

Walking in Love

Ephesians 4:17—5:2

Introduction

Our Epistle lesson once again spans two chapters, showing us that chapter divisions are somewhat arbitrary. Or, as Erasmus Sarcerius, Lutheran educator and pastor of the Reformation said, *The beginning of [chapter 5] belongs with the end of [chapter 4], where, from the example of God the Father, Paul starts to exhort the Ephesians to mutual love and its works.* At the end of **chapter 4**, Paul has given us a “laundry list” of what we are to do and not do as Christians. A close examination shows that fulfilling this list would mean keeping the Ten Commandments. He sums up what this would mean in **5:1a** – *Be imitators of God*. That’s a tall order.

Imitating God

Why?

Before we get into what it means to imitate God, Paul tells us why we are to do this – *as beloved children (Ephesians 5:1b)*. Our reason for imitating God is not because we should, ought to, or must. But because we are His beloved children. As Chrysostom said, *Not all children imitate their father, but those who know themselves to be beloved act like “beloved children”.* A child who knows he is loved by the Father wants to act like the Father. It’s in our spiritual DNA.

How?

How can we imitate God? There are aspects of God we must only believe and cannot imitate, such as omniscience or omnipotence. But there are traits He has we can imitate, such as love and forgiveness. We imitate God when we *walk in love (Ephesians 5:2a)*. It’s that ‘walking in love’ we want to focus on here today. Before we can walk in love, we must understand what ‘love’ is.

What Is Love?

This is where it gets confusing for many people when we talk about love. The Greeks had a different word for each type of love. We use the same word for every kind of love. I want to talk about the two main types of love in our society today – the world’s love and Christ’s love.

The Love of the World

According to the world, we, as a Bible believing church are unloving because we teach that what the Bible calls sin is still sin today. This offends the world because the world doesn’t think along lines of right and wrong. The world’s ethic is tolerance, the notion that we should live and let live. This means we should not do or say anything that hurts other people’s feelings. Feelings are the foundation of the world’s concept of love. The goal in worldly love is for people to feel good. The only thing that matters, is feelings. That’s what censorship is all about. What’s being censored today is anything that offends the sensibilities of people, especially privileged people groups. A close examination of the world’s love shows it to be a flimsy, weak pabulum with no foundation or substance because feelings are ethereal.

The Love of Christ

Compare this with Christ's love. He loved us *by giving Himself up for us, which is a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2b)*. Christ's love is not based on feelings, but action. The action is sacrifice. Real love is costly, precious, and substantial. Real love makes a difference. It is not superficial. Real love, Christ's love is sacrifice. Christ showed His love when He died on the cross for our sins, so we could live. Of course, we cannot duplicate His sacrifice on the cross, but there are ways we can imitate Him, and by imitating Christ, we are imitating God, because He is God.

Imitating Christ's Love

We imitate Christ's love every time we give ourselves up for someone else. We give up ourselves when we do good to others without any thought to ourselves and how it affects us. The ultimate imitation of His love is when we forgive others. To truly forgive is the most selfless act we can perform. Forgiveness begins with offense. There must be something to forgive. As the wronged party, it is up to us to forgive. Remember, Christ died for us while we were still sinners (**Romans 5:8**). He didn't wait for us to apologize. That's why it's so hard. We offer forgiveness, not knowing whether it will be accepted or thrown back in our face. If the other person recognizes the offense and feels the need for forgiveness, he or she is repentant and then receives that forgiveness—the way we receive Christ's forgiveness when we confess and repent of our sins.

Means of Forgiveness

Christ is not only our Model of forgiveness, but He is also our Means of forgiveness. We pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We can only forgive because He has already forgiven us. While it's true we will never be perfect this side of glory, through Word and Sacrament, Christ forgives our sins and strengthens our faith, giving us the capacity to forgive others as He has forgiven us. Then we will know what it means to **WALK IN LOVE**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
