

The Love of Christ  
Ephesians 5: 1-2  
Jason Henderson  
Market Street Fellowship  
081130

## The Love of Christ

We're going to continue with the book of Ephesians this week. We've made it all the way to Ephesians chapter five, and we're going to be looking at the first two verses of that chapter today. Once again, we're still in the midst of a section in this letter where Paul is dealing with certain questions and situations and various forms of blindness and immaturity. He's reminding his readers of the fruits of the adamic tree that should be passing away from them because that man has been put away from God. He's telling them that they should be putting on the new man, by the renewing of the spirit of their mind, and experiencing the fruits of that man. He's telling them how to be wise stewards of their earthen vessels during their stay on earth. This is the section that we are in.

Paul continues this theme in chapter five. Let me read the next two verses to you, and then make some comments about the.

***Eph 5:1** Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

Lets start with verse one. It says that we are to be imitators of God as beloved children. If you read from the King James or the Young's literal, it says "followers of God" and not "imitators". I think the word "followers" may be the most helpful translation, but I'm not opposed to the word "imitators" if we understand the way it is being used. However, if we don't understand the way that Paul intends to use this word then there is room for a whole lot of misunderstanding here.

You have heard me say many times that the gospel is not about an imitation of Christ, or an imitation of God in the flesh. On a few occasions, I have had people then ask me "well, what about Ephesians 5:1". Or what about 1 Corinthians 11:1 where Paul says "be imitators of me as I am an imitator of Christ". Well, the answer to this question should be pretty obvious. It is all in what it means to "imitate" or "follow" the Lord. How are we understanding that word?

My objection to the word imitate is not that it is a horrible word. My objection is that when most people use it, they seem to have in mind some sort of outward mimicking of behavior. The idea is generally that we are to copy what Jesus did, replicate what He said, and do our best to reproduce what He felt. And if that is how we understand the word "imitate", then it is a very inadequate word for describing Christian growth or transformation.

Christianity has NOTHING to do with men and women trying to act like Jesus. That is not even remotely related to the gospel – firstly, because it is utterly impossible. And secondly because you and I cannot even know Jesus through what we observe about Him with natural faculties, and so we certainly couldn't replicate Him in any

way. Despite its popularity, I hope those of you who have been here for a little while can see the absolute absurdity of this idea. It amounts to nothing more than a bunch of humans trying to live according to whatever capricious and shallow perspective of Christ that they currently want to believe. First, with our natural minds, we define what we think Jesus is like. And then with our flesh, we try to live according to that imaginary standard.

Brothers and sisters, this is called religion. Religion is where man defines God according to whatever desirable traits we believe we should emulate. And, by doing this, mankind actually gets to worship his own ideas. Do you realize that we do that all the time in the church? Why are there 40958 different denominations in the world? Why are there so many different ideas about the one Jesus of the Bible? Because man is amazingly adept at defining our concept of a higher power according to the things that we want to worship. We create our version of Jesus, and then bow to it.

I remember many years ago somebody put into my hand a book written by an atheist philosopher. I opened it up and on the first page it said, in a conspicuous attempt to mock the book of Genesis, "in the beginning man created God in his own image". I remember being offended by the book, and I didn't read it. At the time it offended my religiosity. But now I realize that, despite whatever foolish ideas were espoused in the book, the opening sentence actually had some truth to it. Way back at the beginning (not God's beginning, but very close to man's beginning), man **did** begin to create God in accordance with his own image. And he did so after he ate the lie and began viewing all things, even the concept of God, as a means to his own end.

That is why the idols were so frowned upon in the Old Testament. It's not just because they were made of wood and stone and metal. It's not just because they were false gods. Obviously this is true as well. But idols are forbidden by God primarily because they are man's ideas about God. They are man's ideas about heaven and worship and divinity. They are what man creates in the darkness of his own thought. They don't just represent demons, they represent where man has refused the Truth and glory of God and preferred his own darkened ideas.

What is the first of the ten commandments? What is the very first thing that God addresses with Israel by law? Man shall have no other God's. Man is not allowed to make his own idea of God. Man is not allowed to carve his own imagination or impression of God into wood or stone in the likeness of any part of creation. Why? Because just like the Egyptians with the golden calf, man will always create a version of God that suits their interests and their appetites. And, on top of that, we will deify our own ideas, worship them, and believe them to be utterly supernatural. When Aaron spoke with Moses, he said "Look, I just threw all the gold into the fire and it supernaturally became a calf! It wasn't me, it was God!".

I have read that the religion of Hindu has over 300 million gods. That doesn't surprise me. The religion of Christianity has 300 million versions of Jesus...and most of them are idols. All of them that stand contrary to God's view of His Son, revealed by the Spirit are idols of man's imagination. I know those are hard words, but they are true. Idols exist as much or more now than ever. Christians don't carve in stone, but we are just as quick to stamp our own image onto the words and ways of God.

Well, that was all a bit of a rabbit trail. I was trying to say that a mere outward imitation or mimicking of what we perceive to be God's behavior or God's way is worthless. Our ideas about Jesus are an idol. And to imitate those ideas is to serve that idol. **God defines truth by revealing His Son. God brings understanding by showing you His eternal Word.**

And one of the things that you have to face when you see that Word is that you cannot imitate him. You can be conformed to Him, you can be made like Him through the power of the cross...**but you, as a man or woman, can NEVER use what you have to copy what He is.** And so that is NOT what Paul is talking about here.

What is He talking about? Well, notice how he says "be imitators of God has beloved children". The NKJV says "dear children" but a better translation is "beloved children". And the reason it makes a difference to me is that the nature of God's love is to give His Spirit without limit. To give Himself through the cross to those who have been given "the right to be called sons of God." So, what I see here, is an encouragement that those who are sons must grow up and be like their Father. Those who have been given His very life, must have that life formed in them, to the end that they look like Him. **Those who have Christ as their life, must be conformed to Christ, with the result that they resemble Him in all things. This is what Paul means by imitators.**

It is not a wrong goal for us to resemble Christ. That is a good goal if it is rightly understood. The issue is at stake here is *how*, or *in what way* is that accomplished. How is it that you and I can come to resemble Christ in any way? As we have said it is not through copying what we think we've learned about Him. On the contrary, it is through the very life of Christ, given to you by His Father, coming to work in you. Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 – "for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure". Paul says in Galatians 4 "I am in labor until Christ is formed in you".

Not an outward duplication, but an inward transformation through putting off one man, and by the renewing of the spirit of the mind, putting on another. Not simply disciplining behavior and religious devotion to a standard. This imitation or following here that Paul mentions has to do with your soul actually being made conformable to his death, and attaining to His resurrection.

I'm sure you get the point. To summarize, Paul is talking about the Lord's body coming to resemble the Lord Himself. In *that way* we can be said to be imitators of the One who has given us His life. In fact, that is what the next verse talks about. The word imitators may not be the best translation of that word, but it's an OK word as long as we keep in mind how anything in us comes to resemble anything of Him. Only when Christ, our life, is revealed do we experience the putting off of the adamic man and the increased experience of the Life of Christ. Only when what we are by nature is cut away by the sword of His Word, does there remain anything of Him. We can "imitate God" only by bearing in ourselves the increase of His Son.

Alright, verse 2. Paul says

***Eph 5:2*** *And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

Similarly to how Paul says, in the end of chapter 4, that we are to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave us, now Paul talks about loving one another as Christ loved us. If you'll remember in the case of forgiveness, Paul did not leave the definition of forgiveness up to you and I. He said "forgive even as God in Christ has forgiven you". And we talked about how that forgiveness comes through death, and reckoning the adamic man dead, and relating in the Spirit. Now Paul is doing the same thing with love. He's not allowing you and I to define what love means in the body of Christ. He's once again giving the nature of Christ's love as the example of what should be operating in Christ's body.

I want to look at the nature of Christ's love as our example of what love is. And then I want to look specifically at why Paul brings up the specific Old Covenant types and shadows that he does. He says Christ gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice for God as a sweet-smelling aroma. As hard as it might be for us to imagine, for Paul, this great love of God was the fulfillment of what He saw when he read Exodus and Leviticus.

But first, very generally speaking, the nature of Christ's love for us has to do with giving Himself. The nature of Christ's love is not known or defined by what He felt. It is known and defined by what He did. Christ's love for you and I is not an emotion. Christ's love for you and I is the reality and experience of the life that He has given us through the cross. And I know that I am misunderstood on this point quite frequently, so let me try to clarify.

In saying that Christ's love for us is not an emotion, I am not saying that emotions are bad things. I'm not saying anything like that. Nor am I saying that it is not entirely appropriate for you and I have all sorts of emotions in response to God's love. I can tell you right now that when I see something of the reality of God's love, it overwhelms my emotions more than anything else. The reality of God's love fills me with emotions, it can flood my heart with joy and thanksgiving, and make me cry. And all of that is entirely appropriate. There certainly is a real emotional element to my relationship with the Lord. I am not, in any way, against emotion. But I realize something. Emotion doesn't define this relationship. On the contrary, this relationship must define emotion.

I know that this can be hard to see for a while. It starts to grow on you though. I mean, your view of Christ continues to grow and eventually love becomes much bigger than an emotion. **Sooner or later our view of Christ gets big enough to burst out of our natural comprehension of love. Sooner or later Christ begins to define love rather than our view of love defining Christ.**

Let me try to give an analogy from marriage. Lets say you were teaching a seminar on marriage, and a seven year-old kid walks in and says "oh, I already know what marriage is. I've seen it in the movies. It's a strong emotion between a man and a woman. Marriage is another word for passion!"

I would hope that if you were giving a seminar on marriage you would say "no, actually marriage is a bit bigger than just an emotion. Emotion certainly exists *within* the marriage, but emotion is not marriage". And the kid says "well, I don't know what else it could be. I mean, all I could see in the movies was how much they felt for one another. And I have a crush on a cute second-grader at school and I told her that, in my mind, we're already married".

The child is obviously confused. And so you sit down with them and begin to explain some things. You say, "Marriage is actually a relationship. It's a covenant where two enter into a permanent relationship. That relationship will involve many emotions. Some wonderful. Others not so fun. But the emotions don't define the relationship. The relationship stands independent of the emotion. In fact, little boy, part of the problem in our society is that people like you grow up learning to define reality based on your experience of an emotion. And if covenant is based on an emotion, the obvious thing to do is break the covenant whenever the emotion changes". Well...on and on you go describing to the seven-year old the fact that nice emotions are a great benefit of marriage, but marriage is not defined by emotion.

Well, its very much the same way with God's love. God's love is a relationship that He has with you in Christ. It's the covenant in which He gives Himself to you. It's what God is and what God has done. God has loved you by giving you Himself in covenant. Love is when God gives Himself to you in the Person of Christ. Love is the giving of the Person in whom all that God is becomes yours. It's a relationship where God has lavished Himself upon you by giving you life, righteousness, redemption, truth, adoption, an inheritance...all in and as Christ. And certainly, without question, emotions will be *drastically* effected by this relationship and this reality. But emotions do not define this reality.

You receive God's love when you receive the Son in whom you are loved. You receive God's love when you accept the cross by faith and enter into a relationship of love. You know God's love when you begin to know the Son that He has given. You abide in God's love when you abide in that life by faith. You are rooted and grounded in God's love when the gift of His Son becomes the place and person and reality where your soul dwells.

**And, as I said, sooner or later the gift of love that God has given you in Christ will burst the seams of our natural definitions. And we will understand that the shadow cannot contain the substance. The old wineskin cannot contain the new wine. In other words, our natural, shadowy, view of love based on natural things will never be an adequate container to carry the reality of God's love in Christ.**

How did Christ love you? Christ loved you by bearing the cross for the joy set before Him. What do I mean? I mean Christ loved you by being obedient to death that He might share resurrected Life with you. Christ loved you by bearing the end of the first man so that He could become in you the Second man, the Life giving Spirit. Do you see? **Christ loved you by bearing in Himself the death of one man so that He could share with you the Life of another. And that is precisely how we are to love one another.**

Loving our brethren, before anything else, means that we lay down OUR lives so that we can share Christ's life with and minister Christ's life to the body. Loving our brethren as Christ loved us, at its most foundational place, is where we bear in ourselves the death of one man so that we can share the Life of another. Now I realize that this reality of love might have outward manifestation in all sorts of kind actions or selfless sacrifices. BUT kind actions and selfless sacrifices do not constitute love. In fact, Paul tells us in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 that it is possible to give all of your possessions to feed the poor and give your body to be burned and still not

have love. There are a lot of selfish reasons that motivate mankind to sacrifice and serve.

Love is bigger than the actions that are sometimes motivated by love. Death worked in Paul so that life would work in them. Behind everything he did, this is how he was loving them. Paul says "death works in me that life might work in you". And certainly that reality landed Paul in prison and brought about many hardships and sufferings in the natural realm. Without question, Paul suffered for the good of the church. But still Paul never defined His love by what he suffered. For him, the nature of love went deeper than enduring prison and pain. For Paul, the nature of love was not defined by anything in the natural realm. The nature of love was the gift of Christ given to the soul of the redeemed. And for Paul to truly love the Lord's body, he realized that he had to bear in himself the death of one man so that he also could bear in Himself the Person who is the gospel. Or, in his own words, Paul was daily bearing in Himself the dying of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Christ might be manifest in His mortal flesh.

And so we are told by Paul to walk in this love. To walk in this reality, this relationship, this covenant, this gift. Walk in the truth. Walk in the Light. Walk as one rooted and grounded in all that God has given in Christ. And learn, by the Spirit, to love one another even as Christ loved you.

But he then says and *given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma*. I want to wrap up today by saying just a few things about this last sentence. Once again, Paul tries to show us the substance by pointing us back to the shadow. He tries to make us understand the New Covenant by having us look at the Old Covenant types. And in this particular case, he talks about the offerings and sacrifices.

We're making our way through an overview of Old Testament typology in our 9:00 AM class. We're getting close to covering some of these offerings and sacrifices, at least to a small degree. But I thought I'd just advertise the importance of the Old Covenant for a moment. The Old Covenant is the pattern, the blueprint, the natural portrayal of a spiritual reality. And yes, we have come to that spiritual substance in Christ. We have come to the fulfillment and realization of all that the shadows spoke of. But, even so, when we look back to the shadow, the Spirit can show us even more of the substance to which we have come. The Spirit can take the natural picture and use it to reveal in us the eternal reality.

The offerings and sacrifices of the Old Covenant are not just stories of how God wanted to be worshipped in those days. The offerings and sacrifices are the individual views of Christ that are central and critical elements of our salvation. Each offering and sacrifice represents an understanding of Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. There are specific offerings and sacrifices commanded. The Israelites didn't get to use their imagination. They didn't get to add or take away from God's specific commands. There was the burnt offerings, the sin offerings, the peace offerings, the trespass offerings, the grain offerings, and others as well. Every one of these, along with all of the details that surround them, are representative of a particular understanding, God's understanding, of an aspect of His work through the cross. They are all different, and they are all incredibly important.

In my opinion, much of the church likens the death of Christ to ONE of these many offerings. We liken it to a wrong view of the sin offering. But, even if we rightly

saw Christ in the sin offering, that is just ONE offering. That is just one aspect of the cross, and the picture is not complete without the others. And, it is my opinion, that it is impossible to understand the sin offering unless you have first comprehended the burnt offering.

Now I won't get into all of that this morning. I simply put it out there for your consideration. I know this for certain, these sacrifices and offerings were very much part of Paul's consideration. He understood that each and every detail of these aspects of God's law found its perfect spiritual counterpart in a view of Christ crucified. Nothing is left to be fulfilled. But much is left to be realized.

So, when Paul indicates here in Ephesians 5:2 that Christ's love is the fulfillment of the sacrifices and offerings, I can promise you that the parallel is very intentional. When man looks back at the Old Covenant sacrifices and offerings, man sees rules and regulations and weird ceremonies and religion. When Paul looked back at these offerings, he saw the love of God. Paul understood the meaning of the shadow because his soul was face to face with substance.

I mainly just want you to think about that. When Paul contemplated the pages of Leviticus, he saw the love of God giving us Christ as the perfect fulfillment of all of these offerings. What did he see there? Don't you want to see what he saw? Wouldn't you like to read Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers and find yourself staring through the window of the Old Covenant at the reality of God's love in Christ? To look at the burnt offering and see a view of Christ as the end that God provided for the adamic man. Paul saw that man was hopeless and helpless in the pollution of the adamic soul. And he understood that God provided an end for that man. A way for that man to be taken out of the presence of God, and a way for your soul to be found in another man.

When Paul saw the sin offering, he saw a view of Christ where the blood of this death allowed fellowship with God even though Israel broke the covenant because of blindness. These are the offerings that cleansed Israel from where they ignorantly walked beyond the boundaries of their covenant.

In the peace offering Paul saw the view of Christ that he described in Ephesians chapter 2. Christ Himself is our peace because he has taken Jew and Gentile together into His death and been raised as the life of all who live. Thus, in his great love, He established peace. Both peace with God and peace with men in Christ.

In the offering of the firstfruits, Paul saw the firstborn from among the dead, the firstborn among many brethren, raised out from the dead earth and waved before the Lord God. He has brought many sons to glory. He has opened the womb of death and brought forth His body.

On and on we could go. But the point is this: in each one of these offerings and sacrifices Christ Himself is given to humanity as the great love of God. Do you see it? In some sense, Christ is every offering given for man, and acceptable to God. It's not enough for Paul to just hear somebody tell him that God loves him. No, Paul wants to know the great love of God. And to know the love of God, one must come to know the greatness and unsearchable riches of what God has given us in His Son.

And in order for you and I to begin to learn that greatness and see the unsearchable riches of Christ...then we can look to where Paul looked for the pattern. In these

offerings are a multitude of pictures depicting God's perspective of what He has given us. He has given us a death we couldn't die. He has given us blood that keeps us in covenant with Him. He has given us eternal peace in His Son, the firstfruits of a great harvest.

Do you see? By pointing you and I to the offerings and sacrifices, Paul is trying to show us GODS picture of His love. The love of God is beyond words. The best that can be done is to paint a multitude of pictures of it through Old Testament types and shadows. And while looking to those shadows we can begin to see a love that included us in the death of the Lamb that we might bear in ourselves the sweet smelling aroma of Christ unto His Father.

Amen.