

Live A Life of Love
Ephesians 5:1-33
Key Verse: 5:2

“... 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.”

In Ephesians 5, Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians to live a life of love. The phrase, “live a life of love,” might be the best summary of how to live out our new lives in Jesus. Let’s learn from St. Paul this morning what a life of love is and how to live a life of love.

I. Live a life of love. (1-7)

First, be imitators of God. (1) Look at verse 1. “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children....” To “be imitators” means to learn from someone else in order to master something. Sometimes the word “imitation” has a negative connotation because it conjures up images of low quality, counterfeit branded products made overseas. Moreover, our culture places a high premium on originality and creativity. But without imitating, we cannot master a field of study or skill nor are we able to be original and creative. Beethoven is universally acknowledged as a creative genius. He was a child prodigy but he knew that to be a great musician, he had to study under a great musician. He wanted to study under Mozart and he eventually studied under Haydn. Only by imitating and learning from Haydn, could Beethoven become the great composer we know today.

To imitate is not easy. In the ancient world, a young man named Demosthenes was ridiculed for his weak voice and poor pronunciation. So he went to the best orator of his time to be trained. To imitate his teacher’s pronunciation, Demosthenes put small pebbles in his mouth and practiced until he could speak clearly through the pebbles. To imitate his teacher’s volume, Demosthenes practiced on the seashore to train his voice to be louder than the roaring waves. By imitating his teacher, Demosthenes became one of the best orators in history.

We are familiar with imitating. Some people want to be like their favorite athlete. They imitate how they practice and play and even wear the same clothes and shoes. To be successful in their careers and in business, some people imitate Bill Gates or Sam Walton. When we visit the Art Institute, we can see art students with paint and canvas, reproducing masterpieces and imitating the styles and techniques of famous artists. Without imitation, we forever remain mediocre or worse.

Who or what, then, should we imitate? Let’s read verse 1. “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.” It is one thing to imitate other people to learn some skill or technique. But Paul says that children of God must be imitators of God. To be imitators of God is more than just coming to church. To imitate God is to learn his heart and mind and grow to be like Jesus. To imitate God is to grow in the fullness of God’s love. We can really imitate God when we are sure that we are dearly loved by God. Children, who are sure about their parents’ love, almost instinctively imitate them. They learn not only skills but they especially learn their parents’ heart and mind for them. In this way, they also learn to love others. To be imitators of God we must be sure that God is our Heavenly Father who loves us as his precious children.

Second, a life of love. (2) How can we be imitators of God? Let’s read verse 2. “... 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.” We imitate God when we live a life of love. The phrase, “live a life of love”, is very beautiful. It inspires us to overcome selfishness and our differences with others to live a noble and meaningful life of devotion. People often think of love as a feeling but according to the Bible, love is expressed as a lifestyle. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 say, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” All of these things about love are not so much about how we feel as much as they are about how we live. We live a life of love when patience, kindness, humility, selflessness, hope and perseverance define our relationships with others. There are so many good examples of those who lived a life of love, like Rev. Yang Won Sohn who adopted the person who murdered his sons, Corrie Ten Boom who forgave the Nazis for killing her family members and brought Christ’s forgiveness to countless people after World War II, and Mother Teresa who loved the poorest of the poor and sickest of the sick in India.

“Live a life of love” sounds good but it also sounds too hard. How can we live a life of love? We cannot by ourselves but we can live a life of love, when we accept God’s love for us. Look at verse 2 again. “... 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.” Jesus loved us so much that he sacrificed himself on the cross, to take up the punishment for all of our sins. Because Jesus loved us, we have an obligation of love to also love. 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” Therefore, to live a life of love begins by accepting Jesus’ love for us. When we accept Jesus’ love and forgiveness for us, we can love and forgive others. Moreover, we see from Jesus that there is no limit to a life of love. Jesus loved us to the point of death and we ought to do the same for our brothers.

During this past summer, there were many Bible conferences around the world. Some of us were blessed to even join these conferences and see firsthand what God is doing in faraway places through missionaries. A missionary’s life is not glamorous but difficult. Many have no security in this world. Many struggle with language, cultural differences and loneliness. Some struggle with their health. Some are in danger because of their missionary activities. Some worry about their children’s future. Why, then, do they remain in the mission field? I remember speaking with a missionary to a third world country a few years ago. She talked about the unstable political environment, the potential for persecution, difficult living conditions and uncertain finances. The worst part was that the people were not trustworthy and had sometimes cheated her family. When asked why her family remains there, she said, “Because we love these people.” She is still there, living a life of love and God has blessed her ministry. Not only her but many remain in their difficult mission fields because they want to live a life of love as Christ has loved them.

We, too, can live a life of love where we are. There is a family here this morning that was instrumental in leading me to faith in Jesus and helping me to grow in that faith. If they had not lived a life of love until today, I would not be standing here this morning. If they had not lived a life of love, I might not even be a Christian. I have felt like one of their dearly loved children, so I have tried to imitate the life of love that I have seen in them. God has put many into my life who have inspired and encouraged me to live a life of love. There is no better way to live. Usually, though, I could not live up to this heavenly standard of living even though I really wanted to do so. I am very sorry before God that I have regularly lived a life of pride, a life of selfishness and a life of indifference but not a life of love. Still Jesus’ love and grace are limitless. Surely he will help me. I pray to live as Jesus lived by loving as he loved. May God bless each of us to live the most beautiful life – a life of love.

Third, not even a hint.... (3-7) A life of love is also characterized by moral purity. Let’s read verses 3-4. “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 course joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk and course joking are all antithetical to a life of love. We must not have even a hint of these things in our lives.

Paul gives a strong warning about this in 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.” Immorality, impurity and greed lead to idolatry so we must get rid of these things in our lives. But everywhere we go, whether work, school, the movie theatre or anywhere else, we find immorality, impurity and greed. So we must be careful not to be partners with these things or with people who do these things. The most common conversation topics involve gossip or complaining or course joking or all of the above. As God’s holy people, we must not participate in those things. Rather, we must be ready to give thanks to God in any situation. The life of love is characterized by thanksgiving to God.

II. You are light in the Lord. (8-20)

Let’s read verse 8a. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” Paul says that in the past, we were not only in darkness but we were darkness itself. Wherever we went, we also brought darkness to others. One person said that the first time he went to a UBF center, everyone’s face seemed to shine like the sun. On other hand, a shepheress later commented that she’d never seen such a dark-faced person as this person. It wasn’t a comment about his skin tone – it was a comment about his soul. However, after he accepted Jesus, he was no longer dark. He

became light in the Lord. He and his family have been a blessing to many, including me. They will soon move to North Carolina to shine Jesus' light to the students at UNC – Wilmington.

All Christians are light in the Lord. Instead of bringing darkness, we shine Jesus' light wherever we go. Jesus' light brings forgiveness, love and hope. Jesus' light gives meaning to our lives. A life of love shines Jesus' light in us into the world. How can we do so?

First, live as children of light. (8-14) Let's read verses 8b-10. "Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord." In Jesus, we are light. There is no room for darkness. We should not be angels in church and devils at home. Instead we must consistently live out our new identities as children of light and bear good fruit. This requires finding out what pleases the Lord. Children of light must study the Bible, pray and then put God's word into practice.

Look at verse 11. "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." Children of light stay away from the fruitless deeds of darkness. According to verse 12, they should not even talk about what is done in darkness because those deeds are so shameful. Darkness pervades the world but children of light drive it out by shining Jesus' light. They do so by living a life of love, revealing God's love to a world that does not know what real love is but is so hungry for it. Children of light also expose the fruitlessness of darkness so that people may turn from their darkness and live a fruitful life in Jesus. Let's live as children of light and shine brightly through our lives of love.

Second, be wise. (15-21) Let's read verse 15 together. "Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise, but as wise...." We need wisdom to live a life of love. In particular we need wisdom to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. When we look at the world, we can become discouraged by the evil things we see. But we must see these things, not as hindrances, but as opportunities to live a life of love. In fact, every opportunity is an opportunity to glorify God. We need God's wisdom to see these opportunities and to make the most of them for God.

Verse 17 says, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Fools live according to their sinful nature but truly wise people understand what God's will is. God does not want us to get drunk and become party animals. God's will is for us to be filled with his Holy Spirit and speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. God's will is for us to sing and make music to him that expresses our thanks to him. We have so many reasons to sing songs of thanks to God. We can especially sing songs of thanks to God for his love to us through Jesus. May God fill our hearts with beautiful songs of thanksgiving to him and help us to sing them to each other.

III. Submit to one another. (21-33)

Let's read verse 21 together. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." In this verse Paul gives a general principle governing relationships between Christian brothers and sisters. That principle is the principle of submission. It is a practical outworking of living a life of love. Submitting to one another requires humility, love and faith. It requires humility because we must regard our brothers and sisters as better than ourselves. It requires love because we must love our brothers and sisters and value our relationship with them above our own pride. It requires faith because we submit out of reverence for Christ. We recognize Jesus' authority and sovereignty in our relationships and every situation.

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ is critical in the Christian fellowship. Submitting basically means to give in to our brothers and sisters even when we are convinced that we are right. We often have differing opinions from others. We might even be sure that the other person is wrong about what they think or do. We feel strongly about something because we act according to our Christian convictions. Even so, if the situation cannot be resolved, if we only remain "butting heads", the spiritual principle here is to submit to our brothers and sisters. We give in to them but we do not give up on them and we do not give up our convictions. If we give in, we must not mentally or spiritually "checkout". Paul wrote, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." After submitting, we pray for God to be glorified. We also pray for the other person and we pray for ourselves, that God would give us a humble heart to accept if we are wrong and that he would help us not to hold bad feelings toward others. According to our Christian conscience, we want to do what is right before God. When we strive to live a life

of love, like Jesus, God will help us to do what is right, including submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

To illustrate submission, Paul turned his attention to the relationship between a wife and husband. It is because their relationship is a model of the relationship between Jesus and the church. When a husband and wife have a right relationship with each other, their family serves as a witness of Jesus to the world.

First, wives, submit to your husbands. (22-24) Let's read verse 22. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." Paul repeats this in verse 24. It doesn't say, "Wives submit to your husbands if you think he's right but nag and rebuke him until he repents when you think he's wrong." We should not use sophistry when understanding these verses. Very simply, wives should submit to their husbands. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. The church submits to Christ and so a wife should submit to her husband.

Second, husbands, love your wives. (25-33) Let's read verse 25. "Husbands, love you wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." Now look at verse 28. "In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." Paul is very clear. Husbands must love their wives. There are no provisions or exceptions. It doesn't say, "Husbands, love your wives but make sure you point out every single one of her mistakes." Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." A husband must be like Jesus toward his wife, even laying down his life for her. Let's pray that God may build up many beautiful families in this land, where husbands love their wives and wives respect their husbands.

In this passage, Paul encourages us to live a life of love. When we accept God's love, we can live a life of love. This love governs the relationship between a husband and wife, helps us to submit to one another in our Christian fellowship and shines as a bright light, driving out darkness in the world. May God fill our hearts with his love so that we may live a life of love.