

Ephesians 5:1—Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

Paul begins with “*Therefore*,” directing his readers to apply his previous statements regarding God’s forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32) to this chapter. The saints at Ephesus were to “*be imitators of God*” (Ephesians 5:1), forgiving one another as God had forgiven them (Ephesians 4:32). “*Imitators*” (Ephesians 5:1), from the Greek *mimetes* (from which we get the English “mimic”), can also be interpreted “*followers*” as in the King James. We must be careful here. Paul is not teaching that God’s people are to “imitate” or “mimic” Him by attempting to copy His behavior. Had this been Paul’s intent, New Testament believers would be required to submit to the Law (which reveals His awesome character). Hence Paul, in Galatians 3:3, confirms that self-effort (legalism) can never produce righteous behavior:

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
(Galatians 3:3)

Galatians 3:1-14 verifies that the Galatian saints had been misled to believe that they were saved by faith but kept by the deeds of the Law. “*Flesh*” (Galatians 3:3) in this case points to the believer attempting to live, in his own strength, according to God’s righteous standard prescribed by the Ten Commandments. Many saints endeavor to mimic Christ, or even worse, attempt to abide by the standards prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)—standards even more impossible to attain through the power of the flesh (a topic covered in depth in our study, *The Gospels from a Jewish Perspective*). Believers can never experience victory through hooking the flesh to rules and regulations (Romans 8:4-6; Colossians 2:20-23). At some point in the maturing process, church saints must realize that the power required to change lives is not imitative in nature, but creative in nature.

For years, I strived to imitate God, only to experience frustration and despair. I discovered the solution to my dilemma only through realizing that God’s “*Beloved*” Son (Ephesians 1:6) demonstrated how God’s “*beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1) are to live. He lived by the life of Another (by the life of His Father), trusting Him to perform every deed (John 14:10). Instead of imitating the Father, Jesus lived by the Father’s very life. For this reason the events surrounding His earthly ministry were creative in nature rather than imitative in nature. Thus, deeds resulting from attempting to imitate God are of no benefit (John 15:1-5; Colossians 2:20-23). (For more input, review the notes associated with Ephesians 2:10b).

Scripture teaches that God’s “*life is in His Son*”:

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1John 5:11)

“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)

Therefore, to live by the life of Another (to live by the Father’s life) is to live by Christ’s life. Paul says it well in Romans 5:10 and Romans 5:17:

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:10)

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)

The phrase, “*reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:17), can also be interpreted, “*reign in life by the One, Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added). Hence, to live according to God’s blueprint is to live by

the Son's life. Wasn't this God's original plan in the Garden? Adam and Eve were to partake of the tree of life, not for the purpose of imitating God's life, but to share His life—live by His life. Had they obeyed, all their offspring would have lived in like manner, and the first Adam would have fulfilled God's ultimate plan for man. This scenario would have resulted in God's family living, on a moment-by-moment basis, by His very life. However, because *"the first Adam"* sinned, God sent *"the last Adam"* (Jesus—1Corinthians 15:45) not only to die for sin but to demonstrate what it means to live by the life of Another—by the Father's very life.

We are now equipped to properly interpret the phrase, *"be imitators of God, as beloved children"* (Ephesians 5:1). The Father's child (Jesus), as *"the Beloved"* Son (Ephesians 1:6), lived by the Father's life (John 14:10). Not once did He imitate the Father. We, as the Father's children, must also live by the Father's life if we desire to live supernaturally. The Father's life is in His Son (1John 5:11; John 10:30). Thus, by living by Jesus' life we live by the Father's life flowing through the Son.

No doubt, Scripture teaches that we are to be imitators of believers who walk righteously (1Corinthians 4:16-17; 11:1; 1Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Hebrews 6:12; Hebrews 13:7) and imitators of *"what is good"* (3John 1:11). This arrangement is fine so long as we imitate those who have learned to live by the life of "Another" for the purpose of learning to live in the same manner. Imitating legalists, bound by the letter of the Law, brings nothing but despair.

Because Christ *"is our life"* (Colossians 3:4), we have one basic goal as a believer: to know Him as intimately as possible (Philippians 3:10). As we pursue Him, His divine power works creatively in and through us! As we know Him more intimately, our behavior is changed (2Corinthians 3:18), He ministers to others through us (1Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 2:13), and He sustains us (Philippians 4:13)—while we remain in a state of *"rest"* (Hebrews 4:9-11): No more struggling to change our behavior through rules and regulations, and no more striving to accomplish what only God can bring about. Why would we choose to live in such drudgery when enjoying Him and living by His life (Galatians 2:20) is all He desires? (DeVern Fromke's, *The Ultimate Intention*, is a wonderful read on this subject.)

Paul states that we are to *"be imitators of God, as beloved children"* (Ephesians 5:1). Believers are *"beloved"* of the Father (Ephesians 5:1) because they are special to the Father. This special status grants us the privilege of living *"in the Beloved"* Son (Ephesians 1:6) throughout eternity. Amazing!

Ephesians 5:2—and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

If Christ *"is our life"* (Colossians 3:4), if we are saved on a moment-by-moment basis *"by His life"* (Romans 5:10), if we *"reign in life"* through Him (Romans 5:17), then we should *"walk in love, just as Jesus also loved"* (Ephesians 5:2). The Greek word for *"love"* in this instance is *agape*, pointing to selfless, unconditional love. Consequently, only when we live by the life of Another (live by Christ's life) do we *"walk in love, just as Christ also loved"* (Ephesians 5:2). Should the body of Christ comprehend this truth, unconditional love would run rampant, relationships once considered irreconcilable would be reconciled, healthy relationships would be deepened, and the unredeemed world would witness Jesus' character through His beautiful masterpiece—the church (John 13:34-35; Ephesians 2:10).

Agape love, God's kind of love, loves unconditionally. The recipient of *agape* is not required to earn it, deserve it, or even understand it—for its Source is God Himself. Without God's *agape* love, none of us would have had the opportunity to become part of His family. Therefore, since God's love allowed Him to sacrifice His Son on our behalf, our lifestyles should be motivated by love and characterized by selfless living.

None of what has been discussed regarding Ephesians 5:1-2 can occur unless we are empowered by God's Spirit. In fact, to live by the life of Another is to walk by God's Spirit. The first "*fruit of the Spirit*" listed in Galatians 5:22 is *agape "love."* No saint can "*walk in love*" (Ephesians 5:2), nor can he live by the life of Another, void of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Paul encouraged his readers to refrain from grieving the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

Only through walking to the cross by the life of Another (by His Father's life) could Jesus give "*Himself up for us*" (Ephesians 5:2). He also, through living by the life of the Father, gave Himself as "*an offering and a sacrifice to God*" (Ephesians 5:2). This response makes perfect sense considering the interaction between the three members of the Godhead since eternity past. They have done nothing based on selfish motives. Consequently, each individual member of the Godhead viewed the cross based on what the other two Persons of the Trinity, along with all the redeemed, would receive through that selfless act. Thus, Jesus offered Himself for the benefit of the Father (as "*an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma*"), for the benefit of the Spirit, and to provide an opportunity for all mankind to believe—although only the depraved who choose to exercise personal repentance and faith will be saved.

Christ's "*offering and...sacrifice*" was a "*fragrant aroma*" (Ephesians 5:2) to the Father, confirming that it pleased the Father. Philippians 4:18 speaks of how acceptable sacrifices please God:

But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:18)

The Old Testament sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9, 12; 3:5, and 16 were a soothing aroma to the Father because they were a picture of what Christ would later accomplish on the cross.

Because "*God is love*" (1John 4:8, 16), every decision, response, motive, in fact, everything He is and does is based on "*love.*" "*Love*" must motivate us as well (2Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 5:6; Jude 21) or we will soon lose heart. Interestingly, those who perceive God as having forgiven them little find themselves loving Him little (Luke 7:47). Only through a proper view of our total inability to save ourselves, the limitlessness of His forgiveness, and the awesomeness of everything that occurred at Calvary, do we begin to comprehend His love. Hence, the deeper we know Him through prayerfully reading His Word, the more we appreciate the uniqueness of His affection for the entirety of mankind:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Obviously, Ephesians 5:1-2 is sandwiched between Ephesians 4:1 and Ephesians 6:24. Because Ephesians 4:1—6:24 is the practical section of this epistle, dealing with the believer's behavior, could Paul be confirming that to live by the life of Another is the key to seeing these practical truths fulfilled in one's experience? This conclusion seems to agree with Romans 8:4, where Paul validates that the believer's behavior parallels the righteous requirement of the Law only as he is controlled by God's Spirit:

in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4)

Ephesians 5:3—But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints;

The first subject addressed after Ephesians 5:1-2 is “immorality” (Ephesians 5:3). “Immorality” (*porneia*), the total antithesis of love, can be defined as “illicit sexual intercourse in general.” Individuals involved in immoral relationships fail to display God’s love toward the person with whom they are immorally involved. Let me explain.

Much of our society (including the body of Christ) has bought the lie that relationships are established for personal gain. Thus, relationships are entered into, not to give, but to get—the perfect formula for disaster. This arrangement endures only so long as the “partner” is pleasant, attractive, healthy, meets all needs, and surpasses expectations. The moment the feelings flee, however (and they will flee), the unfulfilled partner is free to pursue whomever he/she pleases. Satan dangles this lifestyle before the unwise to their ruin, for death is partner with “*the course of this world*” (Ephesians 2:2). Only Jesus can save us from such nonsense.

God despises sexual sin for an abundance of reasons, for sex was originally intended for marriage—for blessing (pleasing) the person with whom you enter into covenant (1Corinthians 7:2-5) and for bearing children (Genesis 1:27-28). Hence, Jehovah entered into relationship with Israel (Exodus 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 5:1-3) not only to bless her (Deuteronomy 7:6-11), but to bear His Son, Jesus Christ, the “seed” of Genesis 3:15 (Galatians 3:16), through a “*virgin*” (Isaiah 7:14) of Jewish descent. Yet, Israel committed adultery and played the harlot through worshipping foreign gods (Hosea 4:11-14). Besides breaking God’s heart, Israel’s disobedience communicated the lie that He alone was insufficient to meet her needs. It also revealed that Israel desired relationship without commitment. No wonder the Creator so despises adultery! Homosexuality (1Corinthians 6:9; 1Timothy 1:8-10) is even worse, making the bold statement that God is not needed at all. No wonder a homosexual-laced society teeters on the brink of destruction (Romans 1:18-32). God loves the adulterer and homosexual, but abhors their sin. So should we.

Unconditional “love” (Ephesians 5:1-2), *agape* love, God’s kind of love, chooses to respond favorably with no strings attached. Worth, performance, and attractiveness are never required. Neither is *agape* “love” based on emotion (although the “feelings” or emotions are positively affected when *agape* enters the scene). *Agape* love is based on choice and commitment, the only love capable of generating the fruitful and lasting relationships the soul desires.

“Impurity” (Ephesians 5:3) is from the Greek *akatharsia* and points to both physical (Matthew 23:27) and moral uncleanness (Romans 1:24; 6:19; 2Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1Thessalonians 2:3). We can be safe in saying that “impurity” (Ephesians 5:3) points to sexual sin in general, such as impure thoughts, fantasies, lust, and a variety of sexual perversions within the mind.

“Greed” (*pleonexia*), which accompanies immorality and impurity (Ephesians 5:3), is an unrestrained desire to possess more. Thus, the passions and cravings accompanying sexual sin are never satisfied. No wonder “immorality” and “impurity” breed unfaithful relationships, either due to: (1) infidelity or (2) indecent sex acts, of barbaric proportions, performed between the partners.

The number of men, women, and children carrying emotional (and physical) scars due to these uncontrolled passions is appalling. Therefore, when tempted to compromise in these areas, Proverbs 7 and Romans 1:18-32 are necessary reading.

Because “*be named*” (Ephesians 5:3) can also be interpreted “be mentioned,” for saints to so much as “mention” what can be categorized as “immorality,” “impurity,” or “greed” is not “*proper*.” A “saint” is a “holy one,” and his behavior should be progressing in holiness due to the holy, perfect, and blameless soul and spirit he has already become.

