

EPH 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

As we come to chapter five this morning we can see a continuance of the theme of putting off the old man and putting on the new. Paul has clearly shown what that old nature looks like and what it desires. Some of the things include lusts of deceit, lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome speech, bitterness, wrath, slander and so on.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. It simply indicates a heart which is only concerned with keeping self number one. It considers others as an inconvenience and not worthy of receiving love and kindness, compassion and mercy.

Paul describes this kind of ungodly behavior toward one another as grieving the Holy Spirit. This kind of behavior is that which imitates the world and this is what Paul addresses in chapter four.

EPH 4:17-18 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

If we have been given a new life with a new nature then it would stand to reason that we should no longer imitate the world, but rather we should imitate the One who gave us this new life and new nature knowing that we now have the ability to imitate Him.

It is not beyond our capability since it is the God of the universe who is commanding this for the lives of all who have placed their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. And so we come to our text.

EPH 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

I look at a verse like this and wonder how many people are ready to throw up their hands in frustration and discouragement. I mean think about it. I know Christians in this world whose lives are exemplary and whose lives I would love to be able to imitate and it seems impossible to live those kinds of lives.

I look at Pastor Chuck Smith and marvel at his love and compassion and his patience. He pastors a church of some 20,000 people and yet he is as accessible as most pastors who pastor a church of hundreds.

You can walk up to him and talk to him and expect to get the same attention as he might give to heads of state. He's a great guy. Or you look at the Apostle Paul's life. Here's a man who put his life on the line every day. Here's a man who had the authority of an apostle and yet could say, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1CO 15:9)

We also see the heart of the apostle Paul when writing to the church in Thessalonica.

1TH 2:6-8 "We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

This is the same man who said, "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me." (1Cor.4:16) Here was a man whose life was worth imitating, not because he was the standard but because he imitated someone else who was the ultimate standard.

1Cor.11:1 "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

Now, you and I might be able to comprehend how we might consider being imitators of Paul, but the question ought to be raised; how does anyone approach being an imitator of God Almighty as we have in our text in Eph.5:1? "Therefore, be imitators of God..."

Isn't this just a bit unreasonable? Can anyone really attain unto this perfection? Of course not. But this is not the point here. What Paul is trying to convey is that we are new creatures in Christ. We have a new nature. We have a new Master. We have a new life which is eternal. And what we need to be imitating is the character of the One who gave us this new life.

By the way, this word imitate in the Greek is *mimetes*, which essentially means to mimic. Now, we have a tendency to view this word mimic in a negative way. I remember years ago on Saturday night live, when Chevy Chase used to be playing a news caster and

he'd be interviewing someone whom he didn't agree with and he'd sit behind them while they were talking and he'd make faces and move his lips as he mimicked them and made fun of them.

That's not what Paul means at all here in our text. When he uses this word imitate or mimic he means for God's people to emulate, in a positive way, the very character of God. He does not mean to suggest that we become like God in the sense that we become little gods.

But, he does mean that we should desire to be like our God in all the positive aspects we know of Him as He's revealed Himself in His word, and most importantly in His Son. You might remember how the disciples asked to see the Father. Jesus responded in John 14.

JOH 14:7-9 "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Jesus was not confusing the person of the Father with Himself. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all separate and distinct persons in the Godhead and they must not be confused, even though we are speaking of one God. And so, it wasn't as though Jesus was being schizophrenic, thinking Himself to be the Father one moment and the Son the next.

His point to Philip, and the rest of the disciples, was that there is only one God. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. And as God, He is of the same nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit. You can't divorce the divine nature from Jesus simply because He took on flesh and became a man.

And in that sense if they wanted to know the nature of the Father, they need only look to Jesus who was sent from the Father. And in the same sense, if we are called to be imitators of God, then we need only look to our Lord Jesus Christ to get a picture of what true holiness is all about.

But, simply identifying what true holiness is all about is not what Paul wants from us. He wants us to mimic or reproduce that holiness of God in a way where people can see Jesus working in our lives. You cannot reproduce what you don't have. If we don't

know Christ through personal faith then there is no way we can truly be imitators of our God.

Someone might fake it for awhile, but true fruit comes only from a true life in Christ. And this is why we must never think that we can't be imitators of Christ. If we have His life, then we have the nature and ability of our Lord to bring glory to His name. And so we must never become frustrated thinking that we will never be able to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect.

The word perfect here could be better translated complete. We will never be perfect in this life as though we're without sin. But we are complete in Christ and as such we must seek to be imitators of Him whose whole life is to please the Father in everything. And that's where our imitation of God must first start. Are we desiring to imitate Christ, who is God, in a way where we say, 'not my will Father, but yours be done'?

Are we willing to lay aside self and it's old nature and desires and give ourselves entirely to Christ and show the world to whom we belong by the way we live to His honor and glory? Do we see ourselves as belonging to Him in a way where we no longer belong to ourselves, since He purchased us with His life?

These are important questions because the way in which we answer them will determine the direction we will be moving. This is why Paul says that we are beloved children, in verse one. The NIV uses the phrase "dearly loved children".

The Greek word used there is *agapetos*. It's a love which God places upon us and enables us to walk in. The word children could be better translated offspring. And so, what Paul is essentially calling us is, offspring of God who have been agaped, or loved by God.

Consider that for a moment. God has placed His love on us. He has chosen to give us His Son and to take our place for the penalty of our sin. He has adopted us into His eternal family so that we can have eternal fellowship with Him. We are His beloved children in Christ and nothing can separate us from that love since we have been sealed for the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit.

But because of that relationship to our heavenly Father it is only natural that we would imitate Him, even as our own children imitate us. Not to desire to imitate Him shows contempt for the

One who gave us life and adopted us into His family, when the only thing we deserved from Him was judgment and wrath.

And this is the point Paul makes in EPH 5:2 "and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

I like the NASB on this verse because it gives the sense of action as it begins, "walk in love". I can't imagine Paul saying, "sit in love", or "lounging in love". Love is a verb and it is meant to be walked in. It's the word *agape*.

God is a God of action and we are to walk in His love even as Christ walked in His love for us. His walk took Him to a cross on a hill named Calvary. That had to be the longest walk of His earthly ministry. And yet His walk of obedience was the ultimate victory over sin and death. His walk of love for us enables us to walk in a way that shows our thanks.

He gave Himself for us. But in giving Himself for us He pleased the Father. And what Paul wants all of us to do is to give ourselves to one another and the world. That takes an unselfish walk of love, because our natural inclination is to be spiritual couch potatoes.

We think, 'it's great to be part of the family of God. I'll enjoy all the blessings of this family. I'll enjoy the fellowship, I'll dine on the word when it's put on my plate. I'll worship the Lord as we lift our voices to God. I'll pray for others when the need is shared.' These are all meant to be ways in which we can enjoy our salvation.

But these things can sometimes be done in a passive sort of way. It doesn't necessarily take the same effort as walking down a path which might have some obstacles on it. Christ's walk involved all of these things: fellowship, reading and studying the word, worshipping the Father, interceding on behalf of others. But what is the one thing which stands out in Christ's walk?

His sacrifice of love on our behalf. This is what Paul talks about in verse 2. He gave Himself up for us. And this was an offering and a sacrifice to God which was a fragrant aroma. The imagery Paul uses here is the O.T. sacrifice for the sins of the people.

EXO 29:18 "Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire."

One of the first times we see this expression of a sacrifice being a "pleasing aroma" to God is in Genesis, right after the flood when Noah came out of the ark and built an altar with the express purpose of honoring and thanking God for His loving care for them.

GEN 8:20-21 "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

Now, was it the actual smell of an animals' flesh that pleased God? No. In fact, we're told in other portions of Scripture that God was not always pleased with such sacrifices because they were sometimes brought to God with hearts which were far from Him and without faith.

What pleased the Lord was the obedience and love for God which was expressed in these sacrifices which were done in a way to show total dependence on God. It was the thankful hearts of people who knew they could approach God in such a way, which was prescribed by Him, that pleased the Lord.

And what we see in verse 2 of our text is that what Jesus did on our behalf was fully pleasing to the Father. Our heavenly Father received it as full payment for our sin. We never have to wonder, 'is the Father pleased with my substitute?' 'Can I be sure that I have eternal life?'

1JO 5:11-13 "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

We know that we have eternal life in Christ, but we also know that we must walk in that new life so that we, like Jesus, may please our Father in heaven. Paul wants every aspect of our new life in Christ to be a fragrant aroma to our God.

I sometimes wonder, even in my own life, what does God smell? And I'm certain, at times, the aroma is similar to what you new mothers experience when changing the diapers of your little ones.

That's not the aroma I want my heavenly Father smelling. And that's why we're exhorted to be imitators of Him and Christ who only does those things which testify of the *agape* love of God. But the encouraging thing here is that I can always point to the sweet savor and aroma of Christ's sacrifice on my behalf when I come to the Father, asking forgiveness for those times I mess up.

But, it's always a good idea to be able to identify those things in our lives that don't please our God and desire to distance ourselves from those things. And so Paul continues.

EPH 5:3-7 "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them."

Let's start with verse 3. When Paul says that there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality and so forth among you, he is saying that these are not the kind of things that prove this new life and new nature we have in Christ.

But he uses an interesting expression here when he speaks of not even a hint of these things should be present. A more literal translation would be not to let these things even be named among you.

The idea here is similar to what Paul told Timothy in 1TI 3:2 "Now the overseer (elder) must be above reproach..."

The word reproach means to find fault with. And so, not to be found reproachful is to be found not guilty of actually violating God's word. But, Paul actually goes beyond that, in a sense, when he says that the elder must be above reproach.

This doesn't mean that an elder will in fact be perfect, or even approach perfection. What it does mean is that the elder must live a life which would seek holiness, but even more, that he would not even place himself in a situation which could even be inferred to be sinful.

We must not even entertain the idea of being around temptations which others might accuse us of actually partaking in, when in fact we didn't. In today's world, this can be seen in a variety of ways, especially in the ministry.

A pastor, for example, might want to take his secretary out to lunch out of gratitude for the good work she does at the church. And it might certainly be a very innocent thing without any sinful intent. And yet, it might very well be viewed as compromising. No reproach, or guilt, might be the case. But, in a situation like that, where so many Pastors have fallen to sexual temptation, it might be best to be above reproach, not giving anyone anything to talk about.

Wisdom might call for having others being present at such a lunch, or bringing along the Pastor's wife. We don't want to cause anyone to stumble, even if we have no intention of using a liberty to sin. And we don't want to give our enemies an opportunity to point a finger and in the process try to dishonor our Lord by questionable practices.

Now, obviously if such sinful behavior, as is mentioned in verses 3 through 5, is not even to be named among us, it's obvious we should not be actually practicing such things.

And I'll just take a moment to touch on some of them. Immorality and impurity have more to do with sexual sins. Simply being a Christian does not make these temptations go away, but being a Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, we have the ability and hopefully the desires to walk away from such temptations as we walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh or the old nature, from which we've been delivered and given new life in Christ.

Greed is also something which should not characterize the life of a believer. Greed is simply selfishness. It's coveting things we shouldn't have, or more of something we should be content with. This does not imply that having or pursuing more is necessarily sinful. What it does mean is that if whatever we pursue takes the place of God and His will for our lives then we must see it as sinful and selfish and repent of it.

God knows what our needs are and He is more than capable of meeting those needs. Greed takes God out of the equation and places only our personal desires ahead of Him. Paul says this is not proper among saints or believers. And by the way, greed can only

be associated with the temporal world to which we don't belong to in Christ.

In verse 4 Paul says, there should be no "obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

These things have more to do with our mouths. The word obscenity, as the NIV puts it, could also be translate filthiness. And most of us know when we hear filthiness of speech. Someone was once asked, 'how do you define what pornography is?' And the answer was, 'I just know it when I see it.'

This kind of filthy speech spoken of in our text is not acceptable to the One who is known as the Word. May we choose our words with wisdom and express ourselves in a way that does not imitate or mimic the world.

Paul then brings up foolish talk, or silly talk, as the NASB puts it. This would be the opposite of wisdom. We've all heard the expression, 'think before you speak'. Foolish talk is the kind of talk that does not consider the wisdom that should be applied in any particular situation. Sometimes we'll speak on behalf of God and miss entirely what God intended in His word.

There's a big difference between speaking without a proper understanding of something, especially related to God and His word, and simply being foolish in that lack of understanding while trying to look like an expert.

We all make mistakes in trying to understand the things of God, but we don't all have to prove ourselves fools by opening our mouths when silence and simply listening might be the wiser path. You can always tell someone that you can get back with them on a particular matter if you don't have the proper answer. There's no shame or foolishness in that approach. I know, because I've used both approaches.

I've heard Bible teachers joke about giving answers to people who want to know what the word is saying. They say, 'if I can't find the answer, I'll make one up.' Not wise. And unfortunately, it seems these days there's more of this type of approach, which is no joke, then really digging into the word for the answer.

Another term Paul uses concerning the tongue is coarse joking or coarse jesting. In the Greek it's one word which could be literally translated "well turned". Many commentators would suggest that what is meant here is a well turned phrase. That could be in a

positive or a negative sense, depending on the context. The context here is definitely negative.

To turn a phrase suggests that you say one thing, but you mean something else. The language of the world will utilize this in giving a double-meaning to something, usually sexual in nature. Again, Paul makes this distinction to show what we should not be involved in.

Our mouths need to be guarded in this way. This is what the apostle James speaks of when addressing the tongue.

JAM 3:9-11 "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and bitter water flow from the same spring?"

And the implied answer is no, and yet his point is that it is happening and we should reconsider how we use our tongues. Every word we speak should be above reproach even as every action in our lives should be above reproach to the glory of God. And this is why we read in verse 7 of our text, "Therefore do not be partners with them."

In other words, don't imitate the world in these things. I wanted to get to verses 5 and 6 this morning, but we're not going to have the time. But these are important verses because they raise important questions: what if professing Christians are practicing these things Paul says to avoid?

Are they true Christians? If so, can they lose their salvation? If they're not true Christians what are we in the Body doing to deal with their behavior? These and other questions we'll deal with next week. Suffice it to say, that we have everything to be thankful for as we read in verse 4.

If we walk in the new nature we have in Christ then we'll find that thankfulness and gratitude for our salvation in Christ will go a long way in motivating us to love and serve God all our days. Let me close today with a passage taken from the letter written to the Colossian church.

COL 1:10-14 "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that

you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

There should be no greater motivation than to know the love of Christ given for us. May that motivation encourage us to give His love to the world as we give them the same hope we have in our Lord and Messiah, Jesus Christ.