Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Walking in Love, Part 1
Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-2
Code: 1931

In Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 1 through 7, we have one of the most wonderful and helpful passages in all of the book of Ephesians. It touches on the very heart of the Christian life, the subject of love, and you'll note in verse 2 the little phrase, "walk in love." Nothing could be a more beautiful or direct definition of how we are to live as Christians in terms of behavior than that. I want to read these seven verses to you so that you'll see the total setting, and then we'll discuss the first couple of verses this morning. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

But fornication, all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not fitting: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." Now obviously, this is a practical passage. Just as a brief overview, let me say this. I believe that God is really teaching us the same lesson again and again, and it's not calculated on my part, we just keep running into it everywhere.

And I think in the past month or so, the Lord has been causing all of Grace Church to focus on a great truth, and that is that unless our life right now manifests righteous character, there is a real possibility that we're not saved at all. If you've been with us in the last few weeks, you know we've been seeing that. That is precisely at the heart of this text also. If you are a fornicator, or an unclean person, or a covetous person, you have no inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ. I think the Lord is saying something to us, and I'm really concerned about it, because a church our size can easily hide people who have really no living relationship with God.

Who are religious, who are superficial, who maybe made – quote, unquote – a decision, who walked an aisle, who prayed a prayer, but who have no present living evidence to verify genuine salvation. And it seems to me that no matter what passage we come to, it seems to be the heart of it, and in verse 6 again, there are some people who want to deceive. There are people who want to deceive by selling a counterfeit kind of love, and the world's counterfeit love involves fornication, and adultery, and covetousness, and uncleanness, and all of that stuff. But we are not to buy the counterfeit; if we're true Christians, our lives will be not characterized by the counterfeit, but real love.

In fact, you know it haunts me all the time, even in my own life, that in 1 John, chapter 4, John said this: “God is love, and he that loves knows God.” And if you don’t love, you don’t know God, no matter what you claim. If your life isn’t characterized by love, you don’t know God. If you don’t love your brother, the love of God doesn’t dwell in you. And so the apostle Paul is saying the same thing we’ve been learning, and he’s saying it in this sense, walk in love. And if there’s no love in your life, or if it’s the counterfeit stuff that the world is offering, you’re not in the kingdom, no matter what you think. Now, let me go to this passage, and look with me at verse 1. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”

Now, I want to pull that phrase out, followers of God; the Greek word is *mimts*, from which we get mimic. Be mimics of God. And a mimic is not someone who picks up general patterns, but someone who copies specific characteristics. Be imitators, be mimics of God. And beloved, let me say this to you: the whole of the Christian life could be summed up in that one statement – be mimics of God – that’s it. Reproduce in you everything that is true of God. It all began that way, didn’t it, in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 48, when our Lord said, “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” That is essentially what Peter was saying in 1 Peter 1:15 and 16, and in that wonderful passage, Peter says this: “But as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life; Because it is written, ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy.’”

Peter said, “You be like God.” The apostle Paul said, “You be followers of me, as I am of God.” The apostle Paul said, “Gaze into the glory of the Lord and allow the Spirit of God to change you into His image.” The ultimate goal of the Christian life in 1 John is in chapter 3, that one day “we should be like him; for we should see him as he is.” In other words, the whole of the Christian life is summed up in this: be imitators of God, be like God. If you’re fumbling around trying to get a handle on what God wants out of you, it’s that, which means that the more you know God, the more you know what you’re to be. And so what is the primary pursuit, then, of any believer, to know whom? God. No wonder Paul said, “That I may know him.”

If we are to be like God, we must know what God is like; if we are to know what God is like, we’ve got to study God’s character. And so as we study the Bible, we see unfolded God’s character. By the way, the whole Bible is the revelation of God. It’s God’s self-disclosure. Now, this isn’t just a New Testament principle, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” – comes out of the Pentateuch, Leviticus 11:45. That was the way it was from the very start. God says, “You’re my people and I’m your God, and this is where it all begins: be ye holy, as I am holy.” Leviticus 11:45, it all started there, and it’s the same all the way through. You say, “Well, that’s easy for you to say, ‘be imitators of God,’ tough to do.”

Sure it is, and you can’t do it in your own strength; you can’t just grit your teeth and grunt and muster up all your courage and be like God. And that’s, you see, what Jesus was saying in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you know how you start to be like God? You start by realizing you can’t be like God.

You start with a broken and a contrite spirit, you start mourning over your sin, you start in meekness, you start with such an overwhelming sense of sinfulness that you hunger and you thirst for righteousness. And so there's a fabulous paradox here. On the one hand, you are to be like God; on the other hand, you are to know you can't be like God, see? And that's just the point. When you know you are to be like God, and you know you can't be like God, then you know there's got to be some other power to make that possible.

And that's the beauty of chapter 3 of Ephesians, and verse 17, or verse 16, where he prays that God would "grant us to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." In other words, I am a vile, evil sinner; I can't be like God. God says I must be like Him. If I can't be but I must be, then somebody's got to get inside of me and do what I can't do, do you see? And who is that? "The Holy Spirit who strengthens us with might in the inner man." And you know what the result of it is? The result is at the end of verse 19 and it says this, in order that, *hina*, purpose clause, in order that or with the result that or to the effect that "You would be filled with all the fullness of God."

Listen, Paul is saying here you can be like God, you can be filled with the fullness of God, you can be every whit in terms of God, as far as His qualities are concerned, but you can't do it on your own. You must be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; it is the Spirit's work. So there's the resolution to the paradox. "Oh God, oh God, I'm broken over my sin, I mourn over my sin, my sin is ever before me," said David. And in meekness I hunger and thirst for that which I must have, but cannot have, and it is in the midst of that brokenness that you depend upon the work of Christ and the ministry of the Spirit to do what you can't do but must do. That's the heart of it all, see.

So he says, "You be a mimic of God, but realize that that's God's work, not yours." And therein lies your dependence on the Spirit of God. And by the way, beloved, if you're really a Christian, the Spirit is at work in you, moving to make this a reality, moving to make you like Christ, moving to conform you to God. Now, you might even take that little thought in 5:1, and you could kind of spread it both directions. In chapter 4, verse 1, this whole section of Ephesians, the whole second section, which is the practical section – the first is the doctrinal – this whole practical thing began, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation to which you are called."

The walk concept is the whole deal in the last three chapters. You're to walk; that's daily life, this is your lifestyle. This is your doctrine in chapters 1 to 3; this is doctrine, now here is practice. This is who you are, this is how you live. This is what God has done, this is what you do. Walk worthy. And what does that worthy walk involve? Well, it involves a lot of things. It involves a walk in humility, verses 1 through 3, chapter 4. It involves a walk in unity, verses 4 through 16, chapter 4. It involves a different walk, chapter 4, verses 17 to 32, different, not like the world, look at verse 17 – you "walk not as other Gentiles walk." So it is a humble walk, it is a unity walk, it is a different walk.

And now, in chapter 5, it is a love walk, and then, in verse 8, it is a light walk, and then, in verse 15, it is a wisdom walk, and then, in verse 18, it is a Spirit walk, and then in chapter 6, verse 10, it is a warfare walk, see. In other words, he's simply delineating different elements of the walk. But at the heart of it all – I just love this – right at the heart of it all is this beautiful phrase: be imitators of God. That just brings it all down. If God humbled Himself in Christ, you be humble. If God in His Trinity is one, then you be one. If God is different, set apart from this evil world, then you be different. If God is love, then you be love. If God is light, then you be light. If God is wise, then you be wise.

If God is guided and directed by supernatural, spiritual principles, then you be. If God is the victor over Satan, then you be the victor over Satan. You be like Him. That's it. Have you ever stopped to think about everything you have in Christ? It's incredible – it's incredible what Christ has given us. First three chapters, let me remind you. They tell us these things. We have a new standing before God, a new life, a new righteousness, a new Father, a new inheritance, a new citizenship, a new master, a new freedom, a new victory, a new security, a new peace, a new unity, a new fellowship, a new joy, a new spirit, new power, new ability, a new calling, a new purpose and a new love.

That's a lot of new stuff, and that's all ours in Christ. And you can't help but see this concept of love woven through the first three chapters. It's in chapter 1: "In love having predestinated us." It's in chapter 2, why did He show us mercy? "For his great love wherewith he loved us." It's in chapter 3: "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." See, woven through the whole deal, our whole position is predicated on God's love, see. And if this is true, he says in chapter 5, you'd better walk in love, this ought to be characteristic. In fact, other places in the Bible tell us love is the key to everything, right? "And now abideth faith, hope, love; and the greatest of these is" – what – "love." Love is the greatest. So we are to walk in love.

Now, I want to show you four points out of these seven verses, and then a closing warning, and we'll have the rest of it – for that part of it, anyway – next week. Four points, the plea, the pattern, the perversion, and the punishment. We see here a plea, a pattern, a perversion, and a punishment, and then a final warning. So we say the first two points are positive, and the second two points are negative. You could see that as I read it, couldn't you? Verses 1 and 2, very positive, verses 3 to 6, very negative, verse 7, a warning. The plea, first of all, verses 1 and 2a. "Be ye therefore followers of God" – mimics of God – "as dear children; and walk in love." Stop right there.

There's the plea. The plea is for us to live a love life. Now, I know we talk about this a lot, and you can't help it, because it's in the Bible a lot, see. But now listen to me people – remember this: preaching or teaching in the church is not designed to impart to you information, which you will retain for the rest of your life, and in accord with which you will live. That just isn't how it is. The secret to preaching and teaching is to keep telling you the same stuff you heard before, but you forgot, in terms of your behavior. So we never apologize for saying something we said before. God doesn't apologize for it, nor do we. And don't you think because you hear the word, and you hear the term and you

know it intellectually, that it isn't for you.

If it isn't operative in your life, you'd better listen more, because you're more accountable than you used to be. The plea is simple. Look at verse 1 now. It's a command. Be imitators of God. It's not a suggestion, it's a command. And sure, you have to start from the point of sinfulness, and sure, you have to start from the fact that you can't do it, but that doesn't change the command. You've got to be what you can't be. That's where the Spirit of God comes in. But you notice the therefore? Which way does that take us? Backwards. I'll tell you one of the things that you have to do when you teach the Bible is you've got to deal with the paragraph before and the paragraph after.

And if you do that, you've got to deal also with the paragraph before the paragraph before, and the paragraph before the paragraph before the paragraph before, because it all hangs together. What is the therefore there for? To take you backwards. Now, watch what it's going to show you. Verse 31: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and public yelling, and private whispering, be put away from you, along with all malice." Now, let me tell you something people: those are the opposite of love. You see, all of those things preclude the fact that there's no love. When you're bitter towards somebody, and you have a grudge against them, and you are angry – and there's two different words used there. Whether it's an outside blast and display of anger, or an internal smoldering anger, or whether it's clamor, where you slander somebody publicly or whether you whisper behind their back, whatever kind of malice it is, that's the opposite of what he's talking about.

On the other hand, those things shouldn't be there. What should be there is verse 32: kindness – "be kind one to another" – tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. Those are characteristics of love; love is kind, love is tender, and most of all, love is what? Forgiving; it is forgiving. And you see, it is a lack of forgiveness that makes bitterness. It is an inability to forgive that makes wrath and anger. It is an inability to forgive that makes you slander people, and whisper behind their back, and hold malice against them. It's because you don't forgive them that you hold those bitternesses and those grudges. And the reason you don't forgive them, folks, frankly, is that you don't what? You don't love them.

So what he's saying here is put away all of the anti-love stuff – don't let that characteristic be manifest. Don't have characteristics of an unloving heart, but have characteristics of a loving heart. He doesn't mention love in verse 32; he mentions kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. And just to be sure you don't miss where that comes from, he says, "Therefore" – in order to be kind, in order to be tenderhearted, and in order to be forgiving, you must imitate God in this regard – "you must walk in" – what – "love." Because it is love that is kind, it is love that is tenderhearted, it is love that it forgiving. It is non-love that is bitter, angry, wrathful, clamorous, vicious, and malicious.

So it's a therefore that takes you right back. The central thought is forgiveness, people. And let me take that this morning and kind of force it into your mind a little bit. Listen to me: measure your love today, would you? There are a lot of ways we could talk about it, but let's deal with the text as it

appears. Measure your love today by the thought of forgiveness, will you? Because I really believe – now, hang onto this – I really believe that, as far as we're concerned, the greatest measuring rod of love in your life is forgiveness, okay? I mean that's the way God even presents His love.

You see, we could say, "Oh, God so loved the world that He made pretty flowers. God so loved the world that He made beautiful ladies, handsome men. God so loved the world that He made delicious food. God so loved the world that He said nice words. God so loved the world that He made trees and mountains." Well, that's nice, but it doesn't – it's not – something missing. God so loved the world that He took a whole bunch of dirty, rotten, vile, God-hating sinners, and died on the cross to bear their sins, so that He could bring them into His eternal heaven and fellowship with them forever. *Whew*, that's something; that's better than trees and flowers and pretty ladies. That's better than anything. You see, what I'm saying is this: love is best measured in its ability to forgive, see, that's the thing.

You see, here's what he says: it is God's ability to forgive that tells us His love. Even when we were dead in trespasses and sin, God made us alive together with Christ, and why? Because of His great mercy, based on His great love with which He loved us. The most magnanimous act that love can ever do is forgive the greatest evil. Measure your love. Ask yourself, do you love? The children of God love. If you don't love, 1 John 4 says you're not of God. You say, "Well, how do I know if I don't love?" Just ask yourself a question; do you have any bitterness against somebody for something they did to you? Do you get angry with people; does it smolder inside? Do you speak maliciously behind their back? Do you verbally assault them clamorously?

See, those are the characteristics of non-love, that's the old life. And you've got to put the old life away, right? That's gone, see, that's gone. Look at the end of verse 32. We are to forgive, and here's the key to this whole passage, and it's used twice, once in verse 32, and once in chapter 5, verse 2. We are to forgive "as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This thing just jumped off the page and hit me this morning when I was preaching, first service. I'd thought about it, but it never quite crystallized. I don't know if I can say it like I did then, but you know what I saw? And I think I saw it for the first time this clearly; part of the adventure of preaching is you learn as you go, you know?

But you know, I never really thought of it this way. You know, no matter what anybody does to me – this is interesting – no matter what anybody does to me, in the family of believers, in the community of believers – no matter how they hurt me, or harm me, or slander me, or crush me, or bruise me, or wound me, or offend me, or whatever it is – Christ has already paid the penalty for that sin. Did you get that? You say, "Boy, what they did to me. Oh, I'm going to make them suffer." Want to know something? You'd better think twice; Christ already suffered for what they did to you. What more do you want? Well, that's a revolutionary thought. What are you asking out of God? Jesus bore in His own body our sins.

If somebody sins against me, and somebody violates me, and somebody offends me, and my reaction in the human flesh would be to be angry, and bitter, and wrathful, and malicious, and slanderous, I stop and think, “But wait a minute, I don’t want anything out of them. After all, Jesus already bore that sin in His own body on the tree.” Jesus already spilled His blood for that sin. What am I going to ask, what do I want, what more could there be? So next time you think you ought to have a vengeful attitude, next time you want to lash back at somebody, the next time you want to say an unkind word, or you want to be bitter towards somebody, next time you want to slander somebody, or whisper behind their back, or retaliate, or seek vengeance to somebody, remember that the very sin that they used against you, the very thing they did to you, Jesus already bore in His own body on the cross.

And that sin is paid for, and you don’t have to add anymore to the, to the suffering and the consequence that that sin should bring; it’s all been taken by Christ on the cross, it’s already a dealt-with thing. And so we are to forgive, verse 32 says, “even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.” You know what God says? You know, you and I offend God a lot. I offend God a lot, and so do you, and God doesn’t say, “MacArthur, I’ve taken as much as I can take out of you; that is the last time. Take that!” No, you know what God says? “MacArthur, what can I do to you? My Son, He already bore the blows, there’s nothing left to do, it’s over.” God for Christ’s sake forgives you. You for Christ’s sake forgive each other. And the measure of your love is the extent of your ability to forgive.

It’s a fantastic truth. You say, “Well, you just can’t go on forgiving forever; the guy does it every day.” Yeah, well, you can go on forgiving forever. First John 2:12: “My little children, he has forgiven you all your trespasses for his name’s sake.” Colossians 2: “He’s forgiven all your sins.” It’s fantastic. Ephesians 1: “In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” If we are the ones confessing our sins, then we are the ones being forgiven, and constantly cleansed, 1 John 1:9 – just constantly cleansed. And God looks down at me, and He says, “You keep sinning, but I can’t do a thing to you because Jesus already took the punishment.” And then He says to us, “Now, that’s the way I want you to walk.

“I want you to walk in the same kind of love, that never holds bitterness, never holds a grudge, never holds anything against anybody, because you know that that thing has already been dealt with by Jesus Christ. What more could you want?” And if blessed God, holy God, righteous God can forgive that person, and take that sin and put it on His dear Son, who are you to demand blood out of somebody? That’s what happens on this side of the cross, folks. Now, let me develop another thought. The fact is this – and we can split this concept into two parts. The depth of your love is indicated by how much you forgive. Look at your life; how much do you forgive? Proverbs 10:12 says this: “Love covers all sins.” Love covers all sins.

In other words, total love is total forgiveness. Peter put it this way, 1 Peter 4:8: you are to have stretched love, fervent love – *ekten*s, speaks of a muscle stretched to its limits. You are to love to the

very limits, “for love covers a” – what – “multitude of sins.” How big is your multitude? Well, however broad your love is, that’s how big the multitude is. God knows if you love you’re going to have to let people off the hook. God knows if you love you’re going to have to forgive. God knows love has to deal with sin, but love does, by covering it. It means just throwing a blanket over it, removing it, putting it out of sight. So first of all, the depth of your love is indicated by how much you forgive.

Now, think about it. Do you hold a grudge against somebody in your house? It isn’t their problem; that’s your problem. Your inability to forgive belies your love, and I say to you, if this is characteristic of your life, you’re not a Christian, because if you don’t have love, you’re not God’s child. Think about it. Second thing I want to say about this – first is the depth of your love is indicated by how much you forgive, and secondly, the depth of your love is indicated by how much you know you’ve been forgiven. Did you get that? First of all, you can tell a person’s love by how much they will forgive somebody else, and you can also tell by how much they know they’ve been forgiven.

I’ll tell you something, a church is an interesting place. I read that letter this morning about a lady who wants to come here, from jail. She’s been a criminal, sent to jail. We have other people like that in this church; we have ex-cons, people who’ve served over ten years. We have people who’ve done everything in this; we’ve got a sordid bunch here. We have ex-fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, liars, effeminate, homosexuals; we’ve got a whole bunch of those kinds of people. We’ve got just everyday rotten self-righteous, former self-righteous, works-oriented people. We’ve got a lot of people like that. But you know something? I never cease to be amazed that it is inevitably the people who have the greatest sense of forgiveness in their lives who grant to others the greatest forgiveness. Did you ever notice that?

It is always the smug, self-righteous, religious people who can’t forgive somebody for something in the past, who can’t let them off the hook. You know, you get a person in the church, for example, who’s a former drunk, alcoholic, prostitute, criminal, and they come to Jesus Christ, and then a little later on, somebody else comes along with a terrible, deep, sinful problem, that kind of person will say, “Why, you know I’ll forgive them. After all, look what the Lord did to me; the Lord did that to me.” On the other hand, you get somebody, “Well, I’ve gone to church all my life; I’ve been in the religious *foomp*, *foomp*, *foomp*, see?” Somebody comes along, and somebody’s got a little – “Why, I look down on that person, *foomp*, see – The riffraff in the church.”

Yeah, but you know that the fact of the matter is that guy’s sin is probably worse than prostitution, because religious super-“piousity” was the worst thing of all. But you see, it’s the people who know they’ve been forgiven the most who are able to forgive. Now, let me show you an illustration of this. Look at Luke 7, and you see these two people contrasted here, in Luke 7, and we see a beautiful picture of our Lord. Verse 37, verse 36 sets it up: “One of the Pharisees” – by the name of Simon, not Peter, but another one, Simon – “desired Jesus to eat with him. And he went to this Pharisee’s house, and he sat down to eat.” Now watch what happens.

“And, behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner” – now, here’s a woman who’s evil, vile, no doubt a prostitute, just really, a rotten, wretched woman – “when she knew Jesus was eating in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster box of ointment.” Now, we don’t have time to go into all of what that signifies, but that thing would be very costly; and it may have been also purchased by her with money that she gained from her trade, which would be prostitution, so it’s kind of a strange situation. So she comes in the house where the Pharisee is entertaining Jesus, “And she stood at his feet behind him” – that is, Jesus – “weeping” – a broken and a contrite spirit, mourning over sin.

“And she began to wash his feet with tears, and she did wipe them with the hair of her head, and she kissed his feet, and she anointed them with the ointment.” Now, that’s an absolutely shocking scene. If she’d have done that to the Pharisee, he’d have turned around and slapped her across the mouth, he’d have had his servants pick her up and throw her in the street; “How dare you touch a clean person, you vile, filthy woman?” And verse 39 indicates that. “When the Pharisee who had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, ‘This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him; for she’s a sinner.’” Oh, the self-righteousness is incredible.

He didn’t have any forgiveness in his heart, and you know why? He didn’t think he needed to be forgiven for anything, and you will forgive in measure as you comprehend your own forgiveness, see? You will love as you comprehend that love of God toward you, and the deeper your sin the greater your sense of forgiveness, and the more magnanimous your love and forgiveness to someone else. Well, he didn’t have any sense of sin, so he didn’t have any sense of forgiveness. And I like this – he was saying it in himself, not out loud, and then Jesus answered him – isn’t that great? Hoo oh boy, a few of those deals and you’d be shaken; He can read your mind. “And Jesus answering said unto him, ‘Simon, I have somewhat to say to you.’”

And he got his pious voice “And he said, ‘Master, say on.’” “‘There was a certain creditor’” – Jesus was a master of illustrations. “‘There was a certain creditor and he had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred denarii’” – a denarii is about a day’s work – “‘and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.’” Nice guy, right? “‘Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?’” Hmm. “Simon answered, and said, ‘I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.’ And he said unto him, ‘Thou hast rightly judged.’” And he got the point, see. “And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, ‘Simon, you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet: but she’s washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head.

“‘You gave me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil you did not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’” Oh, what a terrible indictment. “The reason she loves Me so, the reason she’s

doing this to Me, the reason she's responding like this to Me, you see, is because she loves much, and the reason she loves much is because she has a deep sense of sin, and seeks a deep forgiveness." And Jesus turned to her, "And he said" – verse 48 – "'Thy sins are forgiven.'" He forgave her much, and she loved much.

You see, the ability to love depends upon how deeply you sense the love of God. The ability to forgive somebody else is dependent upon how much you know you've been forgiven. Here was a smug, self-righteous Pharisee, who thought he was so righteous, and so good, and so wonderful that he didn't even need forgiveness. He didn't even talk to Jesus like that woman did. He wasn't interested in washing Jesus' feet, he wasn't interested in serving Jesus in the way she did. All he wanted was a theological discussion to find out if this guy was who He was cracked up to be, and from the very beginning, he didn't believe it anyway, because he said, "Ah, if He was a prophet, He wouldn't mess with this woman."

His own self-righteousness damned him. He never needed Jesus. He had no ability to forgive a harlot because he had no sense of forgiveness in his own life, because he had no need, he had no sense of sin. And the point is this, people: that man should have realized that if those two sinners were matched side by side, he was the greater one. Because it is the ultimate sin to say, "I don't need God" – it's the ultimate sin. And so I say to you that dependent upon the depth of your own sense of forgiveness will be your ability to forgive somebody else. And you love little because you sense God's love little; you love much because you sense much love in your forgiveness. A beautiful story.

Here is a broken sinner, who knew she desperately needed forgiveness, and she would need much forgiveness, and on the basis of much forgiveness, there was much love. Sometimes I think those are the kind of people that ought to populate the church more than the others. We don't need people who think they don't need anything; we don't need people who already think they're okay. I remember the story Robert Falconer told, and he was sitting in a group of poor, destitute people, including people of the street, prostitutes and evil people, and he was telling them this story, and he was trying to show them that Jesus would forgive them. And he was reading to them, and his biographer says, "Someone sobbed out loud, and he looked and it was a young, slender girl, with a face disfigured by smallpox, and except for a tearful look it wore, it was poor and expressionless.

"Falconer said something gentle to her, and then she said, 'Will He ever come again?' sobbing. 'Who?' said Falconer. 'Oh, Him, Jesus Christ, the one who forgave the woman. I have heard tell, I think, that He will come again.' 'Why do you ask?' said Falconer. 'Because,' she said with a fresh burst of tears, which rendered the rest of her words unintelligible. And then she recovered herself in a few moments, and as if finishing her sentence, she put her hand up to her poor, thin, colorless hair and said, 'Sir, can't He wait a little while? My hair ain't long enough to wipe His feet.'" She loved much because she was loved much.

And so what is going on here in Ephesians – now you can look back at it – is our Lord is saying this: God loved us, and forgave us, and that's the way we are to be with each other. No bitterness, no anger, no wrath, nothing. And in great measure, beloved, your ability to forgive is absolutely dependent on your ability to love, and you will love and forgive little if you see yourself forgiven little. If you see yourself as a vile, broken sinner, poor, and destitute, and desperate, forgiven much, then you will forgive much. That's it, people, measure your love; you love because you've been forgiven much, and you love and that causes you to forgive others much. So we are, in this sense, to be like God. And the Spirit can do it.

You might say, like Zophar said, "Oh, to be like God; canst thou by searching find out God? His ways are past finding out, how can we be like God?" It's impossible. If we take our world's definition and we think God is a benign Santa Claus, maybe we have a shot at it. But if we take the Bible definition, we must say with Peter, "Depart from me, Oh Lord, for I am a sinful man." We must say with John – I see him in Revelation, chapter 1 – he has a vision of Christ, and he says, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as a dead man." To be like God; incredible. How could such a thing be? Luke 6:36, "As your Father in heaven is merciful, you be merciful." First Peter 1, "As he is holy, you be holy." Matthew 5:48, "As he is perfect, you be perfect." First John 4:11, "As he is loving, you be loving." Be like Him.

Is it possible? Sure, it is. Number one: it's possible by regeneration. Second Peter 1:4 says that when you were regenerated, you became a partaker of the divine nature. That's incredible; you can be like God because God lives in you, right? You're a partaker of the divine nature by regeneration. Number two: by sanctification, as the Spirit of God works in the life of the believer to conform him to the image of God. And beloved, Paul is saying, "You know, if you're going to call yourself a child of God, act like it, will you?" I was sitting in a restaurant yesterday – Friday, I guess – and we were talking to someone, and he said, "You know, he claims to be a Christian, but you never see God in his life."

He claims to be a Christian, but you never see God in his life, he's saying about an individual. He would always say he was a Christian, but when you watched him, it never showed. Alexander the Great was going through his army, and there was a soldier with the same name, Alexander. And that soldier was brought before Alexander for acts of cowardice in the midst of battle, and Alexander looked him in the eye and said, "Soldier, drop your cowardice or drop your name." That's fair. If you name the name of Jesus, and you name the name of God, then walk like He walked. Isn't that what 1 John 2:6 says? "He that says he abide in him ought even to walk as he walked." First Corinthians 16:14 sums it up: "Let all your things be done in love."

Love is to qualify everything in our life. This has always been God's standard. You say, "This is a New Testament thing." No, no. It's always been God's standard; the heart of everything is love. From the very first time God ever laid out a standard, it was love. You say, "Well, wait a minute. The ten commandments, boy, that was crushing law, legalism." No, it was love. Did you know that the ten

commandments are nothing but ten aspects of love verbalized? That's all they are. Ten aspects of love verbalized. Look with me at Exodus 20, and I'll show you, very briefly, maybe something you never thought of before. Ten aspects of love verbalized; it's a fabulous thing, first of all toward God, and secondly, toward others.

Love toward God in the first four commands; love toward others in the last six. Are you ready? Here they come. First: love is loyal. Love is loyal is what He's saying, verse 3: "Thou shall have no other gods before me." That's the way love is, love is loyal, not fickle, but loyal. God is just saying, "Would you love Me enough not to leave Me for some other god?" Your wife says, "Would you love me enough not to leave me for another woman?" You see? Your friend says, "Would you love me enough not to go and find somebody else?" That's love; love is loyal, that's all He's saying. This isn't anything different. Love is loyal, it doesn't make other gods, it isn't fickle, doesn't turn its back.

Second: love is faithful; faithfulness is loyalty extended. Love is faithful. "Don't make any graven image" –carved image – "of anything in heaven above, or in earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Don't bow down to them or serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy on thousands of them that" – what – "that love me." In other words love is loyal, and love is faithful. And God's saying, "If you love Me, you're not going to be fickle, and if you love Me" – that's the negative – "you're not going to leave Me, but you're going to stick to Me, and you're going to be faithful."

And then third, love is reverent; verse 7: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain." I've heard people say, "You can't talk about my wife like that," boom, you know? "You can't slander my friend" – do you feel that way about God? Love is reverent. If you love God, you're not going to use His name in vain; you're not going to drag His reputation through the gutter. Love is reverent. Fourth – I love this – love is intimate – love is intimate. Beautiful. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, nor thy son, thy daughter, manservant, maidservant, cattle, stranger in thy gates; For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth" – and so forth – "the Lord blessed the Sabbath, and hallowed it."

Love is intimate; do you know what love does? It draws aside for intimacy. God is saying, "You know, if you love Me you don't just go live your life, you come apart to Me. You want to be with Me, you want to fellowship with Me, you want to drop the cattle, and the activities, and the land, and the busyness, and you want to be with Me." And that's the way love is, you see; love is loyal, and faithful, and reverent, and intimate. That's all He's talking about is loving Him; that's all He wants. Why, when it was all summed up, when the whole deal was summed up, Jesus said the whole thing can be summed up in these words, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Right? That's it.

And the second part of the commandments are toward men, and what is He saying there? Toward men, it's love again; look at verse 12. First of all, love is respectful – love is respectful. "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Love is not lawless, it is not rebellious, it is respectful, it gives honor to people. One of the great characteristics of love is love always seeks to say the best about everyone; love always seeks to aid and help, assist and honor. Love is respectful. Secondly, love is harmless; where there is true love there would be no injury, and so He says in verse 13, "Thou shalt not murder." Love wouldn't murder. Love is harmless, it hurts no one, it helps.

Next one, love is pure; oh, love always seeks the purity of another, so "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Adultery defiles, but love seeks only purity. And then another, love is unselfish, He says. Love is unselfish. "Thou shalt not steal." Love doesn't steal, love what? It gives. It gives; it doesn't take, it gives. And then number nine is in verse 16: love is truthful. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Well, if you lie against your neighbor, you're trying to hurt him; if you love your neighbor, you say the truth. Love is truthful. Finally, love is content. Love is content. It doesn't want its neighbor's house, doesn't want his neighbor's wife, nor anything he has; it's content.

It's content in this sense: love says, "I'm so glad you have that stuff. My happiness is in your possessing it." Do you see what I'm trying to say? Love toward God: love is loyal, faithful, reverent, intimate. Toward men, it's respectful, harmless, pure, unselfish, truthful, and content. You see, even the Ten Commandments, beloved, say the same thing: be like God, God loves. And the second commandment, Jesus said He summed up all those last six. The first one, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; And thy" – what – "neighbor as thyself." If you love your neighbor, I'll tell you something: you'll respect him, you'll never harm him, you'll treat him with purity, unselfishness, truth, and you'll be content not to have what he possesses.

That's all Jesus was saying; in Mark 12, He made that statement summing up the law. No wonder Paul said, "The whole law is fulfilled in this: love, love, love." Be like God people, love like God loves, and God forgives people who offend Him. So we see the plea, walk in love. Now, I want you to see the pattern, very quickly, and we'll close – the pattern. "As Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." Now listen, here is the pattern. You say, "Love like God loved, how does God love?" Well, God loves in this way: He forgives sin. And it doesn't matter how bad the sin, how continuous the sin, He forgives it.

"Well, who's the example of the pattern?" It's none other than Christ. Now, I want you to see something here, it's very important, listen: "As Christ also hath loved us." Now, catch this one, people. I believe – and I've said it a lot of different ways in years past, but I'm going to say it another way this morning; I want you to get the message. I believe that biblical love is not an emotion. Please, it is not an emotion. It is never defined as an emotion. It is an act of self-sacrificing giving. I'll tell you, if we

had a little of that kind of love in our marriages, it would make a difference. People say, “Well, I don’t love her anymore.” Then you’re a sinner. That’s right. At least once in your life, can’t you commit yourself to love somebody, not for what you get out of it? Just one person, God says.

Find one person, and cleave to that one person, and give yourself to that one person, if you never got anything out of it, and you’ll know what it is to know the love of Jesus Christ, who didn’t love us because of what He’d get out of it, but loved us in spite of the hurt. You see, it is a love that doesn’t exist on the basis of reciprocation, that’s the point. It’s that humble, obedient, self-giving, self-sacrificing love that says, “I love. I love not for what I get out of it. I love because it’s my nature to love.” If you don’t love somebody, if you’ve dissolved a friendship, or a marriage, or something else, and you don’t love somebody, that’s not their problem, that’s your problem. That’s a sin. Love, biblical love is not conditional; it is unconditional.

Our dear Lord is washing the feet of the disciples, in John 13, while they’re being so unloving to Him, so indifferent to Him. He’s going to the cross; they could care less. They’re arguing about who’s going to sit on His right and left hand in the Kingdom. They want to know who’s going to be glorified in the Kingdom, which of them are going to be the hotshots, and He’s going to the cross; they are indifferent. And He gets down and blesses them and washes their feet, and He loved them in the midst of their most ugly moments. Because it wasn’t reciprocal – He died on the cross, and He said of those people standing there spitting on His face, “Father” – what – “forgive them.” It’s that kind of non-reciprocal, unconditional, not what-I-can-get- out-of-it stuff that God is after.

In fact, it says in verse 2 – watch this – that when Christ did that, and gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice, it went up to God as a sweet-smelling savor. The whole act of Christ smelled good to God, because it was His kind of love, it was independent, and it was unconditional. God loved that; it was sweet in His nostrils. You say, “What does it mean, what does that mean?” Well, Philippians 4:18 says it: “An odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.” It is simply a symbol that God was well pleased. You’ll remember in Leviticus, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, you have five offerings. The first three offerings, the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering, are in chapters 1 to 3. These were required of Israel.

Now, you remember that the burnt offering speaks of Christ’s total devotion to God, how He literally gave His life. The meal offering speaks of His perfection, and the peace offering speaks of His making peace between God and man, and those three offerings are sweet-smelling savors. Because God is pleased with the devotion of Christ; God is well pleased with the perfection of His character; God is well pleased that He made peace between God and man. But in Leviticus, 4 and 5, there are two other offerings, the sin offering and the trespass offering. Listen – they are not sweet-smelling offerings. They are a stench in the nostrils of God, because even though they depict Christ, both of them depict Christ bearing sin.

And it was at that point that He turned His back on Christ, and Christ cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Because it’s no sweet-smelling savor to the nostrils of God to see sin. While Christ was a sin bearer, there was no sweet smell in that aspect; but when God looked at the perfection in His character, and the peacemaking element of His work, and saw the absolute devotion of His love, it rose to His nostrils in the fragrance of incense, sweet. You see, it’s that kind of stuff that pleases God. Do you want to please God, do you want your life to rise to God’s nostrils as a sweet-smelling savor? Then let it be a life of love, let it be a life that’s characterized by unconditional love, which forgives and forgives and forgives, see.

And you know we’re not going to have any grudges, and any bitternesses, and any of those angry times, and malicious times, that’s all gone, see. This ought to characterize your life. This is God’s standard. Let’s pray. Lord, we know that You want us to be like Yourself, and we know we can’t be like You by ourselves. No wonder it is necessary that Christ lives in us. No wonder it is necessary that the Holy Spirit empowers us. No wonder it is necessary that we depend upon a divine resource. Thank You, Lord, for making us realize what we have to be but can’t be, but can be when we know we can’t be and trust You. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

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