

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 16

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: **“A Life of Love”**

Ephesians 5:1-2 ~ June 26, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help us realize the greatest way to imitate God is by loving others.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Waypoint – Melanie David
- Women of Faith Conf.
- Operation Worship – Bibles for our troops

Opening Prayer

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

“Be imitators of God, therefore...”

“Therefore” refers back to the last verses of chapter 4, and the command to “put on” kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Even though we are in a new chapter – chapter 5 – in the original text, this is not a new paragraph – it’s a continuation of the previous section, not a new section with new thoughts.

“Imitators” = *mimétés* – We get our English word ‘mimic’ from this Greek term.

A chameleon mimics / copies / imitates its surroundings. No matter what its environment is, it does it’s best to match it – to fit in.

Unfortunately, many believers live a chameleon kind of life. When they’re at church, they make sure they fit in with the people at church...when they’re at work, they fit in with the attitudes and actions of their co-workers...when they’re at school, they fit in with their schoolmates.

But we're told here – commanded (*present middle imperative*) to imitate God – not our surroundings!

This brief command sums up the great calling of the Christian life – to be like God – to imitate / copy Him in all we do, say, and think. This is repeated many times in Scripture:

Lev. 11:44 – “Be holy as I am holy”

Romans 8:29 – “...conformed to the image of His Son.”

“Be imitators of God...”

Now think about the enormity of this command...to imitate God! Have you ever tried to imitate someone? Growing up, I remember playing football, basketball, or baseball with my friends, and we would try to imitate our favorite professional athletes. But no matter how many times I tried, I could never “be like Mike” and jump from the free throw line and dunk like Michael Jordan, I could never run with the same power and balance as Walter Payton, or have the smooth, soft hands of Ryne Sandberg. I would try, but I couldn't measure up to their level. Now if I couldn't imitate these guys – mere mortals, sinful like myself, how in the world can I “imitate God”? Well, among many other things...the reason I could never imitate my sports heroes is that I am totally different from them – I don't have their DNA, their height, speed, strength, or natural ability. However, I do have God's DNA in me! As a believer in Christ, I have God in me! Christ is in me – and I am in Christ! I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit! This is what makes this unbelievable command – believable! The impossible command, possible! We are not left to our own abilities and efforts to obey this, because the only way we can obey this command is if we get our own abilities and efforts

out of the way – and rely on God’s Spirit within us as the primary path to mimicking God!

as dearly loved children...

This little phrase contains three vital things we must understand if we are going to “imitate God”. This phrase contains three keys to *“how do I”* imitate God.

I must first ask if you are a child of God? A common belief in our culture is that everyone is a child of God. In one sense, that is true, since all have been created by God – we can call this the universal fatherhood of God (Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'). Where our culture is wrong in this thinking is that they equate the *“universal fatherhood of God”* with the paternal relationship believers have with God through salvation. Scripture is very clear that to be in the family of God one must have faith in Christ, and when we have faith in Christ, we are then born into the family of God. “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit...you must be born again.”

John 3:5,7 Being a child of God is not something human beings innately have because they are human. It’s only achieved by placing your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

So, the first key to imitating God is to become a child of God. If we are going to “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children” – the first key is to make sure we are one of His children! Scripture is very clear on this - the only way to become a child of God is to put your faith in Christ.

“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God...” John 1:12

Knowing if you are a child of God is the first key to imitating God...but there's more. Let's talk about the second key that we find in this short phrase: "dearly loved child of God." Why is love so important here?

Well, the command to imitate God is huge – and so extensive that it would be difficult knowing where to begin! And how do I imitate the attributes of God that are impossible for me to imitate? I can't be self-existing, I can't be omnipotent, and I can't be eternal because I had a beginning.

Paul includes this description so we will know the most important way we can imitate God – by loving as God loves.

This is where you need to set down your pen or pencil, close your eyes, and think about your life. Think about your sin. Think about your sinful thoughts that occupy so much of your mind. Think back to a rebellious time in your life where you rebelled not only against your parents or other authority in your life, but when you rebelled against God. Think about how you knew what God commanded you to do – but you in essence flipped-off God and by your actions and attitudes let Him know what He could do with His commands! Think about the pain you caused someone when you lied to them. Think about the pain you caused your parents when you rejected their good advice and did something you knew was against their wishes. Think about the money you stole, the object you vandalized, the project you cheated on and when you took credit for something you didn't do, or when by your silence you allowed someone else to take the blame for something you did. Think about your sexual sins, your

uncontrolled anger, your coveting, your love of this world over the things of God.

Go ahead and open your eyes.

Each one of you has done all of these things...or some of these things...yet God's love for you has never lessened! "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

When you truly begin to think about your sin, and see your sin as God sees it, only then can you begin to understand and be amazed by God's love for you.

In God's eyes, you are a "dearly loved child".

The key to imitating God is to understand His unconditional love for us – and then to love others with the same love that God has loved us! Our love for others is not dependent on their belief or denial of Christ. Remember, when we were at our worst – when we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

"The depth of our love is also shown by how much we know we have been forgiven." (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, by John MacArthur, p. 195). When you see your sin clearly – both the evil nature of your sin and the quantity of your sin – only then can you begin to understand the immeasurable love of God for you!

God calls us to the highest form of love – agape love – a selfless love that is not given on the merit of the one being loved – or given based on what the person can give us in return for our love. "We love because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19

The second key to imitating God is to understand His unconditional love for us – despite our evil and sin – and to love others with the unconditional love He has infused into us.
Romans 5:5

“...God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”

1 Peter 4:8

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

The third key to imitating God is to realize that our imitation will be imperfect.

As little kids attempt to imitate their mother and father – and fail to imitate them perfectly, their mother and father laugh and encourage them anyhow. The parents see the imperfect imitation of their children as a wonderful compliment and a wonderful expression of love from child to parent because it’s the best the child can do, and it’s from love and sincerity that the child attempts to imitate the parent.

As we attempt to “Be imitators of God”, and are imperfect in doing so, we must realize that God savors the attempted imitation – even if it’s imperfect! I’m not trying to lower the bar or lower the standards of our imitation. He loves us dearly – and like an earthly parent who enjoys their son / daughter dressing up in their parents clothes so they can be like their mom or dad, God feels nothing but love and joy as He watches us clumsily imitate Him!

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children **2** and live a life of love...”

“live a life of love”

Paul now gives us clear and direct instructions – a command (*present active imperative*) to have love characterize our everyday life. What does living a “life of love” look like?

The late Dr. Albert Schweitzer, famous missionary, medical doctor, and musician, was asked, “What is the best way to raise children?” He replied, “There are three ways: 1) By example, 2) By example, and 3) By example”

(cited by Doug Spangler, American Baby [August, 1979], p. 35).

Paul is telling us that our example for living a life of love is Christ – as He “...loved us and gave Himself up for us...”. The unconditional love of Christ as He willingly went to the cross, is our model for daily living. Later in this chapter, Paul will tell husbands to love their wives “...as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

The reason that love is so important for us is that in love of God and love of others, we will imitate God’s actions toward them! Also, as Jesus said in Matthew 22, love of God and love of others will cause us to obey all the commands of God!

Matthew 22:37-40

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus’ sacrifice was “...a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

This is the contrast to 4:30 – “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.”

Paul is helping us realize that if we live this way, how pleasing it will be to God. Our life of love will be like the sacrifice of Jesus – it will be a fragrant offering to our Heavenly Father.

Rom. 12:1

“...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...”

“The greatest expression of love is not that it gives things or even that it gives up things, but that it gives itself.” (Ephesians, An

Expositional Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 175)

Application

Become a child of God

Admit your sin to God

Believe in Jesus’ death on the cross as payment for your sins

Choose to follow Christ each day

Who do you need to love better?

Who do you need to love with the same love that God loves you with?

A sacrificial love that serves their needs – their interests – a love that imitates the love of God!

Closing prayer