As Christ gave Himself up, a fragrant offering and sacrifice. That kind of love. It's like that category of love, God's not saying you can't get into that category. Do you know what that little word "as" means? It means you're capable of somehow some way coming into that same "as He loved" - "as." He's the example here. You walk that way. I mean, I think we have to really examine our life. Are we walking that way? Is our life going to be summed up that way? We don't have long left. There's not many days, not many months. And we're going to come to the end of this thing. Those churches are going to be the greatest fragrance before Him that are imitating Him. I mean, that's pleasing. When we come along and we present ourselves to Him, and He looks at us, it's like: Hey, they look like Me. That's obviously what He wants.

And you know what, when you only do the things that the Gentiles do and the tax collectors do, there's nothing wonderful about that. There's nothing impressive about that. Even

the people who are counted sinners - great sinners - even they do that. So don't measure by that. What we're told is measure by your Father and what He does. Measure by Christ and what He does. Don't grieve the Spirit. These are the motives. These are the incentives. It's not legal. Love isn't like that. It's not: Do this or else the law condemns you to death. That isn't it. It's: you're children. That's the starting point. And He dearly loves you, is dearly invested in your life. He's got His attention on you. He's got His Spirit sealing you. He's got His Son Who gave this unbelievable price for you. He says look at all that.

Now, just answer: If we're going to live as a reflection of that, what sort of things are we going to do? Probably it ought to encourage us all to go beyond where we are. That's my hope by a message like this. Just: We go beyond.

Dearly beloved. Sometimes pastors - Brother Rick - would address God's people that way. That is no flippant title right there. That is a God-given. And that means a reality. There's a reality behind those terms.

Prayer

Father, I pray that You would press us with these realities of love. How should we respond? Oh, may we have grace to respond in a way that is a sweet aroma to You. Father, I pray, I ask You, please in the days ahead, help us as a church to make the greatest sacrifices, and be wise, not to be presumptuous, to be led by faith, to be led by these realities, but help us, Lord, help us to press on. Help us to be what is most pleasing to You. Do a mighty work in our midst, please, Lord. Blow upon us with the Spirit of God. We see what we're called to do. But oh, we pray that You would help us to be what we need to be. That You would help us to feel what we need to feel from these truths and not take them for granted. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who did love us and gave Himself up for us. Amen.