

Ephesians 5:1-2

Introduction

What is the mystery of God's will for the administration of the fullness of the times? What is the mystery of God's will for the goal and end of His creation? It is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.

The first half of Ephesians unveils how God has worked, and how He is still working to accomplish this purpose of uniting all things in Christ. He blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. He chose us in Christ. He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. He redeemed us through Christ's blood. He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ. He claimed us as His own inheritance in Christ. He sealed us with the Spirit of promise, the holy one, in Christ. He made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together with Christ, and seated us together with Christ in the heavenly places. Now God did all this for those who were at one time Gentiles in the flesh, for those who were not only separated from Christ but and alienated from God's people. God did all this so that in Christ, we who were far off might be *brought near* by the blood of Christ. God made Christ Himself to be our peace by creating one new man (the church) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles). Now we are stones in the *one* temple whose cornerstone is Christ. Now we are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.

All of this explains how God is working to accomplish the mystery of His will for the administration of the fullness of the times. This is how God has worked and is working to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him. That's the first three chapters.

The second half of Ephesians calls us to the privilege of *participating with God* in the working out of His plan. "I urge you *therefore*... to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." (4:1) "This *therefore* I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk... put off the old man... and put on the new man." (4:17, 22, 24)

Put OFF: *Therefore*, having put off the lie,
Put ON: speak truth—each of you—with his neighbor,
Gospel reason: because we are members of one another.

Put OFF: Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath,
Gospel reason: nor give place to the devil.

Put OFF: The one who steals must no longer steal,
Put ON: but rather he must labor, working with his own hands what is
GOOD

Gospel reason: so that he might have something to share with the one who has NEED.

Put OFF: Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word,

Put ON: but if there is anything GOOD [let it come out of your mouth] for building up [according to] the NEED
Gospel reason: so that it may give grace to those who hear.
Gospel reason: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Put OFF: All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and yelling, and evil speaking must already be removed from you together with all malice.
Put ON: But be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
Gospel reason: just as also God in Christ forgave you.

And now it's as if Paul would take all that he's said not only in the verses on the screen, but in all of chapter 4 and boil everything down to *one thing*. "I urge you *therefore*... to *walk* worthy of the calling with which you were called..." "This *therefore* I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer *walk* just as the Gentiles also *walk*..." And now:

I. "THEREFORE be imitators of God as beloved children, and WALK in love"

If you're in any way confused after all of chapter four... If you feel like you need a summary statement that pulls everything together for you – this is it. Instead of being the first verses of chapter five, these verses should really be the closing verses of chapter four. "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love."

The last thing Paul said was this: "just as also *God in Christ forgave you*." These words brought back to us all of the first three chapters, and all that God has done for you, and for me in Christ. And so now Paul concludes: "Therefore *be imitators of [this] God* as beloved children." So think about it this way: In the very act of accomplishing the uniting of all things in Christ, God was also setting for us the ultimate *example* to follow as we strive to live out this unity in our own daily lives. In the very act of creating our unity, God was setting for us the ultimate pattern to imitate as we *participate* in what *He's already done* and *will most certainly do*. What a miraculous, and beautiful, and amazing thing this is!

"Therefore be imitators of God... *as beloved children*." Paul says in Ephesians 1:5-6.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:5-6 — [God] predestined us for *adoption as sons* through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us *in the Beloved*.

So now we are God's *beloved children*. Think of the extravagant language Paul uses in Ephesians 2:4.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:4 — God, being rich in mercy, because of His great *love* with which He *loved* us...

And so now as children who have been so lavishly loved by God, we naturally want to be imitators of that love. We want to be just like Him. We want to *think* just like Him, *talk* just like

Him, and *act* just like Him. We want to bear the family resemblance. We want people to see in us the likeness and even the “spitting image” of our Father. And how do we do this? There’s only one way.

“Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, ***and walk in love.***” *Love* is how we live out the unity that God has created in Christ and that God will accomplish completely in the fullness of the times. *Love* is the summary of all the exhortations and practical instruction in chapter four.

- ✓ Ephesians 4:1-2 — I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another ***in love***...
- ✓ Ephesians 4:15-16 — but speaking the truth ***in love*** we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, being joined together and united together by every supporting connection, according to the working in measure of each single part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself ***in love***.

The sum of each one of these exhortations—(Having put off the lie, speak truth—each of you—with his neighbor, because we are members of one another; Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath; The one who steals must no longer steal, but rather he must labor, working with his own hands what is good so that he might have something to share with the one who has need; Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word, but if there is anything good [let it come out of your mouth] for building up [according to] the need so that it may give grace to those who hear; All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and yelling, and evil speaking must already be removed from you together with all malice. But be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another)—the sum of all these exhortations is ***love***.

To love is to bear the family resemblance. To love is to let others see in us the “spitting image” of our Father. To love is the way we participate today in God’s plan for the uniting of all things in Christ. “The Father gives His children but one command: Love!” (Stier; quoted in Braune) For the Christian, the true imitation of God can be summed up in one word: ***Love***. “Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and ***walk in love.***” Hendriksen sums this up very simply: “Let love be the very tenor of your life. Let it characterize all your thoughts, words, and deeds.” It’s in this way that we can be like God – that we can *think* like Him, *talk* like Him, and *act* like Him. As children who have been so lavishly loved by God, we naturally want to be imitators of that love. “Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love...”

II. “just as also Christ loved us and gave up Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma.”

God loved us by giving His one and only Son for us.

- ✓ 1 John 4:10 — In this is love... that [God] ***loved us*** and ***sent his Son*** to be the propitiation for our sins.
- ✓ John 3:16 — For ***God so loved the world***, that ***he gave his only Son***...

Paul said in Ephesians two:

- ✓ Ephesians 2:4-5 — God, being rich in mercy, because of His great *love* with which He *loved us*... made us alive together with Christ.

This is the love of God for us. But Paul has also spoken of the love of Christ.

- ✓ Ephesians 3:17-19 — ...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—You have been rooted and founded in *love*(!)—that you may prevail to lay hold of, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the *love* of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

God has loved you and me by giving His one and only Son for us. Christ has loved us by giving up Himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma. And then we could add this:

- ✓ Romans 5:5 — The love of God [and also of Christ!] has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Do you see? We have been wholly and completely loved by God – *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.

But Paul’s emphasis now is on Christ’s love for us, who gave up Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma. That’s another mouthful isn’t it? Paul could have just said, “Christ loved us and died for us,” and that would have been enough. But he wants to emphasize that as the expression of Christ’s *love*, His death on the cross was unreservedly *voluntary and willing and free*. “*He gave up Himself for us*” – as our representative and in our place. This is love. Paul could have just said, “Christ loved us and gave up Himself for us,” and that would have been enough. But instead, he says: “Christ loved us and *gave up Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma.*” How are we to explain all these “extra” words? One commentator calls this a “rhetorical flourish” (with a “doxological function”; Lincoln). But is that really all it is?

Paul is obviously and very purposefully borrowing his language now from the Old Testament. “An offering and sacrifice to God” already reminds us of the “offerings and sacrifices” of the Old Testament (1 Sam. 15:22; 1 Chron. 29:21; Jer. 7:22; Mark 12:33; Heb. 10:6, 8). But then Paul even speaks of “an offering and sacrifice to God *for a fragrant aroma.*” That phrase, “for a fragrant aroma” (LXX), appears 34 times just in Leviticus and Numbers to describe offerings and sacrifices that were “acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). But it wasn’t the literal smell of the smoke that made these offerings acceptable and pleasing to God. It was the “sincerity and wholeheartedness” of those who offered them. (Thielman) That’s the *point*!

- ✓ Leviticus 26:14–16, 31 — If you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules... then I will do this to you... I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, *and I will not smell your [fragrant] aromas.*

The Psalmist anticipates what would make Christ’s sacrifice so pleasing to God:

- ✓ Psalm 40:6–8 (cf. Amos 5:21-24; 1 Sam. 15:22) — In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: ***I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.***”

Paul’s point in borrowing the Old Testament language is to say that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was 100% voluntary and willing and free. It wasn’t just an act of dutiful obedience. Instead, it was a sincere and wholehearted expression of His love. And so Paul writes: “Christ ***loved us*** and ***gave up Himself for us***, an ***offering and sacrifice*** to God, for a ***fragrant aroma.***” This is love. We have been loved beyond all measure. But now we have to remember that this is just the “conclusion” of something else. Now we can put it all together:

Conclusion

“Therefore be ***imitators*** of God as beloved children, and ***walk in love, just as*** also Christ loved us and gave up Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma.” God has loved us by sending His one and only Son for us. Christ has loved us by offering Himself up to God for us. And in this love of the Father and the Son for us, we have the ground, and the pattern, and the motivation for the love that we have for each other.

We’ve already seen that Christ’s love for us is the ***ground*** of our love. It’s because of Christ’s love for us that we are a ***new creation*** capable of loving each other.

But now we see that Christ’s love for us is also the ***pattern*** for our love. We are to love each other “***just as***” Christ has loved us – willingly, sincerely, wholeheartedly, unconditionally, and sacrificially. Fergusson says: “Therefore our ***love*** ought to be free; for so was his. It ought to be fruitful; for so was his. It ought to be constant; for so was his.” “Because [Christ] is both the ground and model of [our] love, costly, sacrificial love is to be ***the distinguishing mark*** of [our] lives.” (O’Brien) It’s not just one mark among many others. It is to be ***the distinguishing mark*** of our lives! This is ***how*** we are imitators of God – the God who calls you and me His “***beloved*** children.” Jesus said:

- ✓ John 13:34–35 — A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Christ’s love for us is the ground of our love, His love for us is the pattern of our love, and finally, Christ’s love for us is the ***motivation*** for our love. How is it possible for us to be loved by God as we are... and yet fail to love? “Christ’s love to lost sinners, ***being firmly believed***, is a ***strong argument constraining*** those whom he [has] so loved, to walk in love towards others.” (Fergusson) “It was in the exercise of the highest conceivable love, ***which ought to influence all of our conduct***, that Christ delivered himself to death, an offering and a sacrifice well-pleasing to God.” (Hodge) “The ***principle and impulse*** of the Christian walk is ***love***—love as it actually exists in God... and as it has been felt and enjoyed by us who are beloved, so that we can give more and more what we have received and ever receive again.” (Braune) This is what sets true

Christians apart from all other good and moral and loving people: Our love for each other is a love that has its entire existence from start to middle to finish in God's love for us. (cf. O'Brien; Braune)

- ✓ 1 John 4:11 — Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
- ✓ 1 John 4:7 — Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
- ✓ John 13:34 — A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

It's in this way that we may *participate* in the mystery of God's plan for the fullness of the times – His plan to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him. So the conclusion, when all has been said, is this: Walk in *love*.