

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON SEVENTY-SIX)**

### ***“IMITATORS OF GOD”***

#### **EPHESIANS 5:1-2**

*1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;*

*2 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 sweetsmelling savour.*

In this **Lesson**, we will begin to consider the fifth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In **Lesson 37** we had stated that chapter **4** was an important dividing point in Paul’s letter to the believers in Ephesus and the surrounding regions. We noted then that,

“The first three chapters contain **doctrinal instruction**, the last three chapters contain **exhortation**. This is always the proper order, for it is in doctrine that believers are informed about their exalted position in Christ, which alone makes the exhortation to live holy lives a reasonable one. It is in doctrine that believers become aware of all the resources of grace that they possess, which alone can enable them to obey the exhortation. Until a person has been exposed to sound doctrine, it is unreasonable to expect them to live an exalted Christian life. Persons must first know **who they are in Christ** before they are told **how they ought to live for Christ**...

Accordingly, in the first half of the letter (chapters **1-3**), Paul informs the Ephesian Christians about what God has accomplished for them in

Christ, and as a result, all that they have become in Christ, as well as the resources that He has placed at their disposal to help them to live victorious Christian lives.

In the second half of the letter (chapters 4-6), he exhorts the saints living in Ephesus, to conduct their lives in a manner which would demonstrate that they understood and appreciated all that God had done for them in Christ, all that they had become in Christ, and all the spiritual resources that were now at their disposal...

**The Christian life is not to be based on ignorance but on knowledge,** and the more we are exposed to the **doctrines** of the Bible and the better we understand them, the easier it will be for us to obey the **exhortations** of the Bible.

There are persons who say, 'I am not interested in doctrine, I just want to live a Christian life.' Such persons are revealing their ignorance of the way the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer. It is not possible for a person to live a Christian life if he or she is unaware of their position in Christ and of the resources that are at his or her disposal, which alone can empower him or her to live such a life. There are others who argue that 'It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you live right.' This is a similar confession of ignorance. **What a Christian believes makes all the difference in the world, because what you believe will determine how you behave...**

It is the practice of the writers of the New Testament to **explain the doctrine** to their readers before asking them to **apply the doctrine**. We must not act until we are clear about what the Bible has to say about our action."

In order to emphasize the balance between doctrine and duty in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we looked at the symmetrical structure of the letter.

## THE SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-6
Doctrinal	Practical
The Position of the Believer	The Practice of the Believer
The Believer's Spiritual Wealth	The Believer's Spiritual Walk
The Believer's Blessings	The Believer's Behaviour
How God Sees Us in Christ	How the World Should See Christ in Us
The Privileges of the Believer	The Responsibilities of the Believer
The Work of Christ in Us	The Work of Christ Through us

In chapter **5**, the Apostle Paul continues the exhortations which he had begun in verse **4**.

In **Ephesians 5:1** he writes, *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

*“Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children.”*

The word *“therefore,”* introduces a logical result or inference from what has gone before. Let us remind ourselves of what Paul had written in

verses **25-32** of chapter 4. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*25 Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, because we are members of one another.*

*26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger.*

*27 Do not give the devil an opportunity.*

*28 The one who steals must steal no longer; instead he must labor, doing good with his own hands, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need.*

*29 You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it would give grace to those who hear.*

*30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

*31 You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and slanderous talk—indeed all malice.*

*32 Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*

In this passage, Paul provided the Ephesian believers with a list of specific sins which were characteristic of the “**old man.**” These sins were to be “**put off.**” He also provided a list of the contrasting virtues which were characteristic of the “**new man.**” These virtues were to be “**put on.**” Since the **old man** with all his accompanying lusts has been **put off**, and the **new man**, who is created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth has been **put on**, the life-style of a believer should demonstrate that a radical change has occurred. The word “*therefore*” connects this “**putting off**” of the sins of the “**old man,**” and the

“**putting on**” of the virtues of the “**new man**” with the command to be “*imitators of God.*”

Paul says “*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.*” The Greek word translated “*followers*” or “*imitators*” is **mimétés**: (**mim-ay-tace**) which refers to an imitator. It speaks of the process of observing and replicating the behaviour of another. Our English word “mimic” comes from this Greek word.

The word is always used positively in the New Testament to describe the imitation that arises by admiring the example of someone who is deemed to be worthy of emulation. It is used of believers emulating a God-approved example. Paul is arguing here that children are like their parents. Children probably learn more by watching and imitating than by any other way. **If we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father.**

Brothers and sisters **a mimic does not say anything**. He or she employs the theatrical technique of suggesting action, character, or emotion **without words**. He or she uses only gesture, expression, and movement. Paul is saying in effect here, “Don’t simply talk about God’s love. Live it out; practice it. Don’t tell people that you have it, demonstrate to them that you do, by imitating Him. Do as God does.” If we are to be like God, we must mimic Him and let our actions speak louder than our words by being “*kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you*” (**Ephesians 4:32**).

The word “*Be*” is the translation of the Greek word **ginomai**: (**ghin’-om-ahce**), which means, “to become, to come into being, to bring into existence.” The believers in Ephesus had already been “born again.” They had been justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They had “come into being” so to speak, in the sense that they had been saved and by virtue of that fact, had been **positioned** “in Christ.” But now Paul exhorts them to “come into being” as it relates to their **practice of Christ!**

The verb is in the present imperative. It is a command calling for continual imitation! We are to continually “mimic” God’s attitudes and actions. This command reminds us of Jesus’ words in **Matthew 5:48**: *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”* Our Lord is speaking here of the **consistent direction** of our lives, not the **absolute perfection** of our lives. In other words, the measuring rod by which we are to measure ourselves is God Himself! In this regard, let us consider two passages of Scripture, both as rendered by the **New English Translation**:

### **Matthew 5:43-45**

*43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor’ and ‘hate your enemy.’*

*44 But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you,*

*45 so that you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

### **1 John 4:7-13**

*7 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, **and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God.***

*8 The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

*9 By this the love of God is revealed in us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him.*

*10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*11 Dear friends, **if God so loved us, then we also ought to love one another.***

*12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God resides in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

*13 By this we know that we reside in God and he in us: in that he has given us of his Spirit.*

In both these passages, we are exhorted to imitate God. The basis of the exhortation is God's example which we are to mimic, because we are His Children.

But how can we be imitators of God? We can only do so by imitating Jesus Christ, because He is the One who reveals God to us! The following verses of Scripture bear out this truth:

**John 1:18**

*“No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.”*

**John 5:19**

*“So Jesus answered them, ‘I tell you the solemn truth, the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.’”*

**2 Corinthians 4:6**

*“For God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.’”*

Brothers and sisters, we must imitate our heavenly Father by imitating Jesus Christ. In **1 John 2:3-6**, the Apostle John says,

*3 Now by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments.*

*4 The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person.*

*5 But whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in him.*

*6 The one who says he resides in God ought himself to walk just as Jesus walked.*

**(New English Translation).**

We must be engaged in the process of observing Jesus Christ as He is revealed to us in Scripture, and replicating His behavior. The Holy Spirit who indwells us is desirous of impressing the character of Jesus Christ deep within us, and we must facilitate this process by consistently yielding to Him.

Paul says, *“Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children”* **(New English Translation)**. The word “*as*” is a comparative particle in Greek. Paul is indicating both the **manner** in which the imitation is to be done, and the **reason** for it. He says that believers are the “*dearly loved*” children of God. They have experienced His love and forgiveness and as His dearly loved children they should be motivated to imitate His love and forgiveness.

The words, “*dearly loved*” are a translation of the Greek word **agapétos: (ag-ap-ay-tos’)**, a verbal adjective, derived from **agapé**, which refers to a love called out of one’s heart by the preciousness of the object loved. **Agapétos** is the word that the Father uses to refer to His Son (**Matthew 3:17, Matthew 12:18, Matthew 17:5**).

Amazingly, **agapétos** is also applied to believers as being reconciled to God and judged by him to be worthy of eternal life. It is used to refer to persons who have personally experienced the **agapé**-love of God! (**Romans 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Colossians 3:12**). In other words, God the Father sees us now and **forever** as His very own children, because we are eternally in His Son!

Brothers and sisters, this marvelous truth is highlighted in an almost incredible statement made by our Lord in **John 17:20-23**, as He prayed



to His Father on our behalf. The **New English Translation** translates the passage as follows:

*20 “I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony,*

*21 that they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.*

*22 The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one—*

*23 I in them and you in me—that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me, and you have loved them **just as you have loved me.**”*

Verse **23** contains perhaps the most remarkable expression to ever proceed out of the mouth of Jesus. We are told here that God the Father loves “*His own*” as much as He loves His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ!

The love of God is radically different from our natural way of loving. We are drawn to love persons who are appealing. We are attracted by certain qualities that we find in them that stimulates us in a pleasing way. We love persons for what we find in them. But that is not how God loves.

God loves persons, not for what He finds in them, but for what He finds in Himself. He does not love “*His own*” because they are good. He loves them because He is good. He loves the loveless in order to make them loveable.

The love of God reaches in to the deepest, darkest, nastiest parts of us and embraces us as we are, not as we are considered by others or even by ourselves.

God loves us so creatively, so intimately, so tenderly and so consistently that if we ever came to realize how much He loves us, our self-esteem would immediately be enhanced; our fears would be banished; our defense mechanisms would be dismantled. If we ever realized how much God loves us, we could abandon our self-righteousness; we could stop pretending that we are in control; we could take our masks off and quit being hypocrites. We could become more open, more honest, more authentic; more Christ-like.

Brothers and sisters, if we are indeed the “*dearly loved*” children of God, then we should love each other creatively, intimately, tenderly and consistently!

The **New Living Translation** renders **1 John 4:16-18** in the following way:

*16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.*

*17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.*

*18 Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.*

*19 We love each other because he loved us first.*

*20 If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?*

The **New English Translation** has the following interesting footnote concerning verse **19**: “No object is supplied for the verb *love* (the author with his propensity for obscurity has left it to the readers to

supply the object). The obvious objects that could be supplied from the context are either God himself or other believers (the brethren). It may well be that the author has *both* in mind at this point; the statement is general enough to cover both alternatives, although the following verse [verse20] puts more emphasis on love for the brethren.

The “*dearly loved*” are those to whom the Father has shown the love spoken of in **1 John 3:1-3**. The **New English Translation** furnishes this rendering of the passage:

*1 (See what sort of love the Father has given to us: that we should be called God’s children—and indeed we are! For this reason the world does not know us: because it did not know him.*

*2 Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that whenever it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is.*

*3 And everyone who has this hope focused on him purifies himself, just as Jesus is pure).*

The word “*children*” is a translation of the Greek word **teknon** which refers to a child as viewed in relation to his or her parents or family. It describes those who are regarded as true, genuine children. Earlier in **Ephesians 2:3** Paul used the word **teknon** to indicate that, prior to our conversion, we were, by nature “*children of wrath.*” Now he uses the same word to speak of us as God’s “*dearly loved children.*”

As someone has observed, “What a contrast 3 chapters make!” Paul is saying in effect to his readers, “When you were “*children of wrath,*” you lived in obedience to the devil. Now that you are the “*dearly loved children*” of God, you should now be continually motivated by a desire to walk in a manner pleasing to your new Father.

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that we cannot be imitators of Jesus Christ in our own strength. The only way to

imitate the life of Jesus is by relying on the same power that He relied on to obey His Father. That power was, of course, the Holy Spirit.

**Albert Orsborn**, the 6th General of **The Salvation Army**, wrote the Hymn, *“Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.”* It is my prayer that all of us who worship at **The Grace Workshop Ministries**, will exemplify in our lives, the words of the opening verse of the hymn as we seek to become imitators of God.

*“Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.”  
All His wondrous compassion and purity;  
O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine  
‘Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*