

Imitators of God

Ephesians 5:1-2

Turn with me this morning to the book of Ephesians. I want to continue on in our study of this book and pick up Paul's words in Ephesians 5:1-2. We have been seeing Paul's words in regards to the condition of man. Last week we looked at the idea that we are to throw off our old sinful nature (take off that old coat) and put on our new nature, a God nature (put on that new coat).

There is a part of us that needs to be pulled off. Sometimes we allow our old sinful nature to be on display, and sometimes we allow it and not even realize what we are doing. There needs to be an intentional stopping, evaluating, and a purposeful turning away and putting on of a new mindset, a new attitude, a new nature that is no longer ruled by selfish and self-serving behavior.

How many of us this morning agree that there is a part of us that tends to go back to that old nature and that we need to stop, readjust, redirect, and put on the new nature of love and humility? We all struggle with it but it needs to be something that we are doing all the time, until we get use to our new nature that it tends to rule most of the time. Throw off, put on.

We saw that the human nature has a problem with truth, with anger, with stealing, with corrupt speech, with bitterness and that there needs to be a change. A change to what? Paul describes what that change should look like in our text this morning in **Ephesians 5:1-2**:

*1 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.
2 Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us* and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.*

Here we are confronted with possibly the most astounding challenge in scripture. Paul tells us to be imitators of God. Mimic God. What does that mean? We have just been told what it isn't back in **Ephesians 4:31-32**:

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

You'll notice that the characteristics listed in verse 31 are all based on a lack of forgiveness. They are all reactions to something done against us and they touch our pride problem. And we always try to get the last word in and we just can't let it lie. In fact, there may be some here this morning who are still dealing with un-forgiveness towards people who have wronged you a long time ago, and the reality is that you are going to have to let go of it.

Scripture tells us that a lack of forgiveness, refusal to forgive, is disobedience to God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made it very clear that forgiveness from us for others was not optional. He said in **Matthew 6:14-15**:

14 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Now that seems to be a hard saying. But it's as hard as we may think. Lack of forgiveness manifests itself in characteristics of the flesh, the sinful man, that are opposed to the character of God. Those characteristics are therefore to be put away from us as we put on the new man. What Paul is trying to communicate here is two things:

1. We can't just give lip service to Christianity and not live a changed life. If God has recreated us in His likeness, the character and grace of God will be demonstrated in our lives, and that means forgiveness for others.
2. If forgiveness is not in us, then forgiveness cannot be on us. A true believer cannot continue to display the evil characteristics of the flesh, unrepentant and unwilling to change.

To display a new nature means to display the character of God which is love and forgiveness. This isn't easy but it is possible. We are to imitate God.

1. IMITATE THE FATHER

As my kids grow up I find that there certain things that they do that remind me of myself. Our kids like to copy us, they talk like us, they do things the same way that we do them. In fact, as a kid I vowed that I would never be like my dad, yet the older I get the more I realize I am just like him. I think there is within everyone of us a part of us that wants to be like our heroes – for some that may be a parent or friend. But we tend to follow those we respect and love.

One thing I know is that when I see my kids copy me that there is a part of me that says, "Oh no!" but another part that is blessed and touched. What the Apostle Paul is telling us this morning is that **it blesses our Father God when we want to be like him**. Jesus set the example for us. In **John 5:19** Jesus said:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does."

We will imitate those we love and we are to imitate what God has done for us. Paul tells us to imitate God and then in verse 2 tells us to live a life filled with love.

2. LET LOVE RULE

Paul gives us the example of Christ - A sacrificial love, forgiving and giving. In fact, I believe that true love is learned. **We would never know what true love is if it wasn't for the work of Jesus Christ.** Until I am ready to realize and admit that I am a sinner, destined to die unless I trust Jesus Christ, and just how sad of a state I am in, and yet how God sent his Son to die for me (unworthy of even God's consideration) until then I will never fully understand love.

Until I realize who I am, in contrast to who God is, and yet how he reached down to me through his sons death, I will never fully understand the great love of God. Love is learned, it has been modeled, and now I must adapt it into my own life. Paul told the church in **I Corinthians 13:1-3:**

1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.*

Love needs to be the motivation behind what I do. Love needs to be the driving force behind what I give my time to, how I treat people, what I do, what I say. Love is what makes the difference. And true **sacrificial love gets my eyes off of myself and on others** because when you really think about it, how many of us get ourselves into trouble because all too often we have our loving eyes on ourselves.

I need a clear understanding of the love of God if I ever want to let it show in my own life. You will walk, according to what you believe. What you know and believe in your heart about yourself and God, will be demonstrated in your life. In fact, **Proverbs 23:7** says:

"As a man thinks within himself, so he is".

You become what you think and you will walk according to what you truly believe in our heart, about yourself, and about God. That's why I need to be in his word, I need to be learning, thinking, feasting on the truths of God so that I can fix my thought life in order that I may be a truly loving person.

I am to live alongside those I come in contact with the same love of Christ. It is a choice I must make everyday. Jesus said of himself:

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative."

So great was God's love for His creation, that He gave His only Son. So great was the love of Christ for all of us, that He carried the cross of sacrifice, and offered Himself to the Father there in a uniting act. A perfect and acceptable sacrifice, paying the penalty in full for us all.

Many Christians believe that Christ's act of love ended there, merely to get them into the new heaven and new earth. They take on the death of Christ, but that is only the beginning. We need to add to the sacrifice of Christ, the resurrection of Christ. We need to see each and everyday that Christ is who sustains us and that it is only by grace that we continue to have favor with God.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5:2 and states just as Christ's sacrifice was like sweet perfume to God, so must our lives be as well.

3. A SWEET SMELLING LIFE

We read about a sweet smelling sacrifice in **Genesis 8:20-21**:

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and there he sacrificed burnt offerings and animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things.”

When Noah came off the ark and set his foot on a new earth, the first thing he thought to do was to offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to his God. And God received that sacrifice as a man would receive a sweet fragrance. (example of a dead rat) It made Him smile. It gladdened His heart so, that in response He promised never to destroy the ground in reaction to man's evil again.

And here in Ephesians we are shown that the sacrifice that Christ made of Himself for us was pleasing to God. God's wrath against sin consumed the sacrifice on the altar, and it rose up to Him as a sweet smelling aroma that pleased His heart. In the prophetic book of **Isaiah 53:10** we are told:

“But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering...”

It tells us that the Lord was pleased. Why? Is he a sadistic God? No, he was pleased because Jesus perfectly paid the price in full, and took sin away from God's presence forever. His sacrifice of love was as satisfying to the Father as a fragrant aroma. And He declared his pleasure by raising Christ from the dead. **Romans 1:4** tells us:

...and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is our Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus' resurrection brings to us an assurance that the sacrifice of himself was enough to cover all of our sins, yesterday, today and for the rest of eternity. **We are called to follow the example of Christ, not in the idea of being a guilt offering or a sacrifice of sin, but a sacrifice of praise and thanks to God. Romans 12:1-2** tells us:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Our sacrificial, unconditional love for each other is an offering of a fragrant aroma to God. It pleases him. That is what we have been called to – not to have more programs but to be imitators of Christ by offering ourselves up to God in love for him and love for others.

This morning, what does your life smell like to God? How well are you mimicking God's example and character? Scripture tells us that when we see him, we shall be like him – hopefully when the end of time comes and we see God face to face, there are going to be characteristics in our life that we can trace back to our Father God.

If I truly understand the extent of God's love for me, if I realize who I am in contrast to God and that I still am acceptable to God simply because of his grace, If I understand how unlovely I really am and yet how loved I am, then giving my life to God as a sweet smelling sacrifice isn't too much to ask. Living my life in such a way that when God sees my life he is pleased. A number of years ago I wrote a song about being a sacrifice and the words went like this:

Make my life a sacrifice
Cleanse my heart and purify
My soul and my mind
May I seek you all the time
May I live for you each day
Guide me in your special way
My life belongs to you
I seek to find the truth

In my heart there's a desire
Touch my heart fill it with fire
May I understand that price you had to pay
That I may be used by you, Lord each day.