

IMITATORS OF GOD

Ephesians 5:1-33

Key Verse: 5:1

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children...."

In chapter 4, we learned that the children of God should be completely humble and gentle, and should keep the unity of the Spirit based on Jesus' ascension and descension, that is, the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also learned that when we do so, we can grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. In other words, when we are completely humble and gentle and try to keep the unity of the Spirit in Jesus, we can be like Jesus.

Today Paul teaches us that we must be imitators of God. In order to become imitators of God, we must give all our hearts to do so. Still, to imitate God is not easy. In chapter 5, Paul seems to be erecting a standard which ordinary people had never dreamt of. However, Christian converts made the kind of society which this standard had encompassed. What does "be imitators" mean? Educationally speaking, it is the stage of learning or mastering one field of study. In education, when we are going to master one kind of study or skill, first we must imitate a teacher for 10 years. After 10 years, then, one is fully qualified to be a creative scholar or skilled person. Without imitation, there is no one who really masters his study or skill. In ancient times, oratory was the only humanity study. In order to master oratory, one had to have a theory that is wide and deep in knowledge. Next, in order to become a renowned orator, one had to imitate a renowned orator's way of making a speech until he could speak correctly. He had to imitate the renowned orator's usage of phonetics, breathing, and phrasing, until he spoke exactly like the renowned orator. They say that Demosthenes' pronunciation was not good enough. So he put small pebbles in his mouth and practiced until he could pronounce like his teacher. At last, he could imitate his teacher, and finally he became the most famous orator in history. Next, in order to be a good imitator, one must practice his teacher's lifestyle. This is the most difficult part. They say that Beethoven practiced piano from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. every day. His father locked him in a room and did not give him lunch so that he would imitate his teacher. Finally, through imitation, Beethoven became the most famous and creative pianist in history.

Here we learn that we must be imitators of God, because we are children of God. It is easy to imitate to master some kind of study or skill, but it is not easy to imitate God's heart. We must repent of our lack of imitation and wholeheartedly imitate God's heart in our daily lives and be mature Christians. For example, I saw an untalented pianist. But he practiced every day until his index finger and middle

finger became bloody. Still, his piano teacher never recognized his achievements. But after 10 years, he became creative. And he became a better pianist than his teacher.

Medical students study anatomy--the names of bones, the structures of bones, the names of all the organs, and so on. In order to become medical doctors, they must learn the names of a huge number of bones from their teachers and take a test. If they fail the test, they have to take another test. If they fail a third time, they are dismissed from medical school. When we see worldly people, there are many who have a learning mind. In other words, they imitate their teachers. They want to learn so that they can be renowned persons in the future. The children of God must learn of God. We must imitate God's heart.

Albert Schweitzer wanted to imitate the life of Jesus. So he studied the humanities and theology very diligently. But when he wanted to serve in a part of Africa, theology and humanities study was useless. So he began to study medicine in order to help many helpless and sick Africans. He did not have a good aptitude for medical studies. So he finished medical school as one barely pulling his chin over the bar. His medical studies were not so good. But when he served African people in the Lambar^ABn^AB Congo, he gave all his heart and strength to take care of sick people. In this way, Dr. Schweitzer became an imitator of God. At the death of Dr. Schweitzer, even the biggest Russian newspaper paid condolences, saying that he was the unique saint of the 20th century. Dr. Schweitzer gave up his music as a pipe organist and his scholarship and his library. He also renounced his cultural life and lived among Africans. But he said, "I am indeed free because Jesus is in me. I have freedom of imitating Jesus. I have freedom of caring for African patients. I have freedom of enjoying my thought world." When he lived a life of imitating Jesus, he was not unhappy. He was indeed free.

As we know well, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote "The Cost of Discipleship." He really wanted to imitate the life of Jesus. When World War II was at its peak, he visited one of the theologians in New York, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), to discuss something about theology. Then Bonhoeffer wanted to go back to Germany, but his friend did his best to persuade him to stay in New York so that he might escape Nazi persecution. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer decided to go back to Germany, because of God's flock under his care. He knew that going to Germany was dangerous. Anyway, he went to Germany to take care of God's flock under his care.

These days there are many churchgoers. But there are not many imitators of God. Those who do not imitate God cannot be called the children of God. On the other hand, those who imitate God can be like Jesus. When we imitate God, we can grow in the fullness of God's love

and we can experience unutterable joy in whatever we do. Let's read verse 1. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children...." In the last part of verse 1, there is the phrase, "as dearly loved children." This has deep spiritual meaning. When we want to imitate God, we must be sure that we are loved by God dearly. We must know that God is our Father and we are his precious children. Then it is easy to imitate God, saying, "Daddy, Daddy, I love you."

These days, the progress of true educational principle has vanished. There are not many imitators. There are not many true learners. There is a funny story. One junior shepherd came to Chicago from Korea. His senior shepherd came to know that this shepherd's student ministry didn't make any progress during the last 20 years. So the senior shepherd gave him some training. It was to write Mark 10:45 1,000 times. It was intended to teach the lifegiving spirit. The last part of Mark 10:45 says, "give his life...for many." The junior shepherd wrote Mark 10:45 1,000 times. But he didn't learn the lifegiving spirit from Mark 10:45. His senior shepherd lent him a suit to attend a meeting. He should have returned the suit that day. But when he went back to Korea he took it with him without permission. By writing Mark 10:45 he did not learn the lifegiving spirit. When he did not learn the lifegiving spirit, habitually he robbed his senior shepherd by taking his suit. How hard it is to imitate God! How hard it is to learn of God! But we must learn of God and be like God. If we do not learn of God, we remain as the children of darkness. If we don't imitate God, or learn of God, we become rebellious and bitter people. Therefore, we must be imitators of God. How can we be imitators of God?

First, live a life of love (1-7).

Look at verses 1-2. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and 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 first part of verse 2, "live a life of love," means practice the love of Jesus. One shepherd, out of God's love, began to feed his sheep through one-to-one Bible study. The shepherd suffered a lot to take care of his sheep. After four years of Bible study, his sheep rejected his love and ran away. Then he was so sorry that he became like a wounded soldier. There are many wounded soldiers among our coworkers. They became so after several rejections from their sheep. Usually sheep are sheep. They graze a lot and just disappear to somewhere else to find better pasture.

We can live a life of love when we realize the love of God. Without realizing the love of God, we cannot live a life of love. Instead, we live a selfish life as we are educated through pragmatism.

There was a hermit country. It's total population was ten million.

Among them, one million were noble people. Two million were ordinary people. Five million were servant class people. Two million were lifetime government slave class people. At that time, if one committed any kind of crime, he became a lifetime government slave and his descendants also became government slave class people. During the time from 1563-1628, many Catholic missionaries went to this hermit country and taught the gospel of salvation. The result of this evangelism was indeed remarkable and shook the nation. When the government slave class people heard the Bible teaching, "all men are created equal in God," their bitterness as a lifetime government slave disappeared. Joy and happiness were welling up in their souls, when they realized that they are equal human beings. Many hundreds of thousands of people accepted the gospel of salvation by the word, "all men are created equal in God." They realized the love of God. They had thought that the government made them lifetime slaves together with their offspring because of small crimes. But they learned that in God they are equally children of God. They were happy to die for God. So innumerable people from the servant class and slave class accepted the gospel of salvation and received baptism. At that time, the country indicted those who received baptism as criminals. Many were arrested and tortured and killed. This martyrdom continued. But when those who realized God's love, that all men are equal in God, went to execution spots, they sang and prayed. In the midst of torture they died happily. According to a book in the London library, their number was over 200,000.

The king who annihilated Christians because he was a rigid student of Confucius, didn't like equality. He wanted to remain as a king, and not be equal with other human beings. So as a matter of lifetime determination, he persecuted the Christians. At that time, there was a law in the country that when the queen passes age 50, she could petition for one and only one thing which she really wanted to have. So the queen, upon turning 50, went to the king who was on the throne. She said, "May I make one petition according to the rule?" The king said, "Your petition is approved." Then the queen said, "May I be baptized and become a child of the eternal God?" Then the king began to cry and said, "Your petition is granted." The queen said, "Someday may you accept salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ and enter the kingdom of God." The queen realized that her country's class system was not right. She was unhappy about the oppression of the helpless and needy. When she heard that all men are created equal in God, she realized how the love of God is great. She was baptized after getting the king's permission. Baptism meant martyrdom. But the queen did not mind. Here we learn that we must realize the love of God through one word of God. The word of God is the book of life. When we realize the love of God, the world looks beautiful. All kinds of people look lovely.

To live the life of love, influence is the most important. If we say

we love others, but give bad influence, that's not the life of love. So Paul said we must give good influence through moral purity. Look at verse 3. "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." Paul also urges that we can give good influence through thanksgiving. Look at verse 4. "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." In this verse, the word "thanksgiving" seems to be out of place. But if we swap the order to say, "giving thanks," then the meaning is very clear. Giving thanks means to know how to express a thankful mind instead of speaking all kinds of dirty gossip. In order to live a life of love, we must practice how to say, "thanks," to our parents and to our friends. Those who do not know how to express a thankful mind toward God and others cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Look at verse 5. "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." To live a life of love, the children of God should not be selfish or wayward. Such people will be the objects of God's wrath.

Second, live as children of light (8-14).

In this part, we can find the meaning of "the light." Biblically speaking, "light" means "meaning of life." John 1:4 says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." To growing people, romance is one kind of life. But romance cannot be the meaning of life. When we know the meaning of life, we can study hard; we can practice love for others; we can have heavenly sunlight in our soul. In verse 8, "light" also means the generosity of God. Matthew 5:45 says, "...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." The "light" also means God's righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." God's righteousness extends to both the good and bad.

There are many Christians. Most of them live a double life. At church, they are angels. At home, they are angry devils. Paul urges that those who want to live a life of love must not live a life of darkness in secret. Look at verse 9. "... (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)..." Paul defines that to live a life of love is bearing much fruit so that the children of God can please God. Look at verse 10. "...and find out what pleases the Lord." Verses 11-14 say not to live a fruitless life. We must know that a fruitful life in the sight of God is different from human achievements. We must bear many good fruits so that we can please God. Especially we must bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians

5:22,23a says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These verses explain a fruitful life in the sight of God. The last part of verse 14 is a free quotation from Isaiah 60:1. It says, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Third, Christian fellowship (15-21).

The children of God should be wise. Here "wise" means not to lose the opportunity to do something good. Read verses 15-16. "Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Foolish people cannot be the children of God. Foolish people are those who know how to enjoy the world and how to invent evil (17). Ultimately, to live a life of love is to have a thankful mind. Children of God should be happy until they can not but sing spiritual songs and make music in their hearts. Let's read verse 19. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord..." Unhappy people cannot sing. Unhappy people make a stone face and feel downcast for no obvious reason. But children of God are thankful to God, so thankful that they cannot but sing spiritual songs and make music and say "Amen" together in a loud voice. Look at verse 20. "...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Children of God must thank God because he gave us his life in us and he gave us the privilege of living his life, a meaningful and fruitful life, in this world. Even though we can live God's life only for the appointed time, we must thank God for the privilege of living God's life in this world. We must thank God for the privilege to shepherd the flock of God under our care. We must thank God for the privilege of having a wife or husband and many children. On the other hand, anyone, even a good Christian, if he is not thankful even for a certain period of time, can be driven into darkness. There is a senior shepherd who has dedicated his whole life to God's ministry since he was converted by the grace of God and by the word of Ephesians 2:10. He has been always thankful despite unceasing sorrows and too large a burden of ministry. But one day, he was not thankful to God. In the course of engaging in his ministry as a student evangelist, his only son had been a joy to him. His only son is a head taller than he and very handsome. He is pure and thoughtful. Finally, he obtained a Ph.D. in analytical chemistry from the nationally top ranking laboratory and school in analytical chemistry. But after obtaining a Ph.D., he did not get a desirable position. So the senior shepherd got upset. He was not thankful that his son was not accepted as an assistant professor in a first class university. Then he was not thankful to God. So the devil drove him into darkness and made him say, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless." The senior shepherd should have thanked God for the privilege of having such a

decent son and enabling him to support his son to finish a Ph.D. Especially he should thank God, trusting God's guidance for the future. He taught Matthew 6:33. It says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." But the senior shepherd didn't remember that verse and began to worry about his son's future security problem and complained about his son's leadership. One night, he complained to God, "What is my reward? Is it my reward that I have a son with a Ph.D. who is unemployed?" Then God seemed to be saying to him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2Co 12:9). And he came back to his sense. He thanked God who enabled his son to get a Ph.D., only by God's grace. Then he could sing a song. Here we learn that a thankful mind makes us sing a spiritual song. But an unthankful mind drives us into darkness to become like a dead man.

Fourth, marriage in God (22-33).

There are many young men and women from broken families. Outwardly they look handsome and beautiful. But in the course of studying the Bible with them, we can find that each one's heart was broken and they are endlessly sorrowful. We wondered why Rock Hudson, such a first class handsome man and renowned movie star, died of AIDS. Time magazine explained that his father died early, and he could not remember his father's face. When Rock Hudson turned 14, he began to miss his father. He was desperate to taste his father's love, even though he knew his father had passed away. He became a movie star. When we watch the movie entitled, Giant, he was the main star. His partner was Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth Taylor commented on him that he was really a decent man. Many people think that in the course of longing for his father's love, he began to like men more than women. So he worked hard to produce many movies and usually slept with men friends. Before sleeping, he drank a cup of wine. After chatting they slept. Later, he was found to be an AIDS patient and died of AIDS in France. Such a handsome and decent man died of AIDS because of his love problem. The other day, there was an article about a four-star admiral, Admiral Boorda. When he was 16, his parents' marriage was troubled. So he came to the conclusion that, "reducing the amount of pain I suffered every day was important to me." In his parents' initial stage of divorce, he was deeply wounded and rejected by them. He was 16, but he joined the navy saying he was 18. According to Newsweek magazine he was a very disciplined and friendly person. Even though he was a four-star admiral, remembering his sailor's time, he was like a friend to the sailor class of navy people. So he was known as the friend of sailors. He joined the Vietnam War two times and received many medals. Newsweek magazine dug out whether or not he had the privilege of wearing two medals among many medals. Then his pride was greatly hurt. He thought he was an exemplary four-star admiral. But the journalists began to investigate him. He deserved the medals. But the journalists rejected his achievement. He felt a sense of rejection, and his old wounds must

have overpowered him. Of course, it was Satan's prank. Here we learn that parents' love to their children is very important.

In this part, St. Paul talks about establishing a family. Paul never married. But he set the principle of being God's family in two ways. First, a wife's duty. A wife must acknowledge the spiritual order that her husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body (23). Of course, they are equal. But to a wife, to realize the spiritual order is very important. In verse 33, Paul says one more thing to a wife. The last part of verse 33 says, "...and the wife must respect her husband." Usually, all men want to be loved by their wives and want to be served by their wives. How can a wife respect such a person? That's a question. Here, when Paul said, "respect her husband," it means to recognize her husband as her husband. Also, she must recognize his weaknesses and the elements in him that he has to improve as his virtues and respect him.

These days, many couples say, "I love you," with their mouths. But husbands are too young to love their wives and wives are too young to respect their husbands. Many women do not even know the meaning of the word "respect." So they don't respect their husbands. Instead, they demand unceasingly. Then the husbands are burdened and become weary. So God gave woman a mother-like character to embrace her husband. Usually men begin to grow from the age of 35. So wives should not demand many things. Rather, they must treat their husbands as one of their children and take care of them until they fully grow up. In short, respect is to see her husband with motherly affection.

Next Paul says something to husbands. Verse 25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." As we know well, there are two kinds of love: physical love (Eros) and God's love (Agape). Marriage is not sharing physical love. Physical love is limited. But these days many parents divorce when their children are around junior or senior high school age. This clearly shows us that there is a limitation in physical love. Admiral Boorda's parents also began to fight to divorce when he was 16 years old. The cause of fighting when their children are in junior and senior high school is that many husbands want younger women. That's the reason why they divorce. Therefore, a woman must marry a man of God who knows the love of God.

The love of God is like heavenly sunshine. A woman is like a beautiful flower. Beautiful flowers cannot bloom into fullness without heavenly sunshine. Love is like living water to a thirsty soul. Women are sometimes weak and they need a husband's love and care. Then they continue to become more and more beautiful. In Russia, there is a bad phenomenon of Russian women. They lost, throughout three wars and by one dictator, 40,000,000 husband candidates. So in Russia, women hold

all the menial jobs and men usually hold secretary jobs. If a Russian woman marries, she is very lucky. And if she is not married, it is very normal. Whether they marry or not, Russian men do not know how to love their wives because of their superior feelings. So one phenomena is that when Russian women are young they are very pretty and slim, all like ballerinas. But when they get over 30, they become all like snowmen out of their discontent. They are not loved. So they become very ugly.

According to Paul's instruction, a husband must love his wife as Christ loved his church. Here "church" means the flock of God. Any woman would be more and more beautiful if there were no divorce. If there were no divorce, there would be no children from broken families with broken hearts. By the same token, if a wife respects her husband, even if his arms are like a piece of chopstick, he can soon grow as a great man. Suppose there is a family. The father loves his wife and the wife respects her husband in their conversation before their children. Children feel very secure and happy. On the other hand, if parents divorce, it causes their children's hearts to be broken. They do whatever they can to soothe their sorrow and pain of losing their happy family. Here Paul's instructions about establishing a family in God are really important spiritual lessons which all Americans must accept and keep.

Today we thought about the words, "be imitators of God." May God help us to decide to be imitators of God. May God richly bless you.