

Walking in Love, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 5:1–2

Code: 1931

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 5:1-7 touches on the heart of the Christian life: the subject of love. Verse 2 says, "Walk in love." There is no more beautiful or direct definition of how Christians are to live. Love is so important that if it is not visible in a person's life, there is good reason to doubt his or her salvation. Verse 5 says, "No fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man (who is an idolater) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Verse 6 indicates there are people who attempt to deceive God's people by selling the world's counterfeit love, which involves fornication, adultery, covetousness, and uncleanness.

However, true Christians will not be characterized by counterfeit love. Instead they will follow the pattern of 1 John 4:7-8, which says, "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." If a person isn't characterized by love, he doesn't know God.

A. The Concept of Imitating God

Ephesians 5:1 says, "Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children." The Greek word translated "followers" is *mimetai*, from which we get the English word *mimic*. We are to be mimics of God. A mimic does not pick up general patterns of another person; he copies specific characteristics.

1. The pursuit

The Christian life could be summed up in this one statement: be mimics, or imitators, of God.a) Matthew 5:48--Jesus said, "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect."b) 1 Peter 1:15-16--Peter said, "As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life, because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."c) 1 Corinthians 11:1--Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."d) 2 Corinthians 3:18--Paul also said, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."e) 1 John 3:2--The ultimate goal of the Christian life is knowing that "when he [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." The more you know God the more you'll know what He wants you to be, so the primary pursuit of any believer is to know God (Phil. 3:10). That can be achieved only when we study God's character as it is revealed in Scripture.

Please note that imitating God isn't just a New Testament principle. As far back as Leviticus 11:45 God said, "Be holy, for I am holy."

2. The paradox

a) StatedImitating God may be easy to discuss, but it's difficult to do. In fact, you can't do it in your own strength. But Jesus gave us the starting point for imitating God in the Sermon on the Mount. We need to mourn over our sin with a broken and contrite spirit. When we are overwhelmed by our sinfulness, we will hunger and thirst for righteousness. So there's a paradox: we are to be like God, yet we must know we can't be like Him on our own.b) ResolvedOnce we are aware of the paradox, then we know there must be some other power to make our imitating God a possibility. The apostle Paul prayed that God would strengthen us "with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). The Holy Spirit provides the strength "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" (v. 19). We can be like God (in terms of His character), but we can't do it on our own--it's the Spirit's work.

B. The Structure of Ephesians

1. The application

The first three chapters of Ephesians deal with doctrine, and the last three with the practical ramifications of that doctrine. The practical section begins as Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). The Christian walk or lifestyle is the emphasis of the last three chapters. It is to be a worthy walk.

What does the worthy walk involve? Walking in humility (4:1-3), unity (4:4-16), newness (4:17-32), love (5:1-7), light (5:8-14), wisdom (5:15-17), the Spirit (5:18; 6:9), and spiritual warfare (6:10-24). At the heart of the discussion comes the phrase, "Be ye ... followers of God" (5:1). That ties all the elements together. Since God humbled Himself in Christ, we are to be humble. Since the Trinity is three yet one, be one with other believers. Since God is different--set apart from this evil world--be different. Since God is love, be love. Since God is light, be light. Since God is wise, be wise. Since God is spiritual, be directed by spiritual principles. And since God is the victor over Satan, we are to have victory over him as well.

2. The blessings

The first three chapters of Ephesians delineate the blessings we have in Christ. We have a new standing before God (1:4), a new life (2:4-6), a new righteousness (1:7), a new Father (1:5), a new inheritance (1:11, 14, 18), a new citizenship (2:6, 19), a new Master (1:22-23), a new freedom (3:12), a new victory (2:1-7), a new security (1:13), a new peace (2:14-18), a new unity (2:14-18), a new fellowship (2:19), a new joy (1:3), a new Spirit (2:22), a new power (3:20), a new ability (3:16-19), a new calling (2:10), a new purpose (3:10-12), and a new love (3:17).

The concept of love is woven throughout those chapters. God predestined us to love (1:4-5). He loved us with His great love (2:4). And we can "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (3:19). Our position in Christ is predicated on God's love. First Corinthians 13:13 says, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Since God is love (1 John 4:16), and since we are to imitate Him, Paul commands us to "walk in love." Lesson

I. THE PLEA (vv. 1-2a)

"Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love."

A. The Context

The word "therefore" takes us backwards in the epistle.

1. The opposite characteristic of love

Ephesians 4:31 says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." That is the opposite of love. When we are bitter towards someone, violent, or smoldering internally about someone or something, or slandering someone publicly or behind their back, that's the opposite of walking in love.

2. The obvious characteristics of love

Verse 32 says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another." Those are characteristics of love. Of those three, the greatest evidence of love is forgiveness. A lack of forgiveness causes bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, and all forms of malice. And a lack of forgiveness stems from a lack of love.

Paul doesn't refer to love in verse 32, but he does mention kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. To be sure we know where those characteristics come from, he tells us to imitate God by walking in love. The key to walking in love is forgiveness.

B. The Commentary

1. The measure of love

I believe the greatest measuring rod of love in the life of a Christian is forgiveness.

a) The demonstration of love(1) In God's plan of salvation God showed His love to us in terms of forgiveness. The Bible could have taught us that God so loved the world that He made pretty flowers,

or trees, or mountains, or beautiful ladies, or handsome men, or delicious food. Rather it teaches that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He gave His Son to forgive mankind. That certainly shows us God's love more than flowers, trees, or mountains. The best measurement of a person's love is his ability to forgive. That's because the best measurement of God's love is His ability to forgive. Ephesians 2:5 says, "Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath made us alive together with Christ." Why? Because "God ... is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us" (v. 4).

Measure your love. Ask yourself, Do I love? If you don't, you're not one of God's own because the children of God love others (1 John 4:7-8). How can you know if you aren't characterized by love? Ask yourself, Am I bitter toward someone because of something they did to me? Do I often get angry with people, either externally or internally? Do I speak maliciously behind people's backs? Do I verbally assault people? Those are characteristics of a person who doesn't love others, and that's part of our old lifestyle--a life we must get rid of.

(2) In Christ's payment for sin We are to forgive "as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). No matter what others do to you--whether they hurt, slander, wound, or offend you--Christ has already paid the penalty for their sin. The next time you want to make someone suffer for what he has done to you, remember that Christ already suffered for that sin. Don't add to the suffering and consequence that has resulted from that sin--it's already been dealt with. You and I offend God more than we realize, but He doesn't treat those offenses by giving us what we deserve--eternal punishment. Instead He sees that His Son already bore the punishment for those sins. For Christ's sake He forgives us. Now for Christ's sake we are to forgive each other. So the measure of your love is the extent of your ability to forgive.

b) The degree of love At times it seems you just can't go on forgiving someone who does the same thing over and over again. But God keeps on forgiving us.

(1) 1 John 2:12--"Little children ... your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."**(2) Colossians 2:13--**God has "forgiven you all trespasses."**(3) Ephesians 1:7--**"In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."**(4) 1 John 1:9--**"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God keeps forgiving us even though we continue to sin, and He expects us to do the same to others. If our holy, righteous God can forgive someone's sin and put it on His dear Son, who are we to demand blood out of that person? But that's just what we're doing when we refuse to forgive him or her.

c) The depth of love Two important factors indicate the depth of your love.

(1) The indicators

(a) How much you forgive Proverbs 10:12 says, "Love covereth all sins." First Peter 4:8 says, "Above all things have fervent love among yourselves; for love shall cover the multitude of sins." The Greek word translated "fervent" (ektenes) refers to a muscle stretched to its limits. We are to love to the limit, which involves covering a "multitude of sins." Sin must be dealt with, but must also be forgiven. That's what "cover" implies. We're to put a blanket over past sin that's been dealt with. Examine yourself. Do you hold a grudge against someone in your house? If you do, remember that Jesus already paid the penalty for whatever that person did wrong. Your inability to forgive belies your love. And if a lack of forgiveness is characteristic of your life, you may not be a Christian.

(b) How much you know you've been forgiven Inevitably those who have the greatest sense of forgiveness are quickest to forgive others. Smug self-righteous people usually have the most trouble forgiving someone for a sordid past. But the former alcoholic, prostitute, or criminal looks at someone else's sin and says, "You ought to forgive that person. Look what the Lord did for me!" Some who have gone to church all their lives look down on those with evil pasts. Yet the sin of religious piosity is just as bad if not worse than prostitution. The people who know they've been forgiven much are able to forgive much.

(2) The illustration Luke 7:36-48 contrasts a Pharisee with a sinful woman.

(a) The love of the sinner Verses 36-38 begin the narrative: "One of the Pharisees desired ... that [Jesus] would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And, behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner [possibly a prostitute], when she knew that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of [costly] ointment, and stood at his feet behind him,

weeping [mourning over her sin]; and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."(b) The sin of the Pharisee she had done the same thing to the Pharisee, he probably would have slapped her across the mouth and had one of his servants throw her into the street. We see his attitude in verse 39: "When the Pharisee who had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner."(c) The parable of Christ Jesus responded to the Pharisee's thoughts: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors: the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered, and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest me no water for my feet. But she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss. But this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint. But this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (vv. 40-47). The woman responded to Jesus the way she did because she loved Him very much. The reason she loved Him so is she was keenly aware of her sin and sought great forgiveness. So Jesus turned to her and said, "Thy sins are forgiven" (v. 48). One's ability to love depends on how deeply one senses the love of God, and one's ability to forgive depends on how much you know you've been forgiven. Apparently the smug Pharisee thought he was so righteous that he didn't need forgiveness. He wasn't interested in washing Jesus' feet or in serving Him; he was interested only in a theological discussion. He couldn't forgive the woman because he had such a dull sense of sin and his need for forgiveness. If those two sinners matched their sin, the Pharisee's would be greater because it is an unparalleled sin to say, "I don't need God." A person who loves little doesn't sense God's love. The person who loves much does.

2. The practice of love

God loved us and forgave us, He expects us to do the same for each other. In that sense we are to be like God, and it is the Spirit who helps us accomplish that. Nevertheless it is easy for us to respond like Zophar: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). How can we be like God--it seems impossible. If we see Him as a benign Santa Claus, perhaps we could be like Him. But if we understand God as the Bible defines Him, we must say with Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Or we might follow the example of John who, seeing a vision of the exalted Christ, "fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. 1:17).

We're to be as merciful (Luke 6:36), holy (1 Pet. 1:15), perfect (Matt. 5:48), and loving (1 John 4:11) as God. How is that possible?

Second Peter 1:4 says that when we were regenerated we became "partakers of the divine nature." We can be like God because He lives in us. It's also possible by sanctification: as the Spirit of God works in our lives, He conforms us to His image (Eph. 3:17-19).

In Ephesians 5:1 Paul is saying that if you're a child of God, act like one. If you name Jesus as Lord, walk as He walked. First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." We find a good summary of the matter in 1 Corinthians 16:14: "Let all your things be done with love." Love should characterize everything we do in life.

3. The characteristics of love

Love has always been God's standard. In fact, although they appear to be crushing legalism on the surface, the Ten Commandments are in reality ten aspects of love. The first four commands delineate the characteristics of love towards God, the latter six describe love toward others.

a) Toward God(1) It is loyal Exodus 20:3 says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Love isn't

fickle; it's loyal. God wants us to love Him enough not to leave Him for someone or something else. Such a person won't bow down to other gods or turn his back on the one true God.(2) It is faithfulExodus 20:4-6 says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." If you love God, you'll never leave Him--you'll remain faithful.(3) It is reverentIn verse 7 God says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." If you love God you won't drag down His reputation.(4) It is intimateExodus 20:8-11 says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." God's love draws us aside for intimacy with Him. It's as if God is saying, "If you love Me you won't live your life apart from Me; instead you'll draw near to Me. You'll be willing to drop all your activities one day a week and spend it with Me."Our love toward God is to be loyal, faithful, reverent, and intimate. Jesus summed that up in these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30).b) Toward others(1) It is respectfulExodus 20:12 says, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Love is not lawless or rebellious; it is respectful--it honors people. Someone characterized by love will attempt to say the best about everyone. He will seek to help and honor others.(2) It is harmlessVerse 13 says, "Thou shalt not kill." Someone who truly loves wouldn't seek to hurt anyone.(3) It is pureVerse 14 says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Adultery defiles, but love purifies.(4) It is unselfishVerse 15 says, "Thou shalt not steal." People who love don't steal; they give.(5) It is truthfulVerse 16 says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." When you tell a lie about someone, you're trying to hurt him. But if you love him, you'll tell the truth.(6) It is contentExodus 20:17 says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's." A person who loves others is content with his own possessions, and is happy for whatever blessings others receive.Our love toward others is to be respectful, harmless, pure, unselfish, truthful, and content. Jesus summed that up when He said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:31). The Ten Commandments teach us to be like God. We are to love as He loves.

II. THE PATTERN (v. 2b)

"As Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor."

A. The Characteristics of Christ's Love

Christ Himself is our pattern. If we're to love as He loves us, then we need to know the characteristics of His love.

1. It is forgiving

When Jesus died on the cross He said of those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

2. It is unconditional

The Bible doesn't refer to Christian love as an emotion, but as an act of self-sacrifice. A person who truly loves someone else doesn't look to see what he can get out of that person. Do you realize that God loves people on the way to hell as much as He loves those on the way to heaven? He loves

those who curse Him as much as those who praise Him. Why? Because God's love is never conditioned on a response--it is unconditional.

Today the world often defines love in terms of what it can get out of it. But God loves even if He never gets anything in return. If that kind of love characterized our marriages, the divorce rate wouldn't be what it is today. If those who claim they don't love their spouse anymore would commit themselves to loving him or her unconditionally, they just might find they can recapture their love. Our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't love us for what He'll get out of it; He loves us in spite of the hurt we cause Him. Unconditional love is humble, obedient, and self-sacrificing.

3. It is self-sacrificing

Ephesians 5:2 says that Christ "hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." Christ's sacrificial offering of Himself was a fragrant aroma to God. Paul described a gift given to him as "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). That Christ's offering of Himself was sweet-smelling meant that God was well pleased with it.

Leviticus 1-3 describes three types of offerings Israel was to make: the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering. If we view Christ's work in light of those offerings, we could say that the burnt offering refers to Christ's total devotion to God--He gave His life. The meal offering refers to His perfection. And the peace offering speaks of His making peace between God and man. Those three offerings were well pleasing to God.

Do you want to please God? Do you want your life to rise before God as a sweet-smelling aroma? Then live a life of forgiving, unconditional, and self-sacrificing love.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What does it mean to be "followers" of God (Eph. 5:1)?
2. What ought to be the primary pursuit of believers (Phil. 3:10)?
3. What must we first realize before we can imitate God?
4. How can we be like God (Eph. 3:16, 19)?
5. What does the worthy walk referred to in Ephesians 4:1 involve?
6. What has God given to us in Christ?
7. In what way is the concept of love woven throughout the first three chapters of Ephesians?
8. What is the great measuring rod of love in the life of a Christian?
9. How can we measure of God's love (Eph. 2:4-5)?
10. What ought to be our motive for forgiving others (Eph. 4:32)?
11. What are two indicators of the depth of a person's love?
12. What does love do according to 1 Peter 4:8?
13. What is often true about people who have a great sense of how much they've been forgiven?
14. According to Luke 7:39, what was the attitude of the Pharisee toward the woman who washed Jesus' feet?
15. How did Jesus respond to his attitude (Luke 7:40-47)?
16. Why did the woman treat Jesus the way she did? Why did the Pharisee treat Jesus the way he did?
17. How is it possible to be as merciful, holy, perfect, and loving as God?
18. What aspects of love do each of the Ten Commandments describe?
19. What are three characteristics of Christ's love? Explain each.

Pondering the Principles

1. Before we can imitate God, we must know what He is like. Like Paul, that is to be our primary desire (Phil 3:10). Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). The best way for us to know God better is to do the

same thing we would do if we wanted to get to know anyone--spend time with Him. The best way to do that is to spend time in His Word. By daily exposure to what God has taught us about Himself, we will learn what He is like. Make sure you regularly read and study the Bible. Make note of any passages that give you insight into God's character.

2. Review the section on the depth of love (pp. 6-9). How much do you actually forgive others? If you haven't forgiven certain people, what reason do you offer for not having done so? After studying this chapter, is there any justifiable reason for not forgiving them? Be honest with yourself in your analysis. Ask God to reveal your sin to you, and then confess it to Him. Now look back over your life, both before you came to Christ and after. What has God forgiven you? Make a list if that will help you remember. Once you've completed your list, write forgiven across the list. Take the time to thank God for all He has forgiven you. And thank Him for His plan of salvation and the sacrifice of His Son on your behalf.

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