

“He who imitates God.”

Ephesians 5:1-2

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Ephesians 5:1-2 (PowerPoint)

Preface

It has been a long time since we have studied book of Ephesians.

So far, through the words of Ephesians 4, we have been taught that “if we are made believers in Christ, how should we live?” and “Specifically, if loving God is not connected to and practiced in loving our neighbor, then we don’t know what it means to love God.”

In a sense, this seems to be the scariest thing the Bible points out.

As we move into Ephesians 5, following what was said in chapter 4 and digging deeper, we see God’s demands, expectations, and promises for believers in Christ.

As we read through chapters 5 and 6, we are taught what the Christian life of faith is ultimately a battle for, what we should arm ourselves with for that battle, and where we should focus our efforts.

As we read chapters 5 and 6, we finally come to know that our battle is not against flesh and blood or against the material world, but is a spiritual battle.

In our lives of faith, we tend to focus on fight and comparisons on how we can accumulate ethical and moral good deeds. However, if you carefully read Ephesians 5 and 6, you will see that the life of faith of a Christian goes far beyond the external manifestations of so-called morality and good deeds, in other words, it is not an earthly matter, but a far higher heavenly matter, a spiritual matter.

And once we see that, we will finally pray a little more deeply, a prayer that is more like a believer in Christ. We will also realize that each of us plays an important role not only in Tsuchiura Megumi Church, a small church, but also in our times and in our society.

It is as if ten righteous and just men were sought by the society and the world before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As we read through Ephesians 5 and 6, we hope to realize that we are being led to a place where we can pray and experience a deep spiritual flavor once we know and realize that each of us is called

before God as a righteous person whom God is seeking in this time period, in this nation, and in this world. I hope to be led to a place where I can pray and have a deep spiritual experience.

Part One

Ephesians 5:1 begins like this.

Ephesians 5:1 (PowerPoint)

The phrase here, “Be imitators of God,” more accurately means something like “be conformed to the image of God”.

The word “formed” means to pour something like lead into a mold to produce something of the same shape.

In other words, this phrase, “Be imitators of God,” is not just a matter of “following God,” but is a demand for something so impossible that one can only be astonished at the idea of being “shaped by God”.

If we look at it from the perspective of a Christian’s responsibility or duty, it seems like a burden, an impossible demand that weighs heavy on our hearts.

From the moment we decide to let the words, “Be imitators of God,” arise in our own bodies and by our own strength, we will be frustrated.

How, then, should we interpret these words?

Ephesians 2:10 says, “Even the good deeds we do are not because of our appearance or character, but because God has prepared them in advance”. This verse tells us that God is like a parent who watches over a child who cannot do anything on his/her own, but who is happy to crawl or waddle around on his/her own, rejoices with the child in his/her accomplishment, and never takes their eyes off the child, while preparing in advance what is necessary for the child to crawl or waddle around.

In other words, the words, “Be conformed to the image of God and imitate him,” are not God’s demands to us as responsibilities, duties, tasks, or things to be done, but God’s plan, His intention, His will to accomplish it at all costs, and His promise to fulfill it with us.

Part Two

I would like to ask you a question here.

In your life as a believer in Christ, which do you experience more, gratitude and inspiration or frustration and sorrow?

Which do you experience more in your life of faith, joy or hardship?

Due to the words, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace,” or “Be joyful all the time, and be thankful in all things. This is what God wants you to do in Christ Jesus”, there may be a misconception that the Christian life of faith is always full of joy. But in reality, I think we are sometimes tormented by the conflict that it is not so.

Of course, God ultimately delights in us, gives us experiences of unparalleled inspiration, intervenes to fulfill them, keeps us involved, and leads us into what can only be described as miracles, but most of the time along the way, we go through frustration, pain, and hardship.

This is obvious in the Old and New Testaments, and it is also obvious in our own lives of faith.

So why is this so?

Because there are far more things that need to be removed and stripped away first in order to make us conform to the image of God.

When we try to glue something together, if we do not wipe the place where it is to be glued clean before attaching it, it will peel right off. In the same way, when I, as a person, try to receive something that God has allowed to be “given” or “passed on,” I begin to feel that I am incapable of receiving good things from God as they are.

New wine must be put into a new leather bag, but we often fail to see that the new bag is not ready in us.

Sometimes we are told that “You are loved. God Loves you. You are loved by God just the way you are.” It is an overall, all-encompassing, and ultimately accurate statement, but I think it can also be a pitfall if it is misinterpreted.

In reality, the deeper our relationship with God grows, the more grateful we are that it is so, but also the more uncomfortable we will feel.

But that discomfort is what it means to be a believer.

The more our faith is deepened and advanced, the more we say with inexpressible gratitude, “I am a sinner. I am the head of sinners. I am the least of these.” We cannot help but see the evil, the sin, the iniquity that lives within us, without ceasing.

Our life of faith is, in a sense, a life of being bound together by the confession, “I am a sinner”.

What God has already given us and is about to give us is so holy, so rich, so great, so vast.

In front of them, it is so much so that my own condition seems totally unworthy. Nevertheless, God promises us, “Be imitators of God and be conformed to his image”. God, fully aware of our inadequacies, immaturity, and sinfulness, does not say to us, “Be imitators of God,” in order to test us and decide whether we pass or fail. It is God’s loving look at His beloved child that gives us living hope.

In Ephesians 5:1, before the words, “Be imitators of God,

Ephesians 5:1 (PowerPoint)

the words, “as dearly loved children” appears.

God does not say, “If you can do this or that, you are my child”. I think the words, “Be imitators of God,” are an expectation because we are already God’s children, a promise to be fulfilled with God, and words that contain God’s sanctifying declaration, “I have sanctified you,” so that we do not forget who we are.

He knows very well that we can never reach that level or reach that state by ourselves, but with the declaration, “I am the Son of God,” He says, “Be imitators of God, and fulfill the way of life to be conformed to Him”.

Well, we may honestly feel that we are not so sure, but in Isaiah 55, we are told that “God’s word once spoken will never come to naught, but will surely come to pass”.

Isaiah 55:8-11 (PowerPoint)

The promised words, “you will be an imitator of God,” will be accomplished far beyond our setbacks, concerns, and reactions.

Therefore, we can be thankful, despite our fears, if we sincerely accept God’s request to “be imitators of God” and try to live with the fact that God’s word will be fulfilled in spite of our inadequacies and lack of confidence.

When we think about it this way, I wonder if the words, “Be imitators of God,” are more like a promise than a one-sided command or demand.

A promise is not fulfilled if only one party keeps the promise, but if both parties fulfill their duty to keep the promise, the promise will be fulfilled.

Then, the most important thing in our life of faith that is necessary for us to keep and fulfill the promise, “Be imitators of God,” is to get to know God.

We need to strive to know who God is.

Surprisingly, it seems that our own appeals often take precedence, and knowing God is often neglected or obscured in our lives of faith.

In the process of knowing God, we need to strive to know what is holy, righteous, and just. But if we do not seek that holiness, righteousness, and justness in God’s love, God’s forgiveness, and God’s character, it will only manifest itself as a standard for judging people and things, a “should do” law, or religious mindset that is virtually godless and no different than socially accepted good, justice, ethics, or morality.

The most important demand from God to us in the Christian faith is not “Be good and righteous,” but the realization that “I make you my child, and I have done.”

In other words, it is not whether one is righteous or unrighteous that determines what he or she is, but who’s family is he or she belongs first determines what his or her existence is.

The most important confession of the Christian faith is an identity of unconditional love and forgiveness, of being a child of that person in that family, even though he or she lies, is unapologetic, and is not always right.

And it is a promise made between God the Father and us that we will change our identity accordingly, and that there are things we should strive to do to keep that promise.

There is a biblical passage in which Jesus teaches us about this.

John 13:34-35 (PowerPoint presentation)

The word “love” is in some ways a familiar word to us, and therefore there is room for a variety of differences between what the Bible requires and what we think it means.

To what dimension and to what degree does Jesus demand love, to the point where “when others see that you love one another, they will recognize that you are my disciples.”

This is another demand that is filled with great expectations.

We have children at home, and as parents who are raising them, I would say that what we fear or feel uneasy about is that no matter how much we put on an outward appearance, the image of the parent will be projected onto the image of the child, and if we look at the child, we will see the parent, and what kind of family we are.

Jesus points out that if people look at us and do not see in us that the One who made us His children is loving, rich in forgiveness, skilled in waiting, patient, forgiving, and faithful, then we may still be on the wrong path. But while doing so, Jesus asks us to “follow the path of loving.

That said, it is not easy.

If we go to Matthew 5, we find that Jesus goes into more depth about this.

Matthew 5:43-48 (PowerPoint)

(Here we see the words “to be children of the Father.”)

This is an outrageous demand from God.

We can’t help but feel how difficult and scary it is to “be imitators of God, be conformed to the image of God” in the words of Jesus.

Part Four

When I think about why our faith stumbles, I think it is because we are so focused on “what is right”.

What I feel is right. What I feel is wrong.

I can be angry because I am right, and I can judge because I am right. Because they are wrong.”

But Jesus, the Bible, does not demand what is right or what is right in faith in Christ.

Because no one human being is right, right?

All of us are black, even if God requires us to be right.

When we measure people by such a scale, nothing comes out, because we all are sinners.

We are not the children of God because we are righteous.

We did not become children of God because we were righteous and better than others, but because God felt sorry for us, pitied us, forgave us, and loved us.

That is why Jesus says, “Love as God the Father loves us in Christ Jesus”.

Our half-baked standards, filled with hypocrisy, only create a distinction between good people and bad people, but before God, there is no good or bad, Christian or non-Christian.

The One who makes the sun rise and the rain fall on all people is the God of love who created heaven and earth and all things.

Therefore, we must not give up on the path of love, not judging, not looking down on, feeling sorry for, sympathizing with the weakness of, and choosing to love.

We must remember that if that person is a sinner, then I am just as much, or more, a sinner...

We must know that there is no greater sin than to regard that person as inferior, to despise him or her, to feel superior in my heart, as insignificant.

But this, too, is not such an easy thing to do.

Christianity is love, we say, and indeed the Christian faith is love.

But how much have we loved only those whom we felt worthy to love?

It seems there is no room for use to compare ourselves with others, or with that person, or with our church.

Maybe the prayer request we need more of is us, ourselves.

“Do I really love? Do I know how scary sin is? How much do I know that I am utterly helpless in the face of sin?”

This is the most important prayer request for us, and I think it is what the Bible consistently talks about.

But, putting aside such important things, we can be so concerned with distinguishing between right and wrong, so focused on whether someone is good or bad, so concerned with how zealous or lazy they are, that we can delude ourselves into thinking that judging them is an act of faith. It is not faith, but morality.

The Bible does not say, and Jesus does not say, that loving those who like you, loving those with whom you are comfortable, loving your fellow man, your children, or your family, is love.

It is an instinct, and in a sense, a responsibility. It is an ethical responsibility.

And the love that the Bible tells us to love is to love our enemies. Love your enemies... but how impossible is that?

Just not to take revenge on our enemies is admirable.

It may be enough just not to hate our enemies and not to take revenge on them, and we are so helpless that we must use all our patience, we must use our whole nerve.

And so, what we are made to learn there is that I am not yet ready to die to myself. We are made to learn that although I say that I died on the cross with Christ, my body is still full of cells and DNA that have not yet died with Christ, using Him as a springboard to keep me alive.

Questions like, “Why doesn’t God just lead us to where we want to be, where we are satisfied?” may follow us on a daily basis. It is to confirm to ourselves our weakness, our sinfulness, and our insufficiency, isn’t it?

The words of God to the Israelites who lived in the wilderness for 40 years after the Exodus,

Deuteronomy 8:2 (PowerPoint)

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

These words apply exactly to us.

Part Five

As we pray the Lord’s Prayer in our weekly worship services, are there any words that catch your attention every time you pray it?

Forgive us for our indebtedness. (So far, so good. But then) We have also forgiven those who are indebted to us.”

Every time, we lie.

We must see ourselves as far from passable, even with our emotions, our reason, our personality, everything we have, and even when we examine ourselves with the love that Jesus said, “Love your enemies. And again we must continue to bow down to the cross, to kneel, to tie ourselves to the cross, to submit, to die, to pray with tears, snot, torn garments, and ashes, and this is what the Bible demands of us, is it not?

What a difficult demand to keep on doing and to accomplish!

And yet, there is only one reason why the Bible demands these things of us.

As we saw in Ephesians 5:1.

We are beloved children of God, and that is why we are demanded these things.

My father was a graduate of elementary school only and could not learn in school even if he wanted to. He did not want his children to feel that way, so he really worked hard and used his earnings to send his beloved children to school and give them opportunities to study.

However, as my father’s child, it was hard for me, and there were countless times when I thought, “I don’t want to do this anymore,” but it was a blessing.

God is now calling us as His children and sending us to a place of spiritual training and spiritual learning in order to make us worthy of being His children.

I know it must be hard for you, but it is a blessing.

Job in the Old Testament lost his family, his possessions, and even his health in one day.

And as he struggled through the unpleasantness, the indescribable pain and suffering, Job wondered, “What did I do wrong? If I had done this, if I had done that, this would not have happened... How can I get out of this situation and pass through it quickly? God, I don’t know, but please forgive me for now. Please don’t touch me again,” he appealed. However, God’s intervention led him to the result that He wanted.

When you cook rice or make delicious soup from pork bones, you don’t set the fire for 20 or 30 minutes, but rather until the rice is properly cooked and the delicious soup is fully cooked.

The same is true of God.

To borrow a phrase from Job, He is the God who “will not leave me alone while I swallow my spit”.

Until He gets the results.

Until you bear the fruit that God wants His children to bear.

It is not God's purpose to remove suffering, it is not God's purpose to remove pain, but to take us to the point where we will be remade worthy of God's children, where God wants us to be, and when that happens, we too will surely come to joy.

Of course, there are many things that we have brought about by our badness and failures, but in God, there is no "what if" or coincidence.

God, who loved us so much that He crucified His Son, Jesus Christ, will never rest from His hand of transforming us into people who want to love others as the Lord Jesus did, into people who want to love their neighbors, into people who love each other.

Therefore, our struggles, sufferings, failures, and setbacks will never end in struggles, sufferings, failures, and setbacks, but will bear the fruit of the Son of God, the fruit of perfection.

This is our faith.

We are, Ephesians 5:1,

Ephesians 5:1 (PowerPoint)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children

In the process of the fulfillment of this Word of God, we have come to see what we could not see before, to hear what we could not hear before, to understand what we could not understand before, and I believe this will happen more and more.

And yet, God is not giving up, and in order to fulfill this Word in our bodies, He is pulling something away, cutting something away, and making something strong again, making us "beloved children, shaped by God," realizing that "in the presence of God's love, we really have no enemies", God will transform us into people who love someone else.

Conclusion

Recently, we had quite an argument again, and I said to my wife, "You haven't been changed at all! But I have been changed!" She said, "What are you talking about? Not only have you not been changed at all, but you have become far worse than you were in the past! Who do you think you are?."

Both of us were so angry and disgusted with the other, but when we were brought into the grace of the Lord and made calm, we realized that we were both being changed in the Lord's love and grace, even if it may be a step backward or forward in His grace.

We are sinners to the point that we have no time for others, and yet we are blessed to the point that we have no time to envy others. We are kept alive in a promise so sure that we have no time to complain, and even though we stumble, fall, lose, and hurt, we are led to a place where we can confess with certainty that "it is beautiful in the right time," and we notice a change in ourselves that we can now notice things we could not see before, could not hear before, could not notice before".

We notice that we want to seek God more directly, that the Word of the Bible is delicious, that there is no greater event than being saved in Jesus, and that we are made wider, deeper, and higher than before.

We are thankful that we are coming to understand more than before, that no matter what our circumstances, no matter what our position, no matter how painful, we do not end up with a final setback, but that all that happens to us is profitable for us, a growth, and a coming to a place where we are perfect as God the Father is perfect..

We can only be thankful, remembering that we are called to love, not to impose unreasonable demands, but to be privileged, proud, joyful, blessed, and honored because we are children of God.

God will not give up on making us imitators of Him.

Then we hope that we will be the ones who do not give up.

Let's pray.

Benediction: Ephesians 5:1