

The Power of Love

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] So that's Ephesians chapter 5 and the first two verses of the chapter. 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.

Be imitators of God. Well that as soon as you read it strikes you as something that's really hardly thinkable.

Is it really saying to us that we should seek to be imitators of God? Is this saying to us that as Christians it's our duty and responsibility and our privilege to actually seek to be like God and to live in such a way as copies what we find in God himself?

Well that's exactly what it's saying. The word imitator there, followers in some of the other translations, but it comes from a Greek word from which you get your English word mimic. And to mimic as you know is to copy. To mimic is to try and repeat accurately and be if you like an image of the person that you're trying to mimic.

[1 : 19] Imitators of God is really what the verse is saying to us. It's a conclusion that's drawn from the verses that lead up to that at the end of the previous chapter.

Really from verse 17, although more immediately just the last few verses there where he's saying, Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God. But it also leads into what follows. Where he talks about the kind of lifestyle that we have put behind, or that these Ephesians had put behind, and the lifestyle that's taken up as a Christian instead of that.

So the verses 1 and 2 there are a kind of bridge between what he's saying in the previous chapter and what he's going on to say in the following chapters as well. As you know he goes on to deal with relationships, particularly husbands, wives, children, employers, employees.

All of that is really fed from this requirement to be imitators of God, to live in the world as Christians, as those who reflect in our lives what God is.

[2 : 32] Now of course that, as it strikes you, as you read it, as you think about it, is something that is an enormous challenge. And something of which we all have to say, if only that were true of me.

If only I were more like what this verse is calling upon me to do and to be. But you can see that it's set in the context of love. And being imitator of God is something that takes account of two things in regard to love.

Firstly, having been loved. And secondly, living by love. But there's a connection between them. Because the matter of having been loved by God, in the way Paul puts it here, is in fact something that motivates us, that ought to motivate us, towards walking in love as we've been loved.

In other words, when you realize, the more you realize, the more you experience what it means to be loved, to have been loved, and to continue under being loved by God, the more effective that ought to be in our living a life of love.

That's the way that the two things are connected. He's really saying, it is as beloved children, that we are to be imitators of God.

[3 : 54] As children of God, who have been loved by Him. That's what it means by children, beloved children. Children who have been loved, who have been enveloped in His love.

Upon whom His love has descended. And it is, as we've come to be beloved children, that we then are in a position to walk in love as Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us.

So that's really our theme for the evening, just to try and tease out some of the features of these two verses, around that issue of being imitators of God. You could say that another way of looking at the two verses, is to say that they're really setting before us the power of love.

The power of God's love operating in the hearts and experience of His people, and the power of their love as they love. As they are required to love not only God, but to walk in love towards their fellow human beings as well.

So let's look at two things. The matter of having been loved by God, and the motivation from having been loved by God.

[5 : 06] There's the matter of our having been loved, and there's the motivation from having been loved. Now we're saying here, be imitators of God as beloved children.

And the love that he's speaking of here, is the love of God the Father in particular. It's always important in the Bible that we give place to the emphasis that the Bible itself gives to the different persons of the Godhead.

And as we look into what the Bible reveals, or God reveals of Himself, and we see the three persons that God is revealed to us, it's important that we give due place to the emphasis that God Himself gives to these persons in the way they themselves are involved in this love.

And the love that makes us beloved children is especially and particularly the love of God the Father. The Father's love is frequently mentioned, in John particularly, but also in Paul.

And indeed, you don't have to go far into Ephesians to find this love of the Father mentioned right in the beginning at chapter 1 there, where he's talking about God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in verse 3, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.

[6 : 39] That could be, in love we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, or as it's put here, it's also possible to translate it, in love He predestined us.

And I think that's probably the best way of taking the words in love there, that it's connected especially with God having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

You see, there's the love of the Father, God the Father specifically mentioned, and it's a love that before we existed, came towards us, focused upon us, predestined us for adoption, in order to be children of God.

And then you go forward to chapter 2, and verse 4, where the chapter begins, as you know, emphasizing the deadness of each and all of us in our trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, and so on, among whom we all had lived in the passions of a rest, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us.

That's what lies behind the quickening that He's going on to speak about, the grace through which He's been saved. It's the love of the Father particularly, as that has focused upon us, God in His love, having loved us, then that brings us to be quickened with Christ, to be raised up to life with Him.

[8 : 09] Then you go to chapter 3, verse 17. You find the same emphasis on love there, where it's part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, praying that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all saints the breadth and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ.

Now he's bringing in the love of Christ there as well, but it's the love of a Father that leads into that as well. And there's many other places where you could find the same thing emphasized in verse 19 there of chapter 3 as well, from there on to refer to the love of God.

And you go forward to chapter 6, and you find verse 23, that both the love of the Father and of the Son are combined. Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we're saying, it's the love of the Father especially it's focused on in this being imaginative of God as beloved children. That tells you that the Father's love is the adopting love of God.

The Father's love specifically is the love that brings us to be His children. It's through the Father's love. That stands to reason, doesn't it? When you think about God actually bringing us to be His children, it's logical that you think of God in that respect as your Father.

[9 : 41] And that you think of God the Father within the persons of the Godhead as the person to whom your adoption is specifically attached.

And whose love specifically leads to your adoption. So there's the first thing that's mentioned there in regard to love as beloved children. Children who have been loved and love that has made us children.

That's as we see in chapter 1 as well that He has loved us predestined us for adoption. So it's an adopting love. And that's the love with which we've been loved.

And that's part of your consideration when you think of the requirement or laid upon each of us as Christians and all of us together in our relationship to love one another.

To love us will see even those outwith our number as Christians even our enemies. It's to the Father's love that you go when you think of what has made me a child of God.

[10:40] Why am I a child of God tonight? What is it that lies behind my belonging to the family of God? My having the name of one of God's children attributed to me by God Himself?

It is the love of God the Father. The Father's adopting love. But, then he goes on to speak about as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.

Be imitator of God walk in love as Christ loved us. This is not sufficient for Paul to think of the adopting love of God the Father. There is also the love in which Christ Himself as the second person of the Trinity was active specifically in loving us to the extent of laying down His life for us coming to be an offering and a sacrifice to God.

And that's just as important. You think of the Father's love as adopting us. You think of the Father's love sending the Son into the world to die as John says.

But the Son specifically Himself. He Himself loved His people as well. It's not just the Father's love sending Him. the Father's love adopting us.

[11:59] The Son's love as it's specific to Himself. Of course it's in that sense it's the same love of the love of God. But it's brilliant the way that it's expressed by each of the persons in their own way and in the way that they are active in their own way in the whole of working out and bringing in our redemption.

And even afterwards each of them has their own specific relation to love and to the loving of His people. Of course in Christ we could say in passing that there's the extra dimension of human love. Because Jesus expressed and showed and actively engaged in human love as well as a human being.

And in fact when you think about it Christ in His life on earth is the only human being flawlessly who brought together human love and the love of God in a way that met one another perfectly.

He acted as God in loving His people. He acted as a human being in loving God and loving His fellow human beings. Nowhere else do you find in the one person those two aspects of love human and divine acting together absolutely perfectly in harmony but they are in Christ.

[13:31] Well that's just in the way of passing but as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us a fragrant offering. In other words the love of the Son while the love of the Father is seen in adopting us in bringing us to be His children the love of the Son is specifically mentioned in relation to His giving up of Himself as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

And that's where He proved and performed His love. Remember John 15 and that great episode of teaching the disciples just prior to His going out to His death.

greater love has no man than this that a man laid down his life for his friends and you are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.

That was speaking of course of Himself preeminently as the one who would lay down His life for His people and that's where it was demonstrated on His part that He loved His people to give Himself up for us a fragrant sacrifice offering and sacrifice to God.

So, and the two things that come in there is it was for us. That was a love for us. For our benefit. For our everlasting benefit.

[14:57] For our redemption that took our place that took our sin that took our penalty that took our guilt that took all that we deserved and took it to Himself and paid the price in His love for it.

So, it's love for us. Yes, but it's love for God as well or towards God. Because it's the language of atonement.

He loved us and gave Himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. In His love for us, He gave Himself to God for us.

He gave Himself in His love for us as an atonement, as a sacrifice, as an offering, which God accepted. In other words, Paul behind the scenes there if you like, behind his language there is the whole idea of atonement, the whole essence of atonement in the death of Jesus.

And in fact, that of course is really where the love of the Father and the love of the Son for His people come together in the cross.

[16:10] So, there we have the love with which we've been loved. It's a love involving the Father's love for us, in the sense that that's how we come to be made as children.

And in order to be made as children, the Son had to come into the world to die in our place. That's the Father's love in sending Him. And along with that, you've put the Son's own personal love to the extent that He gave Himself up for us as an atoning sacrifice, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, an offering that filled.

Of course, that's going back to Old Testament language, the fragrant offering, the incense filling the Holy of Holies at the time of the atoning sacrifice, and that incense representing that which is pleasing to God, which He accepts, which He Himself approves of, and of which He says that it satisfied Him in every respect.

That is what is fragrant about the offering, the sacrifice that Jesus Himself is in His love. The Father's love for us, the Son's love for us as well, they come together particularly in the cross, but just again in passing, it also involves their mutual love for one another.

The Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father. Go back again to, in your mind to John's language, John chapter 10, verse 17, you remember there, verse that we often bring up in regard to these issues, here in, or in this way, does my Father love me because I lay down my life, for this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life, that I may take it up again.

[18:05] That's Jesus, that's the good shepherd saying, it's for this reason specifically, that the Father loves me because I lay down my life for the sheep. And then chapter 14 of John, just there as he, we come to the end of that chapter where Jesus again is speaking to the disciples, this is what he's saying, I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming and he has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

See the brilliance of that, I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know, not just my people, that it may be clearly known that I love the Father.

The Father loves the Son because he lays down his life. The Son loves the Father in that he has given him a command to finish and he loves that command. And in loving the Father and loving his people, the Son goes to his death.

And in loving the Son and in loving his people, the Father provides for that death and sending his Son for the adopting of his children. What a great God we have, who can fathom out the depths of this love.

Even when you think of all the angles of it, the love that's within the Godhead, the love that comes out from the Godhead, the love specifically of the Father, the love specifically of the Son, all that's attached to them particularly in our adoption, in Christ taking out place in his sacrifice of atonement.

[19:51] Where is there anything else like that? And is it any wonder that Paul now goes on to speak about how being loved by God is the great motivating factor in the lives of Christians?

So let's look at the motivation that comes from having been loved. You can see from the word therefore that he's drawing conclusions from having been loved. Be imitator of God as children who have been loved.

Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. It's a strong argument because it's really saying to us effectively if we are not actually walking in love, if we are short of what we, of course we always say we're always short of what we should be, but if we're deliberately and knowingly not really loving the way we're required to love, then we're acting as if we've not been loved.

That's what you say. We're acting as if God has not really shown such love to us. What he's really saying is having been loved in this way, having had such a love as includes the love of the father, having included the love of the son, having included all of these two together are involved in us loving one another and loving his people.

What else can we do but love? What else is there but to say having been loved and being a beloved child of God and being beloved children of God, the least I can do is to love in return, to walk in love as I have been loved.

[21:39] And that of course brings you to the word imitator itself. You imitate God and he explains that in putting it and walk in love.

love. And of course walking in love as we'll see in a minute involves our lifestyle but the aim is really in that sense to be like God. To be like our father.

Jesus himself remember said in the passage we read in the Sermon on the Mount, be therefore perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect.

perfect. There's a great difference between someone who's not at all a Christian and maybe not even interested in being a Christian but lives a high moral life and lives their lives in a way that doesn't really give any great offence to someone.

He's very careful about their use of language, very careful they don't actually cheat, they don't actually defraud anyone else, they're very impeccable about how they keep up their family life, all of these things.

[22 : 49] And a person can be absolutely outwardly blameless almost in those respects and not have anything to do with God. What's the difference between that and a Christian who seeks to live as an imitator of God and to walk in love?

Well, the person, who has the high moral ideals and in themselves that's not a bad thing. But that person that does that without any reference to God is still really basing life on self.

The end of that is still your self and self attainment and self righteousness. The person that comes to be an imitator of God has a very different template to self.

It's not yourself and how good you can be that provides the template for your life as a Christian but it's the perfection of God. It's the love of God himself, the love of the Father, the love of the Son. That's your template. You know what a template is. It's the original shape of a thing whether it's a drawing or whether it's something that's been carved out and you have to follow it so that you accurately get an image of it.

[24 : 06] A template is something that you provide in order whether it's to cut something out or whatever. That's your original. And you follow that original as you're making copies of it.

And your original, your copy, your template for copying is God himself. Be imitator of God.

God, he's saying, is our temper. And that's the difference between the person that's taking the high moral ground without God and the Christian that bemoans themselves and their imperfections and seeks humbly to walk with God.

They have God as their template. In other words, the aim that you have as a Christian to be holy, to be as God loved you, so to walk in love, the aim that you have in that corresponds exactly to the aim that God has in loving you.

What is God's aim in having loved you in the first place? Where is that going to take you ultimately? It's going to take you to be like himself. That's why he saved you.

[25 : 22] That's why he puts his people together as a people who are saved by his grace. so that they will perfectly bear his image. So that they will come when they are glorified at last to be perfect in the image of God, the image of their Redeemer, the image of their Savior, the image of their Creator.

Nobody will be able to say of the Lord's people when they are displayed in their final glory, nobody will be able to look about them and say, ah yes, but there's one there that's not like God.

That one's not very like their Father. Every single one and all of them together will have to be, it will have to be said about them by everyone.

They are perfectly like their Father, their Savior, their God. God. And that's the aim that you have as you strive to live to be like God.

You know that that's what he has in view, and that without it you would never attain that by yourself. And yet God has placed in your heart the desire to be as like him as you can possibly be by your walk in this world.

[26 : 42] Of course, he is confining himself here to love, which although it's specified as love, I'm sure you could say it's so comprehensive as to really cover everything.

Because you can hardly think of doing anything without taking love into the picture. Whether it's your love for God or for your fellow human beings. So, the motivation from having been loved is that we are imitators of God.

That we aim at that very thing which God himself in his grace is aiming at. And then there's this. Walk in love as Christ loved us.

Walking is commonly in the Bible an expression of our whole way of life. To walk in the ways of God. To walk in the law of God.

To walk in whatever way you think of spiritually like that. That's the Bible's way very often of saying this is your life. This is your lifestyle. This is what your life's about.

[27 : 50] This is the course of your life. You walk. You live this way. And it's the same in this instance. Certainly walking in love means actually having your whole life dominated by, controlled by, governed by, directed by love.

by love as a consequence of having been loved. By love as motivated by the love with which you've been loved.

And you might say, well, that's very difficult in this world, isn't it? We live amongst people who don't love us.

We live amongst opposition. We live amongst corruption. We live amongst all kinds of things which are lifestyles entirely different to the one that we require to live.

The pressure of life. The pressure of ungodliness. The pressure of the world in which we live. And the things that are so very different to the kind of life that you want to live. It's so difficult living in this world a life that walks in love.

[28 : 57] But always remember this. That's where Jesus did it. that's where your template is. Walk in love as Christ loved us.

Where do you see his love? Well, of course, from all eternity as God. He's involved in the love that God has for his people. But as you see him walking in this world and facing the trials of his life in this world and walking on to the cross as we've been seeing in Luke, all that journey that Luke describes as it terminates in the cross, as it comes to that terrible death that he died, that he was required to die.

Then you go to John chapter 13 again and you think of what Jesus said to the disciples as he opened out this teaching preparing them for his departure and for the death they were going to see him die.

It's John's comment actually, not Jesus himself that says it. Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

He loved them, he loved them to the full extent, to the extent of doing everything required in his love for them.

[30 : 18] And he did that in this world. He endured, as Hebrews puts it, the contradiction of sinners against himself. himself. Why did he do it?

Why did he come? What made him do it? Well, it was on his part, the fulfilling of the command the father gave him.

But it was also the working out of his own personal love for his people. As the son of God, he did it because he loved you. He went through with it because of the quality and extent of his love.

As Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. So we always come back to that. It's the love of Jesus that we come back and think of as having existed in this world and lived in this world and yet still showed this perfect love.

That's where we take our example from. That's where we take our motivation from. That's our encouragement to go on. although we fail in our love, though we have lapses in our love, though we sometimes have to confess that we've not loved at all as we should have loved.

[31 : 34] We come back to Christ and come again to draw strength from his. Now of course, that's going to entail what we read in Matthew. You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies. And pray for those who persecute you. Why? So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

See, there's the child of God coming in again. And he's really saying there that the more we actually love in the full extent, even of including a love for our enemies, how difficult that is, the more like we are to what we should be as children of God and the more like we are to our Father himself and his love for us.

And that connects with what you find here as well in Ephesians 5. That we walk in love, that we are imitators of God, that we love as we have been loved by the Father, that we love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

Now we spoke about a template. You have the template, it's the Father's love and it's the Son's love and both of them together form this great template that is your supreme example.

[33 : 06] And you fairly sure, a joiner or any tradesman who uses a template for whatever reason saying, stick to the original template because the danger is if you are an amateur like me, you begin with a template, you cut something the same size as the template, you then take that one that you

have cut and you cut something else based on that one and then you cut another one and as you go along the line, you then come back and say well I better go back to the first one and see how it compares and it's that much longer because you've made these little errors as you've been going along, at least I would, except when you keep to the original template, that's where your accuracy comes from.

And as you keep to that original, that's your guarantee of having perfect copies. Which is why you always have to go back to the original template that is in God's own love for us.

That's why we've seen the two things really come together, his love that has loved us with which we've been loved and our love in return for him and for ourselves one another and indeed for our enemies.

Remember, you and I were enemies of God when he loved us. He didn't love us because we wanted to be loved by him. He didn't love us because we came to him and asked him to love us. He loved us freely. He loved us without any compunction from us. He loved us while we were still enemies, as Romans puts it.

[34 : 44] And that's why Christ extends the requirement to loving our enemies as well. that's the pattern, that's the template. And that's why when it is so difficult, you just have to come back to the template.

You've always got to keep asking yourself this question as you go through your Christian life. How has God treated me? When I have to deal with somebody else, when I'm in a relationship with someone else, when the challenge of that relationship, or whether it's my neighbor, or someone in my family, or someone at work, when the challenge of that faces me, when I'm threatened, and when the temptation really is to retaliate, and to act as they act towards me, how have I been treated by God?

That's the template. And that's when we realize, well, he loved me. He loved me with such a love as just goes past my ability to understand.

And that's where I draw my motivation from. Not from my idea of love, not from what the world thinks of love, not even from what the church thinks of love, but from the love you find in God, the perfect love of your Father, of your Savior, the love that motivates you to be an imitator of God. and of course he is saying this to the church of the Ephesians. It's not enough that we are this individually.

[36 : 26] We have to be this to one another. That's really as much as anything else the emphasis that Jesus left with the disciples.

He had washed their feet, put the question to them, do you know what I have done to you? And near the end of that chapter, John 13, you also are to love one another, even as I have loved you. Same template, but it's for our practical use. Be, therefore, imitator of God. Friends, there is nothing, nothing like the power of love.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we do thank you for the love that has come toward us, that you have so manifested and proved to us in the person of your Son, and also in our adoption as we have come to be brought into your own beloved family.

Help us, we pray, to grow in our understanding of what that love entails. Help us day by day, Lord, to look to you, that you would give us an increase in our knowledge of that love, in our understanding of what it means to be a child of God, and to be part of your family.

[37 : 48] We bless you for your fatherly love, which continues to look after your people, and for the way in which that love is extended to us through your Son, and by the ministry of your Spirit, as you occupy our hearts.

We thank you, Lord, for that love that was displayed in the cross of Calvary, a love that is unparalleled, a love that cannot be found in any other in the universe, and that will never be matched anywhere else in the way in which it was at Calvary.

Help us, we pray, to appreciate day by day what that love means to your people, and what it costs to yourself, and help us as we would contemplate that cost of our redemption.

Lord, help us to see that our burdens and our pains are but little ones, compared to that which you endured in your love for us.

Grant that in all of these things your love may continue to motivate and move us daily to love in return. Hear us we pray for your glory's sake. Amen.