

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	71		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Ephesians 5:1-2		
Date:	March 6, 2016 a.m.		

Be Imitators of God

39. Lord's Day

Question 104. What does God require in the fifth commandment?

Answer: That I show all honour, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; (a) and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, (b) since it pleases God to govern us by their hand. (c)

“The fifth chapter of Ephesians begins with one of the most startling admonitions in the New Testament: ‘Be imitators of God.’ It is the only place in the Bible where these words occur, and what makes them so startling is that they point to a standard beyond which there is no other. William Barclay calls this the highest standard in the world. Alexander Maclaren calls it the sum of all duty. To Martyn Lloyd-Jones it was Paul’s supreme argument... the highest level of all in doctrine and practice... the ultimate ideal.”¹ The Old Testament frequently exhorted believers to imitate God. The repeated “following Yahweh” (cf. Numbers 15:24, II Kings 18:21) or “walking in His ways” (cf. I Kings 3:14; Ezekiel 20:13, 16, 21) were exhortations to follow God’s ways. I Peter 2:21 speaks of “following after Christ” (cf. I Thessalonians 1:6 and I Corinthians 11:1). Likewise there are examples in both the Old Testament and the New Testament where God’s servants are set forth as role models (cf. I Kings 19:19-21; II Kings 2:3ff; Isaiah 8:15-18; Proverbs 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; note Paul’s example in II Thessalonians 3:7, 9; I Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). In Judges 9 the example of following one NOT appointed by God leads to disaster. In Ephesians 5:1, 2 Paul spells out exactly what is involved in the imitation of God. How is this done? How can it be?

Review: In 4:25-32 the Apostle enjoined certain kinds of behavior on believers. Certain things were definitely prohibited; other things were commanded and the all-powerful motivation cited. Chapter 5:1, 2 likewise includes a command and its motivation, but there is no corresponding prohibition. Paul has put his exhortation in strictly positive terms as he sums up his line of thought and breaks ground for his next section.

I. THE PATTERN – v. 1

Paul has in the preceding section (4:17-32) dealt with distinctive conduct required of all who profess to be Christian. Now the Apostle, by means of a series of exhortations states more specifically what this involves.

A. The Exhortation – “Be imitators of God”

The expression “Be” is GINESTHE, literally “you be.” It is a present tense imperative, thus Paul is not dealing with some kind of option. *Imitators* is from the word MIMĒOMAI. Our English word *mimic* is derived from this. The Greek word means to follow after, to pattern

oneself along the same lines. The word is used in the relation of a pupil to his teacher, or, rather, of a disciple to his master. “It can describe the power of the educational process as well as the goal of education... Plato’s relationship to Socrates was that of an imitator in the best sense.”² To pattern one’s life after God is not accomplished overnight. It is a life-long process.

B. The Encouragement – “...as dearly loved children”

The reason for imitating God is simple; believers are His children, His beloved ones. The specific area where they are to pattern themselves after God is His mercy and forgiveness. The exhortation is immediately connected with the last verse of Chapter 4. This is not done in the energy of the flesh. Believers are “born of God”; they are indwelt by the Spirit of God. “There is a world of difference between doing good works on a legalistic basis of trying to make ourselves worthy to be good enough for God to accept, and good works out of love because we are God’s children.”³

II. THE PATH – v. 2

“The corresponding responsibility for the believer is the imitation of Christ. Like mortification, this is a notion which, because of its abuse, has often fallen into disuse among evangelical Christians. But it is thoroughly biblical. Union with Christ for the Thessalonians meant that they ‘became imitators of the Lord’ (I Thessalonians 1:6). We are to have the ‘mind of Christ’ (I Corinthians 2:16), who left his disciples an example ‘that you should do as I have done for you’ (John 13:15). When Peter urges slaves to live as Christians, he tells them: ‘Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you would follow in his steps’ (I Peter 2:21).⁴

A. The Exhortation – “... and live a life of love”

The word translated “live” is PERIPATEITE, literally to walk, present imperative. This word is used eight times in Ephesians. Paul’s language implies a certain pathway that believers are to walk. In I Corinthians 13 the Apostle calls love “a way.” The word “love” requires explanation, especially in our day and age. The word is the well-known AGAPĒ, a self-sacrificing, giving love.

B. The Example – “...just as Christ loved us”

The word trans. “just as” is KATHŌS. It introduces a reason, a comparison, and a quote. It is used here to emphasize why believers are to walk in love. How did Christ love us?

1. ITS EVIDENCE: “...and gave himself up for us” He gave (PAREDŌKEN, comp. with. 5:25 and Galatians 2:20; Romans 4:25) Himself (comp. Isaiah 53:9, 12) for (HUPER, lit. on behalf of, in the place of, instead of, the preposition stresses substitution) us (i.e. believers).
2. ITS EFFECT: “...as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The word for “fragrant offering” is PROSPHORA. It’s Heb. counterpart is MINHAH. The Gk. word for “sacrifice” is THYSIA. The Heb. Is ŌLĀH. The first term could refer to the burnt offering, lit. for an odor of a sweet smell, an expression used in the O.T. in connection with whole burnt offering, in whose ritual the element of consecration was very prominent. The second term has direct reference to the blood sacrifice used in the sin offering.

CONCLUSION: Christ gave Himself up in death for us. This was the supreme evidence of His love for His sheep. Paul marshaled this doctrine forward as an example for the imitation of believers in

their conduct towards one another. “A further motive, however, for urging its imitation is derived from the fact that this act of Christ was supremely pleasing to God. Hence it is described in sacrificial terms not only, but in such sacrificial terms as strongly bring out this, its character as something in which God takes delight... The death of Christ, then, is here described as an act upon which the highest divine approval rested.”⁵

What is so clearly taught regarding the believer’s daily walk rests upon one of the greatest doctrines in the Bible. Paul has instructed; now he says in effect, “This is the way... walk ye in it. You know the truth, now put it into your lives.” To borrow an expression from James, “be ye doers of the Word, and not merely hearers.” (James 1:22-25).

¹ J.M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1977), p. 171.

² M. Barth, *Ephesians: The Anchor Bible II* (Doubleday, 1960), p. 555.

³ Erroll Hulse, *The Believer’s Experience* (Zondervan, 1978), p. 125.

⁴ S.B. Ferguson in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* ed. D.L. Alexander (IVP, 1987), p. 66.

⁵ G. Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* ed. R.B. Gaffin, Jr. (P&R, 1980), p. 377.