

Imitating God

In today's text, Paul ascends a high summit of his explanation in how Christian conversion leads to radical transformation in life. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said of this text, "This is the highest statement of Christian doctrine that one can conceive of or even imagine."

Ephesians 5: 1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I. We are called to imitate God (vs. 1)

We all have tendencies to imitate people, but in this text the Apostle is teaching us that we are to imitate God Himself. Obviously there are some attributes of God which are incommunicable to human beings, such as His omnipresence, His omniscience, and His eternity; there are, however, attributes of God which are communicable to human beings, such as His goodness, His justice, and His truth. These are the things which we must emulate in Him. Notice in verse 1 why it is that we are able to imitate Him: it is because we are His beloved children. As Christians, we are not only forgiven and not only given the righteousness of Christ, we are made His own children. This bonding with Him and the love we experience from Him enables us to want to imitate Him.

II. If we imitate Him, we will walk in love (vs. 2)

The Apostle is very specific about how we must imitate God; namely, we must walk in His love. Somerset Maugham said, "The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love." Jesus taught us that the world would know that we are His disciples because of our love.

The Apostle, moreover, is very specific about what type of love it is which God has given us: it is the love of Christ. In verse 2b, Paul describes specifically what this Christian love is. It is gracious, sacrificial, and God-honoring.

A. The love of Christ is gracious.

Notice that Paul says "Christ loved *us*" (ital added). The amazing thing about Christ's love is that it is not given to friends, but to enemies. Paul said in Romans 5:10, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." It is amazing that God would love sinners like ourselves. Likewise, we must see that our love is a gracious love; that is, we love our enemies, we love those who are indifferent about us, and we love those who are difficult to love.

B. The love of Christ is sacrificial.

The Apostle says that Christ "gave himself up for us, a...sacrifice..." The Apostle is showing us that the love we are to emulate is a love that costs the giver everything. Jesus intentionally laid down His life for us. He says in John 10:18, "No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord." Jesus gives up His life that we may have life.

C. The love of Christ is God-honoring.

Paul makes it clear that Christ's gracious sacrifice is "a fragrant offering and sacrifice *to God*" (ital added). Paul is saying that the ultimate object of Jesus' love for us is to honor and glorify His father in Heaven. In the same way, we are to love our neighbor and our brother and sister in the Church for the glory of God. Thomas à Kempis said in the 15th century, "God takes into account not so much the thing we do as the love that went to the doing of it." Our whole lives are to be motivated by this gracious, sacrificial, God-honoring love of Christ.

.....

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it this way: “Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we should harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

Discussion Questions

1. What motivates us to imitate God?
2. What are some of the privileges of being His beloved child?
3. Why, in verse 2, does Paul focus on walking in love? Why is this so important?
4. Describe an occasion when you were loved graciously by another person. How did that affect you?
5. What are some of the ways in which our fellowship would change if we were to love each other sacrificially?
6. What does it mean for us today to give our lives as an offering and sacrifice to God?

Going Deeper

1. Where do you sense the need in your life to imitate God more closely? How would these verses help you in that endeavor?
2. How does your love most need to change—in grace, in sacrifice, or in godliness? How can you experience the growth you desire?

