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Dear Friends,

Thank you for your love and support throughout the year. Transition and change continue. God's faithfulness remains the same.

Last week I was surprised to find, waiting for me at the post office in Hardin, a copy of our newsletter from December 8th, 1996. Dan Oldham, a Hardin resident had left it with Peggy Smith, our Postmaster, because he thought I would enjoy reading it. I certainly did. I hope you do as well.

I pray this season finds you resting in Him and content.

Kim

From December 8, 1996

We trust that you are doing well and that the Lord continues to be your sufficiency (2Corinthians 9:8). We also trust that Christ is doing (within your daily circumstances) above and beyond all you could think or ask (Ephesians 3:20). What an exciting adventure—this life of faith. Just think, we serve a God who is capable of meeting our needs through resources which are invisible (Hebrews 11:3). Not so with the unredeemed. Their opinions and ideas are based solely upon what they see, touch, taste, hear, and smell. The believer, through faith, can be lifted above such mundane living so as to view the unseen (2Corinthians 4:18). Name one thing that could be more exciting than that!

We want to thank you for being the conduit through which God has worked to encourage us. Please know that we appreciate you and that we would consider it an honor to pray for your specific needs. Just jot them down and pass them along. We will add them to our prayer list and see to it that they are offered before the Father. For those of you who pray for us, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We realize now more than ever that it is the prayers of the saints that have played a major role in what takes place here. As you think of us, please ask the Father to grant us wisdom and favor, along with an ample supply of grace. It would encourage us much to know that you are praying as such.

For those of you who have been led to support us financially, we thank you. We continue by God's grace, to operate from a debt free basis, and we can't begin to express our gratitude and appreciation for the part you have played in that. Your thoughtfulness and generosity speak volumes concerning Christ's sufficiency.

As we approach this wonderful Holiday Season, may Jesus be more special to you than ever before. May His presence supernaturally encourage, strengthen, sustain, and empower you. Walk on!

Thoughts From The Hill

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).

Scripture teaches that God’s “*life is in His Son*” (1John 5:11, 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)

(The original content of the 1996 Newsletter “Thoughts from the Hill” was from the Ephesians series notes Bob was teaching at that time. The content here is from the updated version of his Ephesians Commentary. Both covered Ephesians 5:1-2.)



*Benjamin Robert Warren today
(Mom still thinks he’s cute)*



*Picture from the Winter
'96 Newsletter*

Upcoming Events

Winter College Retreat (January 6-8, 2017), Guest teacher: Steve Pettit
Winter Youth Retreat (January 13-15, 2017), Guest teacher: Ralph Harris
Men’s Retreat (April 28-30, 2017), Guest teacher: Preston Gillham
Summer Youth Leadership Camp I (June 4-10, 2017), ages 13-18
Summer Youth Leadership Camp II (July 9-15, 2017), ages 13-18
Romans Retreat (August TBD, 2017), Guest teacher: Patrick Johnson
Fall Retreat, (October 20-22, 2017), Guest teacher: Steve Pettit