

"Be Ye ... Imitators Of God"

"Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell" (Eph. 5:1).

One always does well to imitate God in whatever thing He does: justice, forbearance, faithfulness to one's word. The appeal here because he uses the word *"therefore,"* is to an earlier recorded example of God's *"forgiving each other even as God also in Christ forgave you."* With the apostles' appeal in 4:32, *"Forgiving each other,"* we have a double appeal to forgive one another.

God has forgiven us! Precious thought! Still, while His promise of forgiveness is universal, to all who will, it is also limited: *"in Christ forgave you ..."* Paul has reiterated a statement from chapter one: *"in whom ... the forgiveness of our trespasses"* (1:7). Forgiveness is in Christ -- He is the way, the truth, the life. *"No one comes to the Father, save by me,"* He said (Jn. 14:6).

One can hardly read Paul's appeal here in these two chapters without remembering Jesus' parable of two debtors (Mt. 18:21-35). That parable came as response to Peter's question, *"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, until seven times?"* Peter's question, with its number, seemed generous indeed. Jesus' response, *"I say not unto thee, unto seven times, but until seventy times seven"* (Mt. 18:22). The parable which followed this exchange between Jesus and Peter was of a king who had a servant who owed him 10,000 talents, an unpayable debt. Yet, upon his earnest plea for mercy, the king graciously forgave the debt. Then that servant sought a fellow-servant who owed him 100 pence, a payable debt. When the second servant asked for time to pay the debt, the first showed no mercy no him. He *"cast him into prison till he should pay what was due"* (Mt. 18:30). In due time, word of his deed reached his own master's ears and it enraged him. The master then reversed his canceling of the debt, called for its full payment, and thrust the servant also into prison. Jesus, in His model prayer, set the proper course when He instructed His disciples to pray, *"and forgive us our debts, even as also we forgive our debtors;"* then adding *"for if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly father forgive you your trespasses"* (Mt. 6:15).

One of the greatest of self-destructing spirits one may possess is an unforgiving, bitter heart. Thus the Lord enjoins that we *"walk in love, even as Christ also loved you"* (Eph. 5:2). Walking in love is companion to forgiving one who injured us. It encompasses that we not only forgive those who wrong us

but that in the stead of the injury which they dealt to us, we respond by doing good to them. Once more our Master's words come clearly in focus: "*As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them.*" "*Love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you.*" "*Resist not him that is evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Mt. 7:12; 5:44, 39).

The greatest example of One who gave the example of perfect love -- even to those who injured Him -- is that of our Savior. He gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of an odor of a sweet smell. What a sacrifice Christ made for us! Dare we show a different spirit than His? Dare we allow our hearts to seeth with bitterness, malice, and anger at even one who has grievously wronged us? We must NOT! Let us be what the Holy Spirit, through Paul urged us to be and do: to be an imitator of God who forgave us; to do as His Son, to walk in love.

Jim McDonald