

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Ephesians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	10		Josh Walker
Text:	Ephesians 5:1-2		
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IMITATE GOD’S SELF-SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Introduction

We continue our journey through Ephesians this morning. Our passage this morning is Paul’s summation of everything he has been saying thus far in Ephesians, about the unity of the body of Christ—the Church, us—from back at the start of chapter 4. This is what the word “therefore” in verse 1 is indicating. Further, this comes right on the heels of Paul calling us to forgive each other just as God has forgiven us in Christ. So, as we will see, the call to be like God is, in part, a call for us to forgive as God forgives. Besides forgiveness, our passage this morning highlights how Paul wants the church, and by extension how God wants you and me, to live out the unity we have together in Christ. So, our passage outlines for us what this unity is to look like for us. Paul outlines for us how we are to go about making this unity a reality in our congregation. That is, our unity is found as we are called to be an imitator of God’s self-sacrificial love. For Paul, then, our unity is to be worked out in our lives as we imitate the example Jesus set for us on the cross. This morning we will look at this command to be like Christ *under two points: first*, imitate God as beloved children, and *second*, imitate God with a self-sacrificial love. Let me repeat that: we will look at this command to be like Jesus under two points: *first*, imitate God as beloved children, and *second*, do this with a self-sacrificial love. Let’s examine each of these points in turn.

Imitate God as beloved children (5:1)

“The continuous display of love for one another is the epitome of what it means to be a Christian. Abundant and self-sacrificial love is the very nature of God himself. Paul thus calls believers to emulate their God and display the likeness of their father, which Christ himself has already shown us how to do.

Ephesians 4:32b, “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”¹

“‘Therefore’ closely links this admonition to that immediately preceding statement that ‘God...forgave you in Christ,’ but also to the whole of 4:32, which speaks of God’s kindness and tenderheartedness. Because God forgives, his children should also be forgiving, and thereby imitate their Father.”²

“The principle idea expressed in the exhortation to ‘be imitators of God’ in this context is the manifestation of love to fellow believers. One of the most tangible ways of displaying this love is by showing genuine forgiveness each and every time someone offends. There are a variety of additional ways that people can imitate God, but the display of love, especially in self-sacrificial ways, is the lofty example that Paul holds up in the passage. Paul uses the same language of imitation to encourage the Corinthians to follow his example insofar as he imitates Christ Jesus (1 Cor 11:1).”³

“As in 4:32, it is vital to see that believers do not *become* children or acquire God’s love by imitating him, but they *are* children and so in consequence imitate him. The fact that Christians are members of God’s household with free access to their Father has already been stated (2:18–19; 3:13; cf. Rom 5:2), but now, in God’s ‘beloved’ Son (1:6), Paul affirms that believers—formerly ‘by nature children of wrath’ (2:3)—are now adopted (1:5), beloved children (2:4).”⁴

“The concept of being imitators of God is found in Hellenistic Judaism, particularly in Philo. He cites Plato and urges his readers to flee from earth to heaven. This flight meant to become like God, and it involved becoming holy, just, and wise, which is similar to the present context where the new person is ‘created in God’s likeness in righteousness and holiness’ (4:24).”⁵

Imitate God with a self-sacrificial love (5:2)

“The ultimate demonstration of love is Jesus’ act of laying down his life for his people to procure their forgiveness of sins and bring them into relationship with God. His willing sacrifice serves as the hallmark example defining what it truly means to love.”⁶

“The term ‘sacrifice’ is the most common term in the LXX [(the Greek version of the Old Testament)] to refer to the ritual of animal sacrifice.”⁷

“‘Walk in love’ (5:2a) is the summary theme of the exhortation in Ephesians (and in the Bible) and may serve as the distillation of the two great summary statement of God’s royal law (Jas 2:8): to Love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.”⁸

“Paul has depicted in the strongest possible terms the contrast between the readers’ previous way of life in the society of his day and their present existence in Christ. The standards presented in this passage are very different from the lifestyle of the surrounding world.”⁹

“Love—defined by the example of Christ—is the epitome of all the virtues. The most significant virtue Paul commands is love (5:2). If believers truly love one another, none of the vices he mentions will be a problem and all of the other virtues will naturally be practiced.”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹Arnold, Clint E., *Ephesians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2010), 309.

²Arnold, *Ephesians*, 309.

³Arnold, *Ephesians*, 309.

⁴Baugh, S. M., *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Lexham Press, 2016), 402.

⁵O’Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1999), 353.

⁶Arnold, *Ephesians*, 311.

⁷Arnold, *Ephesians*, 311.

⁸Baugh, *Ephesians*, 403.

⁹O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 355-56.

¹⁰Arnold, *Ephesians*, 313.