

## **The Love That Forgives**

Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-2

Code: 49-28

We come now to the Word of God, the Scripture, and I ask you to open your Bible to Ephesians, the book of Ephesians. We are working our way through Ephesians and find ourselves at chapter 5, Ephesians chapter 5. And this becomes for us a high point. That's hard to say with regard to Ephesians, because everything seems like a high point. But this is indeed a high point. I want to read the opening seven verses of chapter 5 for you, though we'll only cover the first two; at least you'll have them in mind.

Ephesians 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

"But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

"Let no one deceive you empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them."

This wonderful passage begins in the clouds, it begins in the lofty, heavenly stratosphere of being imitators of God, and it ends down on earth with the sinful lists that are provided for us, which we are to avoid, that lead finally, as verse 6 says, to the wrath of God. And again, we are reminded that we are to have no part with that; and that is a theme all through the book of Ephesians. We saw that, didn't we, back in chapter 4 and verse 22: If you are a believer in Christ, you had a former life. But you laid "aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit." You were "renewed in the spirit of your mind, and [you] put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." This is the very main thrust of this wonderful epistle; and I've been pointing you back to chapter 2, verse 10: We are, as those who have been saved, the workmanship of God, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

We've been learning from the book of Ephesians that salvation is a total transformation. It is complete change. It is going 180 degrees in the opposite direction. It is ceasing to be under the authority and power of Satan, as it tells us in the beginning of chapter 2, walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit . . . now working in the sons of disobedience." It ceases to be that, and instead of walking in the power of Satan, chapter 3 ends with verse 19, saying we now can "be filled up to all the fullness of God." That's how dramatic the transformation is.

And again, this seems to be a question asked so many, many times: How do I know I am a true Christian? And we've learned the answers very clearly through the book of Ephesians, and we'll see

it again this morning.

Now we are called to something in verse 1 of chapter 5 that may on its surface seem like too high a standard. Notice verse 1: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love.” “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.” Since we are His loved children, since He loved us enough to make us His children, and since as a result of that we have become partakers of the divine nature—that’s what Peter says: We have “become partakers of the divine nature”—we have the capacity now to imitate God, and in one particular way: walking in love, walking in love. So we’re going to talk about walking in love. This is the highpoint of the Christian’s calling.

Now we know back in chapter 4, verse 1, we were called to walk “worthy of the calling to which we have been called,” and we are to walk in “humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.” So again, we don’t get very far into the worthy walk until we run into this idea of loving people with a love that can be defined as tolerance. But it’s defined even more directly here in this section, chapter 5, because, we are to “walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” So now we understand love as more than just tolerance; we understand love as sacrifice. And it doesn’t even stop there; if you go back to the end of chapter 4, love is defined even further, verse 32, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted”—and here’s the highpoint—“forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

So I want you to understand today this is the foundational truth that we’re dealing with. You can imitate God in the sense that your love is, at its highest point, a forgiving love. I want you to connect that love with the reality of forgiveness. If you’re going to be like God, you’re going to have to be forgiving. And if you’re going to be like God, you’re going to have to be all-forgiving, comprehensively forgiving, full of mercy, full of grace, full of compassion, full of forgiveness.

At first it might seem like it’s asking way too much for us to be like God. But the Bible doesn’t back down with that at all. In fact, when we’re told to be imitators of God, we’re immediately drawn to what Peter said. Listen to these words, 1 Peter 1:15: “But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” You think the standard is high in terms of loving; it’s high also in terms of holiness. Let me read that again: “But like the Holy One who called you”—that’s God Himself—“be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Where is that written? Back in the book of Leviticus in a number of places, but you can check out chapter 11, verses 44 and 45.

Even in the Pentateuch, God was saying, “I want you to be holy, as I am holy.” We are called on to be like God. This is the unattainable and yet necessary standard for the Christian life. But in order to capture exactly what Paul is driving at—he doesn’t expect us to be like God in creative power. He doesn’t expect us to be like God in immutability, because we are ever-changing; He is not. He doesn’t expect us to be like God in omnipresence; we’re bounded by time and space. He doesn’t expect us to be like God in omnipotence, all-powerful. He doesn’t expect us to be like God as omniscient, with all knowledge and all wisdom. But what he is saying here is that we are to be like God, manifestly His beloved children, by loving the way God loved. And the foundation of God’s love is forgiveness.

You never will receive any of the gifts of God’s love unless you have first received His forgiveness. And that forgiveness is available to us in Christ: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only

begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So God’s love, God’s love takes us to the cross and to Christ, and faith in Him and salvation; and then God’s love lavishes on us total and complete comprehensive and everlasting forgiveness for all our sins. And that is why verse 32 ends that you are to be “just as God in Christ” forgave you, forgiving others. In that sense you are to be an imitator of God: in the sense that you love as Christ loved, who gave Himself up as an offering and a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

So in this sense we can follow God as our example. In fact, the word “imitators” there is *mimētai* in the Greek. It’s “mimics.” Again, we can’t mimic God in those incommunicable attributes that belong only to Him as the eternally existent One. But we are called here to mimic God, to pattern our lives after God in the realm of sacrificial forgiveness. God is love, and that love foundationally is brought to us in the matter of forgiveness; all other expressions of His love proceed out of that forgiveness.

When you think about all that is ours because God has forgiven us, it’s what we’ve looked at in the first four chapters. In fact, the first three chapters emphasized all of this. What did God give us when He forgave us? What did He give us when we were saved by grace through faith? He gave us a new standing before Himself. We are declared righteous, declared just, and His righteousness is credited to us.

He declared that we have new life. We have regeneration. We’ve been born again; we are new creations. We have a new righteousness in terms of our conduct. We have been converted; we aren’t what we used to be: Old things pass away, new things come. We have a new father—no longer the devil, but God Himself. We have a new inheritance—no longer the wrath of God, but the eternal blessing of God. We have a new citizenship—no longer citizens of the kingdom of darkness, but citizens of the kingdom of light, the kingdom of heaven. We have a new master. We have a new freedom—freedom from condemnation, freedom from sin’s dominating power. We have a new security—we are kept safe by the granting of eternal life to us, which is secured by the ever-present Holy Spirit. We have a new peace—not a peace like the world knows, but a peace that is everlasting.

We have a new union with Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and every other believer. We are part of a new fellowship, the redeemed church. We have a new heavenly joy. We have a new spirit in us; we have a new heart. We have new spiritual power. We have new ability to serve God. We have a new calling—a high and holy calling. We have a new purpose, and we have a new love. And I want you to focus on this idea of love because it really is the pinnacle of all that is ours in Christ, all that is ours because we are God’s, and God is ours.

And I would draw you back to 1 John, which I read a few moments ago, just to refresh you in that fourth chapter. That was a long, extended portion basically saying that unless this love is manifest in you, God is not in you. And on the other hand, if God is in you, this love will be manifest. Go back to verse 7 of 1 John 4: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” And again, how did God manifest that love? He “sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Again, the love of God is most clearly and magnanimously and extensively manifests to humanity in the love that forgives sinners. We have been forgiven of all of our sins, all of them. That forgiveness is an expression of God’s love. It’s not something we earned; it’s something He gives freely to those

who come to Him. That is where your relationship with God started. It started in the delivery of heavenly blessings with forgiveness; that's where it all really began.

Back in chapter 2, verse 4: "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Staggering reality. God forgives us so that He can lavish us with His love everlastingly.

So when the apostle Paul said, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love," he is really telling us that our lives need to be marked by forgiveness, forgiveness. I want this message this morning to communicate that to you. You know, Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:5, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart." And that would be true about all biblical instruction. When you're instructed in the Word of God, the endgame for that instruction is not that you know doctrine; the end is that you love the way God loves. That's the goal of our instruction. And you may speak with the tongues of men and angels, but if you don't have love, you're nothing but a sounding gong and a clanging cymbal, 1 Corinthians 13 says. Love is everything. "There is faith and there is hope," Paul said in that same chapter, "and there is love; but the greatest of these is"—what?—"is love."

So with this opening of chapter 5 we come to the main issue in your life as a Christian: love, love—and love that is basically defined by its eagerness and its willingness to forgive. If you want the greatest expression of love, you only need to listen to the words of Jesus. It's not sentiment; it's sacrifice. Listen to John 15:13: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The greatest act of love possible is complete self-sacrifice, even giving your life, if necessary, in death for someone else. Now none of us have done that, or your funeral would already have taken place; but you're here.

This is an extreme kind of love that reaches out to someone who is not perfect, someone who is not deserving, and says, "I will give my life for you. I will die, that you might live." That is essentially what Christ did. Romans tells us in chapter 5 that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This is the call to that kind of love, the love that forgives, as verse 32 says—"as God in Christ has forgiven you."

First John 2:12 puts it this way: "Your sins have been forgiven," and then it says, "for His name's sake." It really, in the primary sense, isn't for you, although you're a beneficiary of it. It's for the fame of God; it's for the glory of God. He forgives sin to put His grace on display, to put His mercy on display, to put His compassion on display, to put His love on display, and to put it on display everlastingly throughout all eternity. In the new heavens and the new earth, we will, along with the redeemed of all the ages and the holy angels, praise God endlessly and eternally for His forgiveness, for His forgiveness.

The point is simple: You can't love like God unless you are marked by forgiveness, unless—if you want to be like God—you act toward people who offend you the way God acts toward people who offended Him. Jesus said in Luke 6 that you need to show mercy as your Father in heaven showed mercy. This is the characteristic of God that Paul is driving at. This kind of love is so extensive.

Go to the end of chapter 3, at least down to verse 17. But trying to get a grip on it is hard. But Paul

prays for the believers to be rooted and grounded in love. This is the foundation of everything in your Christian life: to be “rooted and grounded in love,” and “able to comprehend with all the saints”—this should be the universal understanding of all true believers—“what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.” Amazing statement. Paul prays that believers would understand the entire range of divine love, which is beyond comprehension.

How can we know something that’s incomprehensible to know? Well, we can to the degree that the Spirit of God instructs us. But here’s the remarkable thing about verse 19: When you come to understand that love, that love that surpasses knowledge, you can be “filled up to all the fullness of God.” So if you’re going to be an imitator of God, then you need to be characterized by that which is most definitive of God, and that is His love that forgives; and if you have that same love and understand it in its fullness, you can be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Do you want to be like God? You want to be as God is? You want to be as a beloved child, who can bear the name of the Lord and demonstrate that you belong to that Lord and that you manifest part of His essential nature—then you have to love the way He loved. And if you love the way He loved, you are experiencing the fullness of God.

Those are just beyond-comprehension kinds of promises and realities. I mean, here we are groveling in the humanity of our fallenness, and we’re just grateful to just sort of crawl out of the muck and have the Lord save us and forgive us and bring us to Himself. And He’s not satisfied with that at all; He wants us to come all the way to the place where we literally become imitators of God, and in particular, we love the way He loves.

In 1 Peter 4:8 the apostle Peter was speaking of this very reality, and he says, “Above all”—this is, again, this is the priority in the Christian life—“keep fervent in your love for one another.” “Fervent,” *ektenēs*—it’s used of a muscle that is completely stretched to its maximum limit, reaches far as you possibly can to love one another, “because love covers a multitude of sins.”

So this love we’re talking about is the kind of love that covers sin. It’s the kind of love that forgives. By the way, Peter is borrowing language from Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 12, which says, “Love covers all transgressions.” This is pretty practical, because we’re all going to be offended, right? We’re all going to be treated unkindly, unfairly. We may be slandered, we may be abused. So what should be our response—vengeance, retaliation, anger, hostility? No, no. Those things were laid out for us as things to be avoided back in chapter 4, verse 31: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander. Put it all away, and give back kindness and tenderheartedness and forgiveness, the same way God in Christ forgave you. If you’re in Christ, God doesn’t hold your sin against you; He completely forgives it.

This is so evidently missing in our world. This has got to be the most angry, hostile, hating, vicious, destructive culture, perhaps since days of paganism before Christ even arrived on earth. Everybody wants to destroy everybody else. And it finds its way into the church, the professing church, which then becomes self-destructive. And our Lord gives us completely different direction: “I want you to love each other the way I love you. And how do I love you? I forgive you all your trespasses constantly, every day.” Peter said, “How many times shall I forgive, seven?” The Lord said, “Seventy times seven”—endlessly, nonstop.

Forgiveness is what defines our love; that's what defines it. It's not about being sentimental, it's not about loving someone with some kind of an emotional attachment, it's about loving your enemies. Matthew 5, Jesus said this: "You're never more like the Father than when you forgive your enemies." Did you get that? "You're never more like the Father than when you forgive your enemies." And Jesus, in Matthew 18, told that familiar story about the man who owed the unpayable debt. And Jesus developed that parable in a hyperbole so that the debt was ridiculous; it never could have been paid by anyone. But the man came and plead with his authority, and he was given complete forgiveness. Then he went out—you remember the story, Matthew 18—found a guy who owed him a minor amount and strangled him and threw him in prison. And the anger of the friends of that man reached a point where they actually brought him in for such hypocrisy—that he would receive such comprehensive and extensive love and couldn't give lesser love to someone else.

God's beloved children are to be like Him, imitating Him. What does that mean? Imitating Him in forgiveness, self-sacrifice. This is the issue here: If you want to imitate God, then you have to be forgiving. Whatever the offense, whatever the slander, whatever the maligning attack on you, whatever inequity and unfairness, whatever abuse may have come your way, whatever it is, you leave the results to God. Vengeance is His, He will repay; He takes care of all those accounts, and you offer what He gave you—and that is complete forgiveness.

This is a hard, hard message for our culture today, and I'll tell you why. For two thousands years, essentially, we have had Christian influence since Jesus came. For two thousand years Christianity has had a moral influence on the Western world, and pretty much for two thousand years the principles of New Testament morality have ordered society in our world. One way to illustrate that is that for the most part over those two thousand years, homosexuality in the Western part of the world has been seen as a destructive and very dangerous and deadly kind of sin, and culture after culture in the Western world have dealt with it as a destructive sin.

We who were a few years ago in a post-Christian society, all of a sudden arrived at 2015, and the Supreme Court allowed homosexual marriage. And at that point, that was the final nail in the coffin, and that was the death of Western culture. It had given up all of its Christian morality, and with that went a whole lot of virtue. And not only was evil unleashed—it's manifesting itself in the bizarre transgender aspects of homosexuality—but hate has been unleashed in the world at a level that we've never seen it in our society. Two thousand years have gone by. We are not in a post-Christian world, we're in a neo-paganistic world. We're back to living like the Romans and the Greeks, who tolerated all those kinds of sins that Christianity had a positive impact in eliminating.

So this is paganism that we're dealing with today. But that kind of pagan world that we are now living in was the very same world that the New Testament Christians were living in, and they needed to be in the midst of a hating, vicious, wicked world. And you can read, the iniquities of that world are the same as the iniquities of this world; it's as if two thousand years of Christian history never happened. But at the same time, they were called to express to the people in their world, in a fallen world, forgiveness, because that's what God gave them.

You might think that trying to be like God is really impossible, and there are aspects of it that are impossible; but I want to show you an illustration of that. Turn to the book of Job, if you will. A couple of portions of Scripture there, Job chapter 11. There's a lot of sort of inept advice being given to Job by his friends, trying to explain his suffering. And we hear Zophar speaking in chapter 11, and he

asks some good questions in verses 7 and 8. He says, “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?” So, can you go down to the depths of God? Can you go down to the depths of God? Can you go out to the perimeter of God? No. “They’re as high as the heavens, and what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you [do]?” I mean, trying to grasp God—too deep, too high.

In chapter 21 there is further discussion of this in verse 14. Job says about people in general, “They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, and what would we gain if we entreat Him?’” Basically, you can’t know God, and on top of that, you have no interest in knowing God.

Over in chapter 26—and Dr. Chou commented on this particular portion last Sunday morning—chapter 26, Job responds, and in verse 7 he speaks about God, and he says, “He stretches out the north over empty space”—that’s mindboggling, the infinity of space. “He hangs the earth on nothing. He wraps up the waters in His clouds, and the cloud does not burst under them. He obscures the face of the full moon and spreads His clouds over it. He has inscribed a circle on the surface of the waters”—that’s the horizon—“as a boundary of light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble and are amazed at His rebuke. He quieted the sea with His power, and by His understanding He shattered Rahab. By his breath the heavens are cleared; and His hand has pierced the feeling serpent. Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?” Even when we look unto the creation, the massive realities of creation, we’re really only talking about “the fringes of His ways.” So how can we grasp God?

But when you come to the end of the book of Job—chapter 42, I want you to look at something—something has taken place. Job answers the Lord, and he says in chapter 42, verse 2, “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand.” Job is saying, “Up to now I’ve been talking about things that I don’t understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.” What Job saw there was the love of God, the mercy of God, the compassion of God, the lavish grace of God, and that took Job from saying, “I heard about You; and now I see You.” God becomes clear in His mercy. God becomes clear in His lavish grace. God becomes clear in the expressions of His vast, incomprehensible love.

Now I know there’s a paradox in this, because you feel like if you are coming into the presence of God, you should maybe act like Peter did when he was in the presence of the Creator and said, “Depart from me, O Lord, for I’m a sinful man.” Or maybe you feel like John in the vision of Revelation chapter 1, where he sees Christ and he says, “I fell at His feet like a dead man.” Maybe you feel like Isaiah in chapter 6, who coming into the presence of God said, “Woe is me, I’m a man of unclean lips.” There is that reality that we are in awe of God, and that the fear of God is necessary. But at the same time we are in awe of His holiness, we can mimic His love. Job is saying, “For the first time I see it. You are so forgiving, you are so lavish in Your generosity.”

So much mercy. That’s where you see the love of God; and you’ve seen it. You’ve seen it if you’re a believer. You’ve seen it. He loved us, and because He loved us, He forgave us; and that forgiveness is eternal. And to seal that forgiveness, He placed in us the Holy Spirit, the seal of promise, chapter 1

said. The Spirit took up residence in us; the Son took up residence in us; the Father takes up residence in us. We've been singing about the triune God, and every true believer is in union with the triune God.

So we come into His presence as knowing we are broken, and come with contrite hearts, and come mourning over our sinfulness, come meekly, come humbly, coming for grace, but at the same time, knowing that He will forgive all our transgressions. And we have offended Him over and over and over. Not a day goes by that there is not some offense against God that He willingly, lovingly, graciously forgives. This is what calls us to love: It is divine forgiveness. And that's what the rest of the opening two verses say: "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." That's walking in love that is sacrificial.

You know, I've been thinking about 1 Corinthians 16:13 a lot. That verse is an important one for us in these days because it calls for all of us as believers to be strong: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." Very strong language. "Be on the alert," that's watching for any attack, any assault on the truth, on the people of God, on the Lord Himself. "Stand firm in the faith," unwavering in your convictions in sound doctrine. "Act like men," that means fortitude, courage, fight the battle. "Be strong."

But immediately in the next verse, the Holy Spirit says, "Let all that you do be done in love." There are plenty of people who get the thirteenth verse. They want to stand firm in the faith. They want to create a website and make sure that they line up all their guns and fire them at everybody who deviates one inch from what their expected course should be. Everything has to be tempered, everything. Even the battle for the truth has to be tempered with love. We do everything that we do in love. And what does that mean? It means that our love calls for us to be forgiving, to be forgiving.

The apostle Paul says in Romans 13 love is the fulfilling of the whole law. Love is the fulfilling of the whole law. I mean, if you love God, you won't have other gods. If you love God, you won't make an idol. If you love God, you won't take His name in vain. If you love God, you won't disobey Him. If you love God, you'll worship Him.

The second half of the Ten Commandments have to do with man. If you love others, you're not going to harm them. Paul makes it very clear it's this simple. Listen to his language in Romans 13. He lays out the second half of the Decalogue, verse 8, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another"—that's your debt—"for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and if there's any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

If you love somebody, you don't commit adultery. If you love someone, you don't kill them. If you love someone, you don't steal from them. If you love someone, you don't covet what they possess. You don't harm people that you love, you do the opposite. You sacrifice for them; you forgive them. Love fulfills everything; love is the pinnacle. "Walk in love"—what do you mean? With forgiveness and eager self-sacrifice.

Look at verse 2 for just a few moments as we kind of wrap up—"just as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." That's just beautiful



language. When Christ went to the cross and He was being a sacrifice, the Lamb of God, this was not something that displeased God, this was not something that was noxious to God; parts of it are, elements of it are. But in the sacrifice of Christ as an offering and a sacrifice to God in the place of sinners, this gave “a fragrant aroma.” Let me tell you where that language is coming from. It’s really coming from the book of Leviticus.

When you start the book of Leviticus—and the sacrifices are laid out in the first five chapters—you have three sacrifices in Leviticus 1 to 3. You have, described, the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering. And those three offerings were basically put on the altar, and they gave a fragrance. The burnt offering pictured Christ in His complete devotion to God. Think of it that way. We’re not talking about sin at this point; we’re saying that the burnt offering demonstrated the willingness of the Lamb of God in complete devotion to God to give up His entire life. That was a sweet-smelling fragrance to God. That is the very essence of love. Love at its highest point is not only willing to forgive, it is willing to sacrifice itself to effect that forgiveness. Complete devotion to God is seen in that burnt offering.

In the meal offering, you see Christ’s perfection, a perfection of His character, which also is a fragrance to God, who is holy, harmless, undefiled. He was the Lamb of God without sin. In the peace offering, which also sent forth an aroma that pleased God, He is making peace between sinners and God. So in the burnt offering and the meal offering and the peace offering, there’s a sweet aroma. So even in those offerings in Leviticus, you see that there were aspects of the death of Christ—they were a fragrance to God. His devotion, the perfection of His character, and His making peace.

Those are the things that we can follow. We’ll never be somebody’s sin offering; we’ll never be somebody’s trespass offering. But we can be, as Christ was, so devoted to God, so committed in our character to Christlikeness, that we are the ones who make peace with sinners. This is what it means to love. It’s really all about forgiveness.

It would be wonderful if this passage stopped right there, verse 2; but it strangely changes, and all of a sudden in verse 3 you read, “But immorality, impurity, greed.” What is all of that? If God’s love, Christ’s love, and our love is self-sacrificing and forgiving, you can be sure Satan will pervert that, and the love of the world will be selfish, self-centered, self-indulgent, lustful, and destructive. That’s why the contrast. That’s why verse 7 says you don’t partake with the world.

How has the church managed to absorb the loveless attitudes of the world? Tragic, tragic. We have to be—we *have to be* the children of God in the world. We have to adorn the doctrine of God. We have to be like our Father, and no one is more like God than when he or she forgives.

So we’re back to where we started. The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart. And how do we know that love? We know it because it is lavishly, unendingly forgiving. It’s verse 31—never bitter, never wrathful, never angry, never clamorous, never slanderous, never has any malice. It’s kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

So when we talk about this kind of love, again just to emphasize what I said at the beginning, we’re not talking about some kind of sentimental feeling, we’re talking about expressions of forgiveness that define us. That’s the love that the world needs to see. And I am sad to say, they are not seeing it

in the professing church of Christ. May they see it in us. We can only reach as far as we can reach, right? But we can be known by that kind of love. May it be so.

Father, we thank You for Your truth. Thank You for this particular word because it is so clear, so direct, so practical. And I pray, Lord, that You will help us to remember that if we walk in the Spirit, we'll see the fruit of the Spirit, which is love—which is love, and then joy, and then peace and the rest. May we be known by our love, a love that lavishly and unendingly forgives. Anything less than that, for us who have been forgiven an unpayable debt, is a sin worthy of heaven's discipline. If there's any unforgiveness toward anyone in our hearts, Lord, we confess that, we repent of that; we ask that You would remove it. And may we reach toward the blessed Holy Spirit, and walking in His strength, may we be characterized by the fruit of love. May we leave a fragrance, a sweet aroma of love everywhere we go, no matter what is coming at us; and in so doing, be Your beloved children. That's our prayer. Amen.

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