

“Seeking the Miracle of Love”

Ephesians 5:1-2

September 15, 2024

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Ephesians 5:1-2 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Last week, we were taught in verse 1 about the status of the sons of God, who are called to be imitators of God and shaped by Him, and the promises of God that accompany this status.

This morning, I would like to consider the words of the next verse, “Walk in love”.

The Apostle Paul, the author of the book of Ephesians, uses the parable of how Jesus loved us in order to speak of “walking in love”.

That is, God’s ultimate purpose for those who believe in Christ is to “become those who love like Jesus”.

It is not the Christian faith to stop at “I am loved by God,” but to “love as I was loved” is God’s intention, goal, expectation, and plan.

We are called by God to love in a concrete way, not in a vague way, but with a concrete content, shape, and form.

Part One

When we are given faith and begin our life of faith as believers in Christ and in God, what do we look for when we examine the quality and content of our faith? I think it is something that is “fulfilled, heard,” something that is expressed in words like “how blessed I am,” etc.

“I believed in the one true God, and my health was blessed. I was blessed financially as my life improved. I was blessed in social status. When I prayed, the rain stopped and I was blessed with clear skies. I was totally lacking, but strangely enough, I was filled up and things turned out well.” With such things, we will want to realize our faith in Christ the Father.

In fact, God sometimes gives us these things in abundance so that we can experience faith in an easy-to-understand way.

Of course, it is a delightful and gratifying blessing.

And as faith progresses, the question of sin and righteousness now rises up.

We want to discern “what is righteousness and what is unrighteousness, what is sin, what is righteousness, and what God abhors.” By discerning these things, we will become self-conscious that we are Christians sanctified by God.

And as we go further, we will go from recognizing that we are Christians only by discerning sin and righteousness to wondering, “Having been made righteous and holy children of God through Christ, how exactly should I walk, how should I live, and how is it that I am expected to live?”

And then we will find the God’s Word as we see today.
“Walk in love.”

What God wants us to do is to come to the point where our righteousness is love, not to the extent that we discern righteousness or unrighteousness.

God does not want us to just discern what is righteous and what is unrighteous, what is right and what is wrong, and be content with that, but He wants us to love.

God wants us to live in love, to treat others in love, to live in existential and practical love.

The ultimate goal God asks of Christians is to “walk in love.

As I ponder this alone, I am reminded of Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes, “Thou shalt not be too righteous, neither shalt thou be too wicked.” .

It reminded me of my own self, who, because of my confidence that I am a Christian and have been made a Christian, deluded myself into thinking that I am a righteous person, that I am good at judgment and discernment. I was reminded of my own self, who cut people down and judge them, saying, “That judgment is first necessary for love,” and clutching as if it were a biblical teaching, although it is a false teaching that I have created in myself, pretending that it is a biblical teaching, which is not in any biblical text.

I am right, I am too right.

On the other hand, I can’t help but think, “Well, it’s bad anyway, so it doesn’t matter anymore; let’s just open up and live our lives, holding on to our insidious badness, polishing it up, and pretending to be holy.

That's a thought that goes against the teaching, "You can't be too evil."

If all we have to do is talk about loving, it doesn't seem like such a difficult thing to do.

Or rather, it may be easy.

You might be able to get intoxicated in love with talking about love, intoxicated in pretending that you know what love is, and feel good about yourself with a feeling of self-satisfaction.

But the problem is that the Bible does not say, teach, or require that such things are love.

The Bible asks us to love.

The Bible tells us that "faith is not sitting around listening and nodding your head and saying, 'Yes, yes' .

Part Two

But then again, as we were taught last week, loving is not that easy. We think we know it in our heads, but when it comes to actually doing it, we inevitably experience that our bodies don't quite keep up with our brains.

Moreover, the love that the Bible teaches is not love of family, love between friends, or love between companions.

There is only one choice: "the love of enemies".

But the moment we say, "The Bible teaches it, so let's put it into practice," we are confronted with the frustration of impossibility and recklessness.

Then, when you try to resolve the setback by saying, "Well, it can't be helped now," you express your love by judging the person who is the object of your love, even though you were supposed to say, "I love and want to love".

Not only do the head and body not match, but the head is a part of the body and is exposed as a member of the same hole.

The Bible is well aware of this.

Interestingly, even though the Bible teaches us to "love," it begins to speak of love out of the impossibility of that love, placing the greatest emphasis on the impossibility of the practice of that teaching.

And in preaching that impossible love, it always speaks of “love us as Christ loved you”.

When the Bible speaks of love, where does it always begin? It is “as Christ loved you.”

Let’s go to the Epistle to the Romans.

Romans 5:8, 10 (PowerPoint).

Not when we were Jesus’ companions, co-workers, friends, and sympathizer, but “when we were sinners and enemies, God revealed His love for us in Christ dying for us”.

It is not because we are worthy to be loved, nor because we first asked God to love us. When we did not even know that such love existed, when we were antagonistic, hostile, offended, disgusted, frustrated, and turned our backs on God, whether we knew it or not, God the Father sent His only Son, Christ Jesus, the image of the invisible God, sinless, perfect, and righteous, to die on the cross. God the Father revealed His love to us by sending His only begotten Son, the sinless, perfectly righteous Christ Jesus, to die on the cross.

When we try to follow Jesus’ example and “practice a little love,” we naturally expect that the other person will notice us, even if it is only a little, react to us, look at us, even if it is only a little, and show us the sign that they are sorry, even if it is only a little.

Then you will feel rewarded and motivated.

But the moment you think this, you are told by the figure of Jesus in Romans that the love you tried to practice is no longer love.

Jesus revealed His love by dying for us, His perfect enemy and sinners, without exception, rather than love masquerading as such.

He revealed that love is to die for one’s enemies and to give oneself up for them in order to love them.

Therefore, before we spit words of judgment at others, what must be the first thing we must remember is, “On what terms and at what level did I receive love before God and before Jesus?”

“Who among us is qualified to judge others?” And so, today’s verse, Ephesians 5:2,

Ephesians 5:2 (PowerPoint)

I cannot help but remembering the content of this verse.

Part Three

It seems that the Apostle Paul had certain Old Testament events in mind when he spoke these words.

The words, “Christ loved us so much that He gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God, a fragrant aroma,” seem to have been written with the story of Noah’s flood recorded in Genesis chapters 6 through 8 in mind.

In Genesis 8, immediately after Noah’s flood, there is a scene in which Noah offers a sacrifice to God, and in that scene, God’s words as a response are connected to the words in Ephesians.

Genesis 8:20-21 (PowerPoint presentation)

This is one of the most important scenes in the Bible.
Why did Noah’s flood happen?

Genesis 6:5-7 (PowerPoint)

Noah’s flood was brought about because of this.
The most important reason for Noah’s flood was the spreading and increasing evil of man on the earth.

Genesis 6:5 (PowerPoint).

(Everyone ((every one of you, young and old, male and female)),
always((in whatever you do, for your whole life)))

Everything and anything we can think up from that mind, from the moment we are born with a cry, or to borrow David’s words, from the moment our mother is pregnant to the moment we die, we are human beings who are unrelentingly evil all our lives.

For example, when we try to forgive someone, what do we expect to be forgiven?

We forgive under the expectation and promise that the person will acknowledge and realize that he or she has done wrong and will not repeat the mistake again.

But what does it say here?

It says, “Your expectations are dashed.”

When we expect something, it does not turn out as expected, and we are the ones who do that evil again in the same way.

People are evil all their lives.

No matter how long we live, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110 years old, we are evil as long as we live.

Therefore, all but Noah's eight family members were to be erased from the face of the earth.

Then came Noah's flood, and when we look at the results of Noah's flood, we find that, oddly enough, nothing has changed.

Genesis 8:21 (PowerPoint)

Don't you notice something strange?

In chapter 6, when God says, "Man is evil, so I have blotted him out from the face of the earth," it is naturally expected that God would declare, "The world after Noah's flood, the people of that world, are better," or "I have seen improvements," or "Well, at any rate, it is at a level we can look at," etc. But what does God say?

"For the thoughts of man's heart are evil from his infancy."

Nothing has changed!

That is strange.

In chapter 6, He destroyed them because they were evil, but in chapter 8, He says, "I will not destroy them because they are evil."

Doesn't that sound like it doesn't add up?

So what is the difference between before and after Noah's flood? Before the Flood and after the Flood, one has God's judgment and the other does not, even though they are both equally evil.

What is the difference between the two?

The difference is that "the Lord smelled his fragrant aroma."

It is the crucial and fatal difference between before and after Noah's flood.

Was there or was there not a fragrant aroma of the sacrifice that was slain, burned up, and offered on the altar?

Here we see Jesus Christ who "loved us and gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, a fragrant aroma."

1 Peter 3:18-21 (PowerPoint)

What is the difference between the people in Genesis 6 and 8, even though they are as evil as ever?

Well, the big difference is that Jesus, the slaughtered lamb who “loved us and became for us a whole burnt offering, a sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God,” is either present or absent.

The ark that Noah boarded and the sacrifice that he offered represent Jesus Christ.

Though still evil, they hear the gospel of entering the ark of Christ and are led to the decision to enter the ark. Because of the ark of salvation from the judgment of the waters, and because of the sinless and evil offering of Christ Himself, the image of God, as a substitute for us, who are sin and evil. Those who believe will be saved from the final judgment, in which they will be destroyed without trace, this time not by water but by fire and sulfur, though they are still evil, and will be welcomed as children of God into the new heaven and new earth. This is the salvation that the Bible tells and the God’s love.

In Christianity, salvation is not to be saved from the various things of the earthly world that are destined to perish.

But, somehow, strangely enough, I can’t help but remember our spiritual stupidity, which is evil, that we live our lives seeking only the trivialized, human, visible salvation of “being saved from something on this earth,” which is only the worries, wealth, and pleasures of life.

But thankfully, and truly thankfully, all believers in Christ are alive in love under a salvation that is still evil but does not lead to apocalyptic destruction.

Part Four

In a sense, we do not really change.

Last week, I said “change” and “being changed,” but not in the sense of becoming saints and going on being changed. It is a change in which we become more aware that we are sinners with roots so deep that we cannot be talking about others. It is not a change in which evil is diminished.

Of course, there is the promise of sanctification, of growing, maturing, and reaching the stature of the fullness of Christ, but we don’t change.

We are not changed in the sense of sinfulness.

The moment you think, “Oh, I’m better than I used to be,” that moment reveals that the evil of pride, which has not changed at all and is blind to itself, is still living in you.

When I try to do something sinful, the reason I no longer do it or can no longer do it as I did in the past is not because I am a better person, but because God hinders me, God takes away the opportunity, God gives me weakness, and God protects me with His grace.

For example, when I was in a store somewhere and said, “You son of a bitch!” I heard a voice saying “Hong Sensei~” out of nowhere and was distracted by it.

Or, something bad came into my mind and I wanted to do it, but the trains and buses were late that day, so I thought, “I’ll do it the next day,” and when I went to bed and woke up, it didn’t matter anymore,

When I try to fight, outdo, earn, and win with values and standards that are completely not different from those of the world, I feel a tingle in my heart and a voice that says, “Is that good enough?” whether I wake up or go to sleep. “Oh, I’m in pain. I can think, “No matter if I lose or no matter if I will be ashamed of”, it is not because I am wiser than before, have a greater sense of justice, have more experience and wisdom in discerning things, or have less power to sin than before. It is just that God, in grace, has sent the heavenly army to work everything so that we can’t do so, and God has sent us a holy hindrance and protected us by the Holy Spirit within, or else we would still have the same guts to try to find an opening and sin.

So, what should we do to love like that?

Today’s scriptures give us a hint and an answer.

Ephesians 5:2 (PowerPoint)

To renounce ourselves and die, just as Christ renounced Himself and died because He loved us.

This is what it takes to love.

Dear brothers and sisters, what is the greatest sacrifice you have paid for believing in Jesus?

What did you sacrifice, what did you give up, what did you concede, what did you change before you believed in Jesus and after you believed in Him, and what did you sacrifice, what did you give up,

what did you concede, although you said earlier that you had not changed?

Time, things that you loved before, or maybe you were not understood or received cold shoulder or ridicule because of your faith in Jesus.

But one thing to consider here is that renouncing what I have and renouncing myself are two very different dimensions.

To abandon what I own is to have a stake in it; I only have to lose it, and my existence will still remain there.

But if I abandon who I am, then not even my existence will remain.

When we make a concession in a relationship or in a thing, we do so in order to preserve the existence of me.

By renouncing and giving up something, we protect my existence.

We cannot give up my very existence.

But when Jesus came to earth, He did not come to protect Himself by giving, giving up, and sacrificing something He had, but He gave, gave up, and sacrificed Himself.

He did not come to interest, to protect, to give up, or to judge, but to give up Himself, to die, to serve.

He came not only to wash the feet of His disciples, to be mocked, to spit in their faces, and to be flogged, but also to give up His very being.

The same is what the Bible demands of us with the words, "If anyone wishes to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

The words, thoughts, and decisions that may arise from this, "I want to live in humility," are a contradiction in terms when we say, "I want to live in humility."

It is a deception.

There is no humility, no pride, no misery, no blessing in "denying myself and taking up my cross."

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus has no existence of his own.

When you follow Jesus, you cease to exist in the name of "I".

In the name of Jesus Christ, you exist.

We are as the hands of Jesus Christ, the feet of Jesus Christ, and the mouth of Jesus Christ.

In anything else, we cannot exist if we are Christians.
That is what the Bible teaches us and demands of us.

Part Five

In this sense, love does not begin or come from us, but comes from the Lord Jesus alone.

There is love in the Lord, not in us.

If we say, "I have love," it would not be love, but pity of a higher order.

It may be the most ingenious way to indulge our own sense of superiority.

Love is never something we can have, and if we have love, it is all because of the Lord Jesus' use of us as persons, is it not?

In other words, the only thing that comes out in our speaking and doing of love can only come out in our denial of ourselves, in our abandonment, in our dying.

So, does it come out of us?

As I have said many times, it does not.

But the Bible says that Jesus, God, does not say, "Well, if you can't do it, so be it".

He asks for practical love, "Walk in love, just as Christ loved you, as beloved children."

So what do should we do?

We have to pray.

A prayer like "God, you say to me, 'Love me,' but it's a trick I can never pull off. Please work a miracle. Please give me the miracle of love." should come.

I think the word miracle is a word that we use only for loving.

If we prayed, "God, no hospital, no doctor can cure this disease. Lord, please perform a miracle of healing," and there is a testimony that this was answered, why don't we ask for a miracle for the sake of loving?

"Jesus, no amount of overturning or beating will ever produce love from me. I have no power to love. But the Lord asks us to love, so please, please let me love. Give me the love to love. Let me die, let Christ live, let me love as your hands, as your feet, as your mouth."

We are still told that if we are Christians, if we are the Church, if we are the flock of Christians, it is precisely because love is cold that we are in crisis, that we must tear our garments and cover ourselves with ashes for the lack of love, and pray for the miracle of love being put into practice.

In the presence of the Lord Jesus, we have no more miracles than to love.

There is no more faith than to love, and there is nothing else that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit ask of us except to love.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by praying a prayer for the miracle of love and reading the words of one who experienced the miracle of love even unto death.

Acts 7:54-60 (PowerPoint)

Praying Jesus' words, "He who wishes to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," as his own prayer, Stephen died, representing the miracle of loving the enemy who had stoned him to death, as Jesus' hands, feet, and mouth.

And it was the Apostle Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, known as Saul, who willingly led the killing of Stephen.

This miraculous prayer was passed on to Paul and is now spoken and urged upon us.

Please do not think of these words you have just read as a burden, but let us pray from where we can.

Let's pray.

Benediction : Ephesians 5:2