

## A Life of Love Eph. 5:1-7

**Intro.** I'm sure many of us have been to Sea World in Aurora, OH. It's closed now. But if you ever saw the show at Shamu Stadium, you saw the **mime**. His performance is legendary. As people filed into the stadium, the mime would entertain those already seated. His show is unscripted and completely spontaneous. He would follow people into the stadium and mimic their mannerisms. He's all over the lady with poofy hair who's searching for the rest of her family. He impersonates the frustrated young father who struggles to keep his four kids within reach and under control. He pretends to toss the most unruly one into the tank with Shamu. He mirrors the character with tilted ball cap / headphones / and low slung jeans. The stadium rocks with laughter while those entering have no idea what's going on. He's so entertaining, people forget the wait. After the whale show I've heard people..."Is that all Shamu's got?...Bring back the mime!"

### **1. Life's direction - vs. 1-2a - Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love...**

In **Eph. 5:1**, Paul gave an exhortation that provides clear direction for every Christian. He writes, **Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love...** No challenge in all the Bible rises higher than this. The fact that you and I are to be **imitators of God** is the summit and highest ideal of Christian teaching. This exhortation is the key to the rest of **chap. 5**. Because God is love, we must imitate Him by living **a life of love**. - **v.1** Because God is light, we must **live as children of light**. - **v.8** And because God is truth we must live a life of wisdom. - **v.15**

The word translated **imitators** is **mimetai** in the Greek language. The KJV translates it **followers**, but the idea of following doesn't do justice to the original word. **Mimetai** means to copy, to duplicate, or to mimic. The English word **mime** comes from this Greek word and no one in my book illustrated its meaning better than that mime at Sea World. But how does God instruct us to imitate Him?

Theologically, God has two kinds of attributes...communicable and non-communicable. The non-communicable attributes include His majesty / glory / omnipotence / omniscience / and omni-presence. These attributes are non-communicable because they belong to God alone and can't be replicated. They make God uniquely God! What chance would we have if our goal was to become majestic? And who has a legitimate shot at omnipotence, omniscience or omnipresence? These are non-communicable attributes. They can't be replicated. So give it up and let God be God.

But God also has communicable attributes. Among these attributes, God is Holy / righteous / and pure. We wouldn't know these things about God apart from the Bible. But the Bible tells us who God is and what He is like. In these communicable ways, believers are instructed to be like Him. Here are a few sample verses that convey the

same challenge. **I Pet. 1:16 - "Be holy, because I am holy." / I Jn. 2:29 - If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. / I Jn. 3:3 - Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** Each of these attributes of God is moral and communicable in the sense that you and I are to bring our lives into conformity with them. Other communicable attributes of God include His love / mercy / compassion / tenderness / long-suffering / loving-kindness / faithfulness / and forgiveness. Christians are commanded to recognize these attributes / appreciate them / and imitate them in our daily living. And we're not left to ourselves to produce these character qualities. God has given us His Word and the power of His indwelling Spirit. So here's what we need to know from the first part of **vs.1**...as Christians, we're not called to be nice people. We're called to **be imitators of God**. We're called to put His moral perfections on display in the way we conduct ourselves. God wants to show His glory through our behavior.

The **therefore** in **5:1** connects with **4:32 - Be kind and compassion-ate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**. One writer calls **4:32 "the sweetest verse in the Bible."** Each quality; (**kindness / compassion / and forgiveness**) originate and are found perfectly in God / and are to be replicated in our lives. In Christ we see these qualities displayed and exemplified. To imitate God is to do for others what God in Christ has done for us! We'll come back to that.

But notice how **vs.1** continues. **Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children**. Here Paul reminds us of our new identity. This reminder could be called a "*stimulus package*." In the NT, Christians are called believers / brothers / disciples / followers of the way / saints / etc. But here Paul reminds us that we are **God's dearly loved children**. Would you savor that for a moment? What title compares to this one? We are intimately related to God as His own **dearly loved children**. The Apostle John never got over this. In **I Jn. 3:1, 2** he shouts...**HOW GREAT is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.**

The way children imitate their parents and grandparents can be both encouraging and embarrassing. What parent hasn't had a red face when their child repeated something they heard them say in a careless moment? "*My daddy says...*" *Hush your mouth child!*" A few years ago when our son in law was working out west, Rachel and family stayed at our home. On warm mornings, Peggy and I like to drink coffee and read our Bibles on our porch swing. Not to be outdone, the grandkids would join us on the porch with story books and milk in coffee mugs. It's natural for children to imitate their parents. The nature and the traits of our parent's are written in our DNA. But there's a spiritual side to this. Since the moment Christ entered our lives, God's DNA was implanted in the deepest regions of who we are. John wrote, **God's seed remains in (us)**. - **I Jn. 3:9** Peter explains that believers **participate in the divine nature**. - **II Pet. 1:4** But in relation to the specific command of **Eph. 5:1, Rom. 5:5** says, **God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us**. This explains how it's possible for us to imitate God. His Spirit of love resides in us. As we yield ourselves to His control, the love of God is manifest in and through us.

Jesus said kingdom people are willing to humble themselves and become like children. His teachings are refused by know-it-alls, big shots, and the self-righteous. He can't work with those who feel like they could teach God a thing or two. The Bible says, God resists the proud, yet He delights in those who are humble / simple / and needy. His life transforming work is accomplished best in those who are eager to learn His ways and walk in His footsteps.

So **vs.1** exhorts us to imitate or copy God in terms of His communicable attributes. We are motivated by the fact that we are children **dearly loved** by our Heavenly Father. The first phrase of **vs.2** is then linked to **v.1** by the conjunction **and**. It continues the exhortation by stating the specific way God wants us to imitate Him. **...and live a life of love**. As we've seen previously, **live a life**, is **peripateo** which means **to walk about**. This is the 3rd time **peripateo** appears in Paul's letter. Comparing our living to a **walk** includes the idea of forward movement / advancement / and progress. And this forward progress is qualified. Our walking is to happen in the sphere of love. Like boundaries set for a child at play, the verse implies, "whatever you do or say, make sure you don't leave the park...make sure you stay inside the fence of love." That was Paul's meaning in **I Cor. 16:14 - Do everything in love**. So everything we do and say must be an expression of love.

To **walk in love** or to **live a life of love** implies progress in the attitude and action of showing compassion to others. A walker is usually going somewhere. So where is your love going? Is it progressing and becoming more steady and mature? Is it advancing beyond the loveable crowd to those who are less loveable? Or is your love shrinking and retreating?

To become an **imitator of God** in the matter of love is a lifelong challenge. The goal will never be reached this side of Heaven. As we found in Paul's prayer in **ch. 3**, God's love is immeasurable and inexhaustible. It surpasses knowledge. So Paul prayed that we would know in our experience that which can never be known in a final or complete way. If you're looking for God's direction for your life...if you want to know what His will is...let me recommend **Eph. 5:1, 2**. The summit and highest ideal in life is to imitate God in the way we love others.

But for many people, love is a confectionary term is more about feeling than substance. They're like the young lover who said, "*Love is the feeling you feel when you feel you are feeling a feeling you never felt before?*" Contrary to love as a feeling, the text proceeds to describe love in terms that are active and solid.

## **2. Love's description - vs.2b - ...just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Notice the model our love is to be patterned after. **...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God**. The words **just as** point to Calvary's cross as the example we should imitate. A **life of love** is to be **just as Christ loved us**.

Any theology that begins with man always ends wrong. But here's a case where we need to think about **us** for a minute. To understand what love is, we need to consider exactly who Christ was willing to love and give His life for. The reason is obvious. If Jesus loved and gave Himself for nice people who loved Him / who were like Him / and in whom He saw favorable qualities and potential...that would be all love demands of us. We could love the loveable and call it good. The trouble is, there's a bunch of ungodliness and unloveliness in the group that includes you and me...the group designated **us**.

Listen to...and remember the close relation between the inclusive pronouns **we** and **us** as I read

**Rom. 5:6-10 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!** The secular humanist hates these verses! They obliterate theories of innate goodness and human potential. These verses tell us that apart from Christ, we were powerless / ungodly / sinners / and enemies of God. Yet, in that rotten condition, God loved us and Christ died to save us. So the love we're to imitate is far wider than we ever experienced or imagined! God's love reaches out to sinners like **us**! No one comprehends the wonder of God's love who hasn't first come to terms with how unworthy and undeserving **we** are.

There's a tender story in the 7th chapter of **Luke's Gospel**. While eating dinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus received gestures of love from a prostitute...a woman who lived a terribly immoral life. She kissed Him / anointed his head with oil / wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She then poured expensive perfume on His feet. The Pharisee was incensed and horrified! He reasoned this way, *"If Jesus was really a prophet of God, He'd know what kind of person she is and He would forbid her from touching Him"* Skipping some of the details, here's how the story ends. Jesus said, **Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.** Zing!!! The Pharisee offered no love to Jesus because he sensed no need of forgiveness. He was self-righteous to the core. But this woman knew what she was in God's sight. She was overwhelmed by Christ's love and willingness to forgive her.

Responding to the extent of Christ's forgiveness she loved much! **MacArthur** writes, *"Forgiveness is the supreme evidence of God's love and the most convincing proof of our love. To know the depths of divine love, we have to honestly face the debt God has forgiven."*

We can never imitate God's love until we face the ugliness of our sin in God's sight! And ugliness isn't our only problem...we're also guilty because there's so much of it! So in

the first place, the love we're called to imitate is unconditional and undeserved! Love isn't my response to the good points of some other person. Love is about me. The tests of love are like a spiritual EKG that expose whether God's goodness has changed my heart. God is love, and He calls us to imitate Him by the way we respond to others. And one of the greatest tests of love is our willingness to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us.

The second part of the description is revealed in the fact that **Christ...gave Himself up for us...** Throughout the Bible, love always involves giving and sacrifice. Love sacrifices something of itself for the sake of another. The fact that **Christ gave Himself up for us** means that Jesus handed Himself over to His accusers. He wasn't overpowered. He wasn't executed or murdered. He voluntarily laid His life down. The Gospels report the determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem even though He knew the suffering and death that awaited Him there. Jesus surrendered to His enemies while submitting to His Father's plan to meet our deepest need.

But notice how **vs.2** ends. **...as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** Love that imitates Christ is costly. Love involves giving away something that belongs to us. Yet the love we're challenged to imitate involves giving what is most precious to us...life itself. The extent of Christ's love is shown in the fact that He gave Himself as a **sacrifice**. He died on the cross. An **offering** is something given to God. So as we love others we are loving God. Our love is an offering to Him. But a **sacrifice** is more than an offering...a sacrifice dies in the process...it dies in the act of giving. All of the OT offerings and sacrifices present the picture of Christ laying down His life to do God's will and provide the basis for our redemption. Christ giving Himself is the greatest demonstration of love the world will ever see. **I Jn. 4:10 - This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** We will never succeed in imitating God's love until we're willing to lay down our lives for others.

The fact that Christ's sacrifice was a **fragrant offering** reflects back to the grain, oil, and wine poured over the sacrificed animal. The smoke rising from the altar was fragrant and pleasant in a symbolic way. The right kind of offering offered the right way and with the right heart attitude was acceptable and pleasing to God. Yet the OT sacrifices were never able to take away sins even though they were offered day after day for hundreds of years. Jesus came as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice. His death accomplished what the OT sacrifices could only anticipate. **Heb. 10:12 - But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.**

The crucifixion was painful and repulsive to God the Father. Darkness engulfed the region from noon to three when the sun is normally brightest. But when the sacrifice was complete, Jesus uttered the words, *"it is finished."* In that same hour the darkness lifted / the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. We can imagine that the Father in heaven said, *"Yes, it is finished!"* At that moment, the sacrifice of His Son became a fragrant offering, a sweet smelling aroma acceptable to Him.

Two lessons emerge from **vs.2**. *First*, our worship should always contain wonder and amazement as we contemplate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We couldn't know what love is or the extent of God's love apart from the cross. *Second*, when we pay no attention to what others deserve but sacrificially give something of our own for their benefit, this expression of love becomes a fragrant offering to God Himself. This kind of love transcends charity / nice gestures / or *the milk of human kindness*. Love by this definition is a choice. It's voluntary. It imitates the love of our Heavenly Father. This kind of love is choosing to replicate the unconditional love shown when Christ died for us. It's blessing God by actions we know will be a fragrant offering to Him. This love is anything but cheap. It can be very costly. It's unusual and contrary to our selfish nature. What is completely unnatural for sinners is to become a way of life for God's children. And listen...all the direction we'll ever need for the rest of our time on earth is bound up in this command to imitate God and love others the way Christ loved us! But love has a counterfeit and Paul abruptly shifts gears to warn against it.

**3. Love's distortion - vs. 3-7 - But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.**

Love has an ugly underside that is utterly selfish / unspiritual / unacceptable to God / and completely inappropriate for His children. Some have called this section *Satan's counterfeit*. It's love going the wrong way. The Welsh scholar, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones once said he wished the text stopped at **vs. 2**. He compared **vs.1** and **2** to the disciple's experience of seeing Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Then continuing on to **vs. 3-7** he writes, "*But here I am looking at the lunatic boy. I am down in the dull plains of life; I am back to the hard reality of life and living.*"

The conjunction **But**, signals an abrupt shift. It's a hard left turn from thoughts about God and self-sacrificing love to selfish lusts of the flesh. From the heights of heavenly love we descend into the dark valley of human experience. Because the Ephesian believers lived in the midst of a sex-crazed culture, they were constantly tempted to immorality. One historian wrote: "*The moral life of the Graeco-Roman world had sunk so low that, while protests against the prevailing corruption were never entirely wanting, fornication had long come to be regarded as a matter of moral indifference, and was indulged in without shame or scruple not only by the mass but by philosophers and men of distinction who otherwise lived exemplary lives.*" Sounds like our world! The floodgates of immorality are wide open. Love and lust are confused and mingled together as though they're synonymous. We're constantly bombarded with visual and audible signals designed to arouse and ignite the lusts of the flesh. If some of the Super Bowl ads and the halftime show represent where we are, we've landed at new depths of sexism and immorality. I'm sure many of us switched channels. I try to imagine what my grandfather's response would be if he was here to witness the seductive scenes that have become so routine. The better question is this..."How does holy God view such obscenity?"

Ryan Murphy, the openly gay producer of shows like Glee, Nip and Tuck / American Horror Story / and his newest show called The New Normal, once boasted that his goal is to "*push the envelope until there is no restriction from explicit depictions of sex on television.*" He speaks for many who are pushing for fewer restrictions and greater liberty. It's time to think seriously and critically about the direction the world is heading in contrast with the way God has called us to go.

The word translated **sexual immorality** in **vs.3** is **porneia** from which we derive, *pornography*. And notice... there should never be even a hint of **porneia** among God's people. The whole of our life is to be lived inside the fence of love, but there should never even be a hint of lust or immorality among us. Because the sex nature in human beings is so powerful, **I Cor. 6:18** instructs us to, **Flee from sexual immorality**. While the positive command of **vs. 1,2** calls us to live a life of love...there's a negative side...**among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality of any kind of impurity, or of greed...**

So much the world calls "romantic love" is really lust and the distortion of love. God's love is unselfish, giving and pure. Yet the counterfeit is selfish, indulgent, and impure. So much of what passes for love happens because the other person is attractive / enjoyable / pleasant / satisfying / appreciative / or is likely to repay in some way. The world's love is conditioned on whether the other person fulfills my needs and meets my expectations. This is why so many marriages end in divorce. The emphasis on what love is has shifted to getting instead of giving. Jesus spoke of this flawed kind of love in **Matt. 5:46 - If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?** Yet when he commanded husbands to love their wives he used the Greek word *agape* which signifies a self-sacrificing love that is unconditional, durable, and self-sacrificing.

In these verses Paul did more than repeat the Bible's moral code. Unlike the way moral issues are often addressed by the world, he didn't cite statistics or bring up the dangers involved in loose living. His argument isn't pragmatic like so many are. His concern is theological and that's what I want to camp on as we finish. Paul has deliberately set up a razor sharp contrast designed to shock us into sensibility. Like the before and after pictures in **chaps. 2** and **4**, he urges us to face what is fundamentally wrong with **sexual immorality / impurity / greed / obscenity / foolish talk / and coarse joking**. What's wrong with these behaviors can only be understood in the light of who God is and what He has done for us. Like parking a shiny new Rolls Royce next to a smelly dumpster, he parks our Father's self-sacrificing love next to these sins of thought / action / and speech. He wants us to know that lust is the opposite of love. And sexual sins are entirely opposite to Christ's self-sacrifice on our behalf. He wants us to be shocked and incensed by how inappropriate a lifestyle of immorality is for God's dearly loved children. It isn't that these behaviors are just different from God's ways...they're opposite to His ways! No hint of anything like this is ever found in Him! Not ever! We can't claim to be children who imitate our Father in heaven if these sins persist in our

lives! Instead of glorifying our Father as He is, these sins distort His image and violate His commands.

In the middle of all that is out of place and inappropriate for God's children, one behavior is entirely appropriate. **vs. 4 ends but rather thanksgiving.** Thanksgiving and a thankful heart are always in style for sinners who are saved and forgiven by such amazing love. That's what motivated the woman who sensed Christ's love expressed by His willingness to forgive her and accept her. There isn't a day or a moment in a day when we shouldn't be thankful that Christ has done this for us!

**vs. 5-7** were written in response to deceivers who were pedaling some sort of libertine message among the believers at Ephesus. **For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.**

Here Paul repeats truth his readers had been taught many times. **vs. 5** doesn't describe a person who has been tripped up by some form of immorality or impurity. It describes a person for whom sexual sins are a regular habit. Regardless of what they claim, they have no inheritance in the Kingdom. God's people repent of sin and pursue righteousness. Those whose basic life pattern doesn't reflect this orientation can't claim God as Father or God's Kingdom as their inheritance. People in this state are still under God's wrath and believers must never join hands with them.

So let me wrap this up. As the chapter opens we find God's word concerning life's direction. Like the mime at Sea World, believers are called to imitate the communicable attributes found in God... especially by the way we love God and others. The love we must strive for finds its example in the way Christ's loved us and gave Himself to save us. In total contrast to our Father's ways are love's fleshly distortions. As we pursue love, we must turn so completely from sexual sin that there isn't even a hint of immorality or selfish ambition among us.

So what must we do to imitate God? We must spend time in God's Word not just to accumulate Bible knowledge, but with a desire to know the Bible's main character, Jesus Christ. A disciple is a follower who becomes like his teacher. Far too many Christians can name all of Israel's kings while living in ways that are nothing like the life of the king of kings! Yet **I Jn. 2:6** declares, **Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.** Paul summarized the process of becoming like Christ in **II Cor. 3:18** - **And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**