



EPHESIANS 4:32-5:2 | Live a Life of Child-like Imitation

Sunday, October 5, 2014 – Pentecost 17A

³² *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

^{5:1} *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [ESV]*

It hasn't been easy. This Father has worked so hard to provide so much for his children. At his child's birth he washed his new child clean. He wiped away the dirt and the grime and wrapped him in beautiful white cloths. He whispered to him, "You are mine." He wrapped his protective arms around this new child and promised never to let go.

When she was a young child, this Father tenderly and patiently instructed and taught her. He slowly and methodically gave her what she needed, making sure to emphasize his love and his compassion to her in every lesson. Sometimes the lessons were tough, sometimes they were abundantly clear, and other times the young child had a hard time understanding what purpose the lesson served. But the Father continued to teach and to train, and the child continued to learn and listen.

When his child was a teenager this Father made every effort to give freedom to his child. He assured him that he had the right knowledge and experience to make smart, wise decisions. This father assured him that he would be with him wherever his child would go and in whatever decisions his child had to make. He continually reminded him of his presence and that he would always be there for him.

When his child got married, the Father was there. How could he not be? He had been so involved in her life thus far that he knew he had to be there on such an important day. Promises were made; rings exchanged; and this Father was so happy for his child. A soulmate had been found. She would have a partner, a companion for life.

Then came time for a child to be born. His child would have a child himself! This Father knew that he had led by example, showing kindness, compassion, mercy, and love to his child. He knew that his child would have the opportunity to follow his example. He knew that he could be a great father himself.

But it's been really hard for this Father. Despite the love, the compassion, the dedication, and the concern, this Father's patience grows thin. His children are rebellious. Despite the cleansing bath at birth his children despise their new clothes. Sometimes they're ashamed of them; sometimes they feel they're too constricting. His children don't appreciate the immense amount of time and effort it takes to protect them—often from themselves! And instead they work to get as far away from their Father as they can. It's shameful how much his children despise his love and protection.

These children have tested this Father's patience. As young children they've become so whiny and discontent. The simple truths that their Father has presented to them have the ability to provide for their future. He's not asking for much; he's not looking for hours and hours of commitment. But even

the short lessons, the few times a week he asks for, the small moments of a day which he craves—even those are met with hostility and anger.

His teenage children aren't much better. While he's allowed them freedom in choices and lives, they're still not happy. His thoughts on life and decision-making aren't what they want to hear. Those things he's asked them to do don't seem like freedoms—they constrict! They're forbidding! They're constraining! And these adolescents test this Father's patience every day as they push the lines and boundaries within their daily freedom.

And then there's the marriage; instead of following his example, this Father's children have manipulated, lied, deceived, and mocked their relationships. They've completely disregarded the amazing example he's set for them, and instead have went looking for their own selfish, self-centered desires with no care or concern for the feelings of their spouses.

If you were the father to these children, would you put up with it? No? Well, you are those children; I am that child. Think about it: God, our Father, has given you a new birth through baptism. As young Christians—spiritually and physically—we often despised his word. We look back and wish we could go back to those simpler days of spiritual milk. As spiritual adolescents we push the limits of our Christian freedom, looking for ways to “bend the rules” and “push the limits” without breaking our God's commands. And as adults in our relationships, not just marriage, but with family and friends, we abuse, we mock, we ridicule, we hate, and we hurt. If I were the father to us, I would have left us long ago.

But he didn't. In fact, he sent another one of his children to us. And we weren't much better in the way we treated him. We mocked him, we ridiculed him, in fact, we killed him. But through our sin God brought salvation. Through our mistakes and problems God brought about good through his Son, Jesus. Jesus was the perfect son, the perfect brother, the perfect friend, and, if he had had children, would have been the perfect father. Jesus is our Savior.

And so as his children we look to God for help! We cry out to him in repentance and sorrow. We seek to be forgiven. And we are. Through Christ and his sacrifice we are given full redemption, the forgiveness of sins. What an amazing act of grace! We truly didn't deserve it, not with the way we have treated our Father. Yet he still calls us by name, he patiently provides for us every day, and he forgives the faults for which we are guilty.

Therefore! That's what Paul said, right? Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly-loved children. That is what we are! How much more could God have loved us than forgiving the unforgivable? How much more could God have loved us than giving one of his own Sons—his only Son!—to die for his adopted children? That's backwards; that's not how you and I would have done it. We would have sacrificed all we had, perhaps even our adopted children, to save our own flesh and blood. But God sacrificed his own flesh and blood to save his own adopted children.

Therefore, imitate him! Put on the qualities of God. Be kind. Take people's words and actions in the kindest possible way. Exhibit Godly love by loving others as you would be loved. Set aside your own selfish desires and concentrate on the needs and wants of others. Be compassionate. Show concern. Cry with someone in pain. Pray for someone in trouble. Help where help is needed.

But most of all forgive. Forgive as God forgave you. Put away all divisions and doubt. Get rid of revenge and grudges. And forgive. Follow God's example. When someone wrongs you or commits a

sin that is so heinous, so wrong, so unforgivable, look in the mirror. Realize who you were. Understand what you've done. And forgive as you have been forgiven.

It won't be easy, dear Christian. But God has never said it would be. It certainly wasn't easy for him. The sacrifice he made was severe—a human life for the Life of humankind. But take heart. Find the strength and courage to imitate God in what he has done for you. Live a life of child-like imitation. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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