

Walk In Love

Dr. Dennis Leatherman

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 5:1-15
Preached on: Sunday, March 7, 2021

Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church

1005 Broadford Road
Oakland, MD 21550

Website: www.mlibc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/mlibc

Ephesians 5. I would like to read verse 1 and 2. He likes it when I talk about him. Verse 1 and 2. I'd like for us to read Ephesians 5:1-2, I'd like for us to read those two verses together in unison, if you would. If you have it there in your Bibles, verse 1 and 2 of Ephesians 5, if you have it there, let's read together. Here we go. Ready?

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

I want us to notice in verse 2 the first phrase there, it says "And walk in love." I want to speak this morning about walking in love.

Let's pray and ask the Lord to challenge us this morning.

Father in heaven, it sure is good to be back in the house of God. What a blessing to be with your people and to sing together, fellowship together. And now, Lord, we have our Bibles open and we are asking you to speak to our hearts, we're asking you to give us direction in our lives, Lord, give us instructions what you would have us to do. I pray that you would prepare our hearts and minds that we would be submissive, and as your Holy Spirit applies your word to our lives, that we would agree with you and trust you and then follow your instructions, Lord, in our lives. I yield my will and I present my body, Lord, and I ask that you fill me with your Spirit, Lord, and that you speak and preach through me and I'll just be an instrument for you to work through. So bless, Lord, and have your way. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

I tried to and I'm certainly far from where I would like to be, but I try to on a regular basis as I go through my days and weeks, I try to be a witness to other people about the grace and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know many of you also, you want to try to be a witness, you want to try and share the gospel with folks, and as we do that and over the years I've had numerous times where I would be able to share the gospel, maybe I'd have my Bible out or whatever the situation is, and be able to go through with someone how to be saved according to the Bible, how to know for sure sins are forgiven, on my way to heaven and not to hell according to what the Bible, trust in Christ. And here's sometimes occasionally I'll have someone say something like this to me, they

would say, "Preacher, I just don't think I could live it. I'm not going to make that decision because I don't think I could live the Christian life." And I try to assure them, listen, there are several answers to that concern but the fact of the matter is how I live my life is not the determining factor as to whether I'm saved or not. Do you follow what I'm saying? A person doesn't get saved because they live a certain lifestyle, a person doesn't get saved because they behave a certain way. A person gets saved, their sins forgiven, eternal life, a new life, home in heaven, escape hell, by trusting Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. Then as a result of that, then as a consequence of that, then the Lord starts changing our life and developing our lives. How many folks here, you're saved and you know it? Say amen. How many folks here, your life is different now than it was before you got saved? Sure. I think most of us, if not all of us that understand this, we would say, "I didn't change my life, Christ changed my life. God did that."

And so they say, "Well, I don't think I could live it." And I've tried to address that and tried to address their concern about that and give them a scriptural answer for that, but the fact of the matter is salvation, being saved in and of itself, is really a very simple thing. Trust in Christ as Savior. Jesus said, "I am the door." He said, you know, it's like walking through a door, like receiving bread. It's trust in Christ. It's as simple, the act itself is a very simple thing to put my faith and trust and confidence in Christ. It's not always easy to get to that point where I'm willing to do that but the act of salvation itself is not a complicated thing. I'll have you know, a little child can trust Jesus Christ as Savior.

So getting saved, the act of trusting Christ in and of itself is a very simple thing and this is what I'm trying to get at, but living that Christian life, that's the hardest part about Christianity. Living that Christian life, carrying out, living that life that God instructed us as disciples, that's where the challenge comes in. Now again, I want to reiterate it is not my lifestyle that determines my salvation. It's not how I live my life. I've heard people say and I don't want to get too off-track here but I've heard people say over the years, I'm thinking of a funeral I was at one time and another preacher was preaching and he said this, "You've got to live it or you're going to lose it." He said those very words, you've got to live the Christian life or you'll lose your salvation. I don't believe that for one minute. The Bible is very very clear we're saved by grace, not by works, and works can't save me in the first place and works can't keep me saved. It's the grace of God, we're kept by God. However, living the Christian life as a believer is what God expects from us and God works in our life and convicts us and challenges us and prompts us to live for him, but that's the challenge, that's the hard part, living the Christian life.

Somebody put it this way, I put this down: the hardest part about living the Christian life is living it here on earth. Once we get to heaven, it's not going to be a problem. Somebody put it this way: to live above with the saints I love, oh, that will be glory, but to live here below with the saints I know, now that's another story. Getting along here on earth, interacting here on earth, functioning here on earth as a child of God, that's where the challenge comes in. The fact of the matter is, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I've been saying this a lot lately, those of us that would consider ourselves disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, trying to live for God, trying to live by his word, follow his leadership, those of us that are disciples, the fact of the matter is we are living behind

enemy lines in this old sinful world. This world's values are not the values of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. The principles that this world lives by are not the principles that a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ lives by. We live by a different standard than this world.

I heard a preacher a number of years ago, I was in a meeting, in fact, it was down at the Capital Connection down in DC several years ago, a preacher was preaching and he made this statement, he said if you take the 10 Commandments and just reverse them, that's pretty much the principles that the world lives by, the values that the world lives by. Just take the 10 Commandments, do the opposite and you've pretty much got what the world, the way the world functions. So you and I are living in a world whose values and principles and priorities are pretty much the very opposite of someone who's trying to live for Christ, somebody who would claim to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're behind enemy lines. We live in an old sinful world. We live in a sin-saturated society. I'm telling you, you can't hardly see a commercial or read an article and a news article anymore without the language being horrendous and the advertisements being absolutely perverse. We live in...anybody notice this? Our society is saturated with sin and not just everyday sin that we might consider but the most perverse wicked type of sin you can come up with is exalted and celebrated and promoted. And you and I live in this type of world as children of God, as people who are trying to live by God's holy word.

We're behind enemy lines. We're in a sin-saturated society. We're dealing with not only that but we're dealing with our own sinful nature. If this old society, this old world isn't bad enough, Satan has one of his greatest allies, one of Satan's greatest allies dwells within your body and mine in our old sinful nature. I got saved, it didn't take long after I got saved, I realized there's still a part of me that is not onboard with this new life that Christ has given me. Anybody know what I'm talking about? Anybody here know what I'm talking about? An old sinful nature. Paul addressed it in Romans 7 and he put it this way and I'm putting this in my own words, but he put it this way, "The things that I know I want to do to please the Lord I find myself not doing. And the things that I know I ought not to do and I know that they don't please the Lord I find myself doing them. That which I want to do, I don't do. And that which I don't do, I end up doing. O wretched man that I am!" Do you know what Paul was saying? He has a sinful nature struggling with him.

So think about this, we've got a devil in hell that's trying to keep us from living for God, we've got a world that is the very opposite of everything we value and cherish, and then even within our own being we have a sinful nature that fights this Christian life and this life that God would want us to live. That makes living the Christian life a challenge. That makes living the Christian life a spiritual warfare that we are facing. In John 16:33 Jesus put it this way, he said this, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," now I'm glad he added on, tacked onto that he said, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Now I've painted a dark picture, a difficult scenario, but the fact of the matter is you and I can live victorious Christian lives even in the midst of the situation we just painted for us, we can live for God, we can be victorious, we can have the joy of the Lord, we can be a bright light for the grace and gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in this old, dark, sinful world. We can do that. We can do that.

As I study the Bible, I come to find out that most of that book, most of the Bible is written for believers and God helping us, instructing us on how to live for him. The Bible primarily is not given for unsaved people. Now does the Bible address unsaved people? Yes. In fact, the Bible is our only source of knowing how to be saved, how to have our sins forgiven, how to have a new life, how to escape hell and gain heaven. The Bible is our only source for that. The vast majority of the material and information in the Bible is given to you and I as believers on how to live for God, how to serve him, how to be that disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of the Bible is instructing God's people how to live in a fallen world. He gives us warnings. He gives us promises. He gives us instructions. He says, "Now be sure you do this. Watch out for that. Stay away from this. I promise this. Trust me on that." And this book helps us live for God, helps us be victorious.

It's one of the reasons we emphasize from day one when I showed up here in 1993, day one we started emphasizing the importance of every Christian spending a little bit of time every day in the word of God, letting God teach me, instruct me, and lead me. How many people have ever heard me say you ought to read your Bible every day? Yeah. We're going to keep saying that. You need to read that Bible. We need to spend time. We need to memorize scripture. I hope you'll memorize our verse for this month, "Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know, your labor is not in vain in the Lord." We need that input. God's given that to us that we can live for him.

I want us to notice here in our text that we're looking at, in fact, this whole passage, I had Brother Matt read an extended portion this morning and I just want to give you a little outline just by way of introduction on what God is instructing us here. I don't know if you'd want to jot this down, it would be helpful, but just a little outline. I notice in chapter 4, verse 31, down through chapter 5, verse 2, you know these chapter breaks and the verse divisions, those are man-made, they were added years and years later. And so I think the last two verses of chapter 4 and the first couple of verses of chapter 5, I think that's one context. If you'll notice in verse 1 he says there, he says, "Be ye therefore," and that ties us back into the previous statement.

Notice in verse 31 he says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye," what? "Kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Then he continues on in verse 1, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." So I see there, I put this down, God's telling us we ought to be kind. Amen? That's a good place. Say amen? We ought to be kind to each other. We ought to be kind to the people that we work with. Come on now, help me. We ought to be kind to the people that step in line at Walmart. Anybody notice? That really bothers me when people, you know, people have 11 items in the 10 item aisle. Be kind to them. God's telling us to be kind. God's people ought to be kind to our family, our loved ones, our neighbors, coworkers, our church members. You

ought to be kind. You say, "Yeah, well, he's a knucklehead." Yeah, but be kind to him. We could park it there and preach. Be kind. Be kind.

I've always said the folks at Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church ought to be the kindest people in the county. You ought to be kind. Wouldn't it be something if people would say, someone would say to someone, "Do you know anything about that church out there?" "Well, I know this, they're awfully kind." Wouldn't that be a great testimony? "They're kind. That church is kind."

So, one, he tells us, I notice in verse 31 down through verse 2 of chapter 5, he tells us to be kind. Then I notice in verse 3 of chapter 5 down through verse 5 of chapter 5, he says be clean. Look what he says there in verse 3, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints," then he elaborates, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks." Do you know what he's saying? He's saying we ought to be clean. We ought to live, moral, good lives. Amen? Wouldn't it be something if somebody says, "What do you know about Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church?" "Well, I know one thing, those people are awfully kind. I tell you, they live clean lives, those folks do. They live clean lives." You know, there used to be a day in society when living clean was a praiseworthy thing. Now it's almost people are ashamed of it. Now living in sin is exalted and praised and celebrated but God says we ought to be clean. There are some things, there are some things that ought to never be a part of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ's life and he lists them there.

So number 1, be kind, number 2, be clean, then I notice in verse 6 down through verse 15, look in verse 6, in fact, I want to encourage you to underscore the first statement in verse 6, he says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words." I underscored that in red ink in my Bible and I put this down: he wants us to be kind, he wants us to be clean, he wants us to be careful. Be careful. Don't be fooled. I'm telling you, there's a lot of nonsense out there that is promoted in the name of Christianity. There's a lot of nonsense, deception in the name of Christ and Jesus warned strongly in Matthew 24 that in the last days many deceivers. He says, "Be careful. Take heed. Beware. Be very very careful." I'm telling you right now, if it doesn't line up with God's word, it is not God's will. Mark it down. Mark it down. And we live in a world, I've said this often, we live in a world that has perfected the ability to take that which is right and make it look so wrong, and take that which is wrong and, man, make it look so right. We must not be deceived. We must not be deceived. I'll tell you, there's churches and Christians who are being deceived on this matter of marriage, on this matter of male and female stuff. We'll never be deceived by that, the Bible is very very clear. Amen or not? You know, that's where we stand, let come what may. We're standing with the word of God.

Don't be deceived and he goes down through there and he warns about being deceived, and so be kind, be clean, be careful. Now verse 1 and 2, it caught my attention. I've been working, I read telling the men at prayer breakfast yesterday, we have a wonderful time, I was telling the men at prayer breakfast in the mornings I just read about 4-5 chapters. I just read them. I just sit down and read through it and that's been a great blessing. Then in

the evenings I try to, in the evenings then I spend a little more time and I'll study and go through them, going through the New Testament right now, and I came across this a week or two ago, verse 1 and 2, and it struck me and notice in verse 2 he says here, he says, "And walk in love." Walk in love. Last week, if you'll remember, we preached on walking by faith. Walking by faith and now I notice here he says that we are to walk in love, in fact, there are numerous places through the New Testament where God tells us to walk a certain way.

If you would, look up there at verse 8, at the end of verse 8 he says this, "walks as children of light." We come down to verse 15 and he says, "see then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools." Walk, walk, walk. Now we pointed this out last week, I want to restate it here, when he talks about us walking in a certain way, walking by faith not by sight, walking in love, walking circumspectly, walking as children of light, when he uses that term "walking," what he's referring to is how we live our lives, our behavior, our lifestyle, our conduct as a disciple of Christ. Last week we pointed out that he said that we're to walk by faith. Our life is to be lived trusting God's word and following his instructions, that was our message last week. That's how I'm to live. That's how I'm to conduct myself. The decisions I make in my life, I go by faith in what God says. I make the decision according to his word because I have faith in him, I trust him. There are certain things I don't do as a disciple of Christ, as a believer, why? Because I trust God and he says I need to avoid that. There are some things I make sure I do, some things I make sure are in place, some things I make sure I'm doing, why? Because I trust God and he tells me I need to do these things.

So we're walking by faith, my conduct, and today he says this, he says walk in love. My conduct, my behavior, my lifestyle is to be characterized by love. Now I know some of these tough macho guys, you know, I know I look tough and macho but inside I'm just a loving teddy bear. And you know, sometimes guys are just kind of like, "Well, that's for the women." Wait a minute, walking in love, living a lifestyle characterized by love is for the men as much as the women. In fact, can I say this, can I suggest this: you ain't much of a man, you're not much of a man if you don't love the way God says that we are to love. This world's convinced us that manhood and macho and tough is using filthy language and being mean and beating people down and slapping folks around, dog eat dog, I claw my way to the top, I'm a man. That ain't biblical manhood, that's sin, that's selfishness, that's hatefulness. The Bible says we're to walk in love. It ought to characterize our life. It ought to be how we conduct ourselves, the basis of how we conduct ourselves.

I've got two observations real quick in the little bit of time we have left. 1. I put this down: I want us to notice the precept that God has given us. Now a precept is a command or an order, here's a word we've been hearing a bunch the last year, a mandate. I'm so sick of our state giving us mandates. Amen. I'm just being honest with you, okay? They've got a mandate for this and a mandate for that and I understand, whatever, I thought who opened that can of worms? But God gives us a mandate. Now I am concerned about God's mandates, amen? God gives us a precept, a mandate, something that is an instruction, a command, an order that we are to follow.

Now I see actually there's a twofold precept here, twofold mandate, if we want to say, if you want to put it that way. Look at verse 1, "Be ye therefore," look at this, "followers of God." Then verse 2, "And walk in love." I want to point out to you these are not suggestions. This is not some advice God is giving us, "Oh yeah, all right, I advise you to walk in love. I advise you to be a follower of God." No, no, no, these are mandates. These are precepts, instructions given to us by God, commands, if you will. You and I as a disciple of Christ, we are to be followers of God. We are to walk in love, that's what our Creator designed us to do and be and that's what he instructs us to do and to be, followers of God and to walk in love.

Now let's look at that first one there in verse 1, he says followers of God, "Be ye therefore followers of God." By the way, that's the only place in scripture where that is worded this way, to be a follower of God. Now I got looking up that word "follow" and how it's used. It's used numerous times through the New Testament and the interesting thing about it is this, it comes from the same word that we get our word "mimic." Mimic, if you are familiar with what it means to mimic something. Sure comedians do that a lot. What they do is they'll study the characteristics of a well-known person, a celebrity or somebody that's very well-known, they'll study different idiosyncrasies and characteristics, how they talk and certain distinctive speech things they have and how they gesture and different things, and then they'll mimic that. A lot of times they're mocking them.

There was a fellow, I don't know why I thought of this, there was a fellow years ago when George W. Bush was President, there was a fellow on tv who would mimic him and you just had to laugh because he had it down tremendously, he'd studied his characteristics. Our boys were, I shouldn't say this, our boys were terrible but we'd have preachers in here and they would go home and they would mimic those preachers and they would have different idiosyncrasies and things and they'd go home and, "Who am I?" And they' do something. [laughter] They got that from their mother. [laughter]

So God tells us one of our mandates, our precept, is to follow God. In other words, we're to do this, we're to study what God is like, we're to pay attention to how God responds and what the thing is to do and he says, "Alright, you follow that. You follow the pattern I've given you. Follow, the same word as we get our word "mimic; to imitate or to copy the characteristics of another." You know, I study my Bible and I see certain things about God, in fact, though this is the only time in the Bible it's worded this way, it's not the only time in the Bible that we are to imitate God or follow God's characteristics. In 1 Peter 1, I think it's verse 15 and 16, he tells us that we are to be holy even as your Father in heaven is holy. Now you and I can't be as holy as God, you understand that, right? But God is as holy as he can possibly be which is perfectly. Do you know what he's saying? He's saying you and I ought to follow that pattern, we ought to mimic that, and we ought to be as holy as we can possibly be.

I had a preacher, I heard Brother Traber on the radio, I like listening to him at 11 o'clock on 88.7 FM, and back at the beginning of the year he said, "I made a New Year's

resolution." He said, "I'm resolved not to sin one time this whole year." I said, "Oh, brother, wow!" And of course, he was being facetious and he says, "Of course, that's impossible." He says, "But however that is what I want to endeavor to do." And I thought, "That's pretty good." How good would it be if we would say, "You know, I want to be as holy just as God is holy, I want to be as holy as I possibly can be."

So this precept is here, this idea is here about following God and his holiness. In Matthew 5:48 he says, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Wow. Would you agree with me God is flawlessly perfect, God has no flaws whatsoever at all. You say, "How in the world am I supposed to be that perfect?" Well, we can't be as perfect as God but we can be perfect in the same way that God is perfect. Do you follow the distinction there? God is as perfect as he can possibly be and that word "perfect" means "complete; everything he ought to be," and he's saying, "Listen, just like God is everything he can be perfectly, you and I ought to be everything God expects us to be, endeavor to that." Do you follow what I'm saying?

So he says, "Be followers of God, study God." I tell in our institute, our Bible institute, I love that ministry, I tell our students in Bible institute every one of us are theologians. They get scared of that and I say the fact is every one of us are theologians, a theology is simply the study of God and if you've ever thought about God and you've ever thought in your mind what is God like and what does he do, then you are acting like a theologian to some degree, and what we need to do as disciples is to learn about our heavenly Father and study him and then follow that and mimic that.

So follow God. Follow God. By the way, this isn't following God and walking in love are not just cliches, abstract cliches, these are decisions we make, and what I've been challenged as preparing this and what I believe God is challenging us as a church is what are you going to decide? Are you going to decide to be a follower of God? Are you going to decide to see what God says what he's like and then pattern my life after that, mimic that, follow that? It's not just going to happen. If I just let things go and just act the way just naturally, we're going to make a mess of things. But I've got to decide, "No, I'm a child of God. I'm a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and I'm going to follow him, I'm going to mimic him the way he responds and the way he treats others."

Paul told the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said, "Follow me even as I follow Christ." Now I'm thankful for some great Christian mentors I've had over the years, more and more of them are going to heaven. I always had older men of God to be a mentor I would look to. And Paul said, "Listen, you follow me," but then he put this qualification on, "as I follow God." I'm telling you, our instructions as disciples isn't to follow man, it's to follow God. Now sometimes a man will help us follow God, we can follow the pattern as he's following the Lord's pattern, do you follow what I'm saying? And so be followers of God, be followers of God. We're told in various places through the New Testament to be followers.

I thought it was interesting at looking at this, he doesn't say be meditators on God. He doesn't say be admirers of God. And that's fine, we ought to meditate on God, we ought

to admire God. He doesn't say be academics of God, in other words, know all the facts about God, and that's good, we need to know the facts about God. But he says be imitators of God, be followers of him.

He says, look what he says there, he says, "Be ye therefore followers of God," what's the last three words, would you say that for me? "As dear children," in the same way, now get this, in the same way that a child follows his parent, his father, a little girl sees her mother in the kitchen and she follows her, she patterns after that. Did you ever, I don't know how your kids were, we didn't have girls, my wife said, she said, "I'd rather have boys than girls, too much drama with girls." We didn't have drama, we just had bugs and worms and stuff like that. But a little girl, did you ever see a little girl in the kitchen, mom's cooking and she's over there mixing stuff up and spilling eggs all over, you know, and she's mimicking, she's following mother. Just like a little child, as dear children. A little boy sees his daddy and he's following his daddy and he's imitating what his daddy does and he says that's what you and I as children of God need to do with our heavenly Father. You're at work and some guy is hateful and difficult, just gives you a hard time, maybe lies about you, does hurtful things, all right, how did Jesus treat those who did that to him? I need to follow that. I need to mimic that. Somebody come across that's living in sin and just nasty and they made such a mess of their life and they're doing wrong, you want to just say, "Yuck!" Wait a minute, how did Jesus treat, how does God treat them? I'll tell you, Romans 5:8 has meant so much to me recently, "But God commendeth his love toward us that while we were yet," what? "Sinners Christ died for us."

A couple of weeks ago we got a call, somebody called and asked for help and you never know, you get the call, you have no idea what the situation is. We have been ripped off so many times. I told them, "Brother Matt," I said, "somebody has a rough time, they're downtown." I said, "Would you run down there and just see what the situation is and if it's legit, we'll help them, we'll get them some food and, you know, we'll put them up for the night." And he was back 45 minutes or so, maybe an hour he came back and he said, "Preacher, what a mess." He said, "They made such a mess of their lives. Unclean, I mean, just physically unclean and made a mess." And he spent an hour with them, got them some food, prayed with them, went through the gospel, tried to encourage them, got them a room, made sure they got cleaned up, got a good shower and cleaned up and they went on their way. They went on their way. I don't know how you are, no doubt you're much nicer than I would be naturally but I know the natural Dennis, the old Denny, would have said, "Listen, you made your bed, you sleep in it. You made a mess of it, that's your problem." That's the old Denny. Now I'm a child of God and I look up and I see how did God treat people like that? He showed them compassion. He showed them mercy and helped them. I don't know where they ended up, they claimed to be saved.

But followers of God, followers of God, then he says.... Oh, by the way, I want to mention this and I think I need to point this out. This is talking to believers, right? Being a follower of God isn't going to save your soul. Hey, if I'm talking to somebody that's not saved, you've never been born again, don't get the idea, "I'll just follow Jesus' pattern. I'll just try and live the way Jesus did and then God will accept me." No, he won't. All righteous, the good things we do as an unbeliever is nothing more than filthy rags before

a holy God. No way you and I can do things to earn our merit with God and earn acceptability with God. We can only do that through the Lord Jesus Christ and the blood he shed on the cross and his resurrection. So don't think that following God is going to save our soul. This is for folks who are saved. This is for folks that are children of God. This is for folks that are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. And by the way, following God really is impossible if you're not saved and so don't confuse this with as if this is some means of salvation. I don't know who's listening and I don't know who may hear the sound of my voice whether online here in the auditorium or someday down the road listening to it off the website or somehow, don't get the idea if you've never trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, you are lost, you're in your sins and the most important issue in your life is getting that matter settled through trusting Christ as Savior.

This is for believers to follow God, follow God. God himself in the person of Christ is the standard for every thought we think, every word we say, every action we take. It's God Almighty in the person of Jesus Christ, that's the standard, that's the pattern that we follow, that we mimic, that we imitate, Jesus Christ.

2. The second precept here. First is follow God, the second one is what the title of the message comes from is walk in love in verse 2. Walk in love. I found 17 times in the New Testament, get this, 17 times in the New Testament God instructs us, commands us, mandates us that we love one another. You say, "Preacher, what's God's will for me?" Well, I know part of it is loving one another, loving that person beside you, in front of you, behind you, loving the people that live around you, the people that live in your household, people you work with, people in our community, our neighbors.

Love one another, 17 times in the New Testament we're told to love one another. In fact, the basis of our salvation is the fact that God loves us even though we've sinned against him. God did that which was necessary for us to have forgiveness and cleansing of our sin. 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. We're to walk in love even as God loved us.

God's kindness and patience towards us, do you see there in verse 32 of chapter 4, see what he says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another," what's those next two words? "Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us." We're to walk in love even the same way, even as God for Christ's sake has loved us.

Now what is walking love? Walking in love, I think, let me just simplify it and summarize it. What does it mean to walk in love? It means I live my life for the well-being of others. I live my life for the well-being of others. What do most of us, generally speaking, most of us live our lives for the well-being of who? Ourselves. I've got to do what's best for me. Did you ever hear this statement, "You've got to look out for Number 1"? What are they saying? You put yourself first. You live, you decide, you act for what's in your best interest.

Now I know and understand what some people say and, you know, I'm not trying to be unkind but I think we've got to watch out for this thinking, "You know, it's just about

time I've got to take care of me." Now I understand that and, you know, we do need to take care of our walk with God and keep ourselves, the well-being of ourselves, we need to give attention to that, but he says walk in love. He's not talking about love for ourselves, he's talking about love for others. Love for others.

Paul referenced a fellow, I think it's in Colossians, that for the work of the ministry he was nigh unto death. In other words, I think it was Epaphras, I think what he's saying there is he had just given himself and given himself and given himself where he had just run himself down. Big thing when I first went into the ministry, I heard, and these were all my peers saying it, "Well, I don't want to burn out in the ministry." I'll tell you what, I'd far rather burn out in the ministry than rust out. I'll tell you what, I want to be like the pick-up trucks I buy, I run them until they're dead. I don't want to be some old car sitting in the backyard rusting away. I want when I get to heaven, I want when I get to heaven the fender's falling off, the hood's missing, the windows don't work and the seats got whole springs coming up through the seats. Just live for others, living for others, living for others.

Walk in love, that means I live my life for the well-being of others. I live my life, it means this, that when folks when they leave my presence they're better off than when they showed up, their faith is stronger, their needs, as much as I can, meet their needs. Walk in love, my whole lifestyle, my whole conduct walking in love, the well-being of others. Then notice last of all real quickly, I notice here the last part of verse 2, the pattern he gives us. He gives us a precept, follow God just like a child, and then walk in love, and then he gives us the pattern for us to mimic, for us to follow, "as," I circled that word "as" there, the fifth word in the verse, "And walk in love, as," that word "as" there means "in the same way, to the same degree, after the same fashion, Christ also hath loved us." Let me ask you a question: does Jesus Christ love you? Yes, he does. You shouldn't hesitate for a moment to answer that question. Listen, don't call God a liar and say he doesn't love you. You're calling God a liar.

How does he love me? Let me ask you a question: how many folks here, anybody here Jesus has been patient with you? Yeah. Anybody here Jesus kind of put up with some nonsense sometimes? I'm talking about you and I. Yeah. He says, "All right, that same pattern as I have loved you, that same grace, that same mercy, that same love, that same unconditional treatment, that's how I want you to love, how I want you to act." That's the pattern to follow. The pattern to follow. Jesus' love for me is to be the pattern for my loving others. Jesus giving himself for me is to be the pattern for me giving to others. Jesus sacrificing himself for the forgiveness and salvation of my soul is to be the pattern for me sacrificing for the good and well-being of others.

It means to love the unlovely. It means to live a life of unconditional compassion. I think one of the most Christ-like things you and I can do, listen, one of the most Christ-like things you and I can do is to be kind to people, to be forgiving, is to show love. It's one of the most Christ-like things I can do and I'm not talking about those who are kind to us and forgive us and are loving to us, I'm talking about even those who are unlovely. I'll tell you, one of the most profound statements in all scripture, Jesus hanging from the cross

and here's the very men that just unjustly beat him to a pulp and nailed him naked to a cross, and he looks down and he says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And if you and I could get ahold of that as a disciple of Christ, even as Christ loved me, I walk in love. I walk in love. The most Christ-like thing I can do is to be kind, is to be loving, is to be forgiving.

I believe there are two characteristics of a mature disciple of Jesus Christ. 1. Unwavering faith, walking in faith, not by sight. Walk by faith. One of the chief characteristics of a mature believer is to walk by faith and, number 2, is to walk in love. "I'll tell you two things about that Christian gal, she has faith in God and she is the most loving person I've ever met." Wouldn't that be something if the world says that in a world of hatred, a world of bitterness? Have these lights shining, disciples of Christ shining in that darkness of anger, walking in love, displaying, patterning the love of Christ, isn't that something? Isn't that something?

He says, "Walk in faith. You trust me and follow my instructions and you walk in love just like Jesus Christ loved you, and you show it to this old world." I'll tell you, the world, they'll do one of two things, either they'll come to our Savior or they'll crucify us. Isn't that something, somebody is angry, full of hatred and bitterness and you're kind to them and they lash back, they persecute it, try and snuff it out. It happens but my Bible says the goodness of God leads people to repentance. Do you know what we'll find out? People see that and we share the gospel with them, they'll come to Christ.

We live in a world that's hungry for love. Amen or not? Hungry for love. To love like Jesus, I'll end with this, to love like Jesus is to love those who oppose you and will not return your love. It's easy to love those who love us. The world does that. Forgive those. To love like Jesus is to forgive those who wrongly abuse us. To love like Jesus is to have compassion on the weak and the powerless, to serve others with no thought of being repaid, to befriend those who are downtrodden and discouraged. And to love like Jesus is to share the good news of salvation in Christ with those who are dying in sin.

I want to challenge us, here's the challenge to myself and all of us. I believe this is what the Lord is challenging us to do, is this week decide, it's not just going to happen, I've got to decide I'm going to walk in love. I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit of God to fill me that the love of God would be shed abroad in my heart and life. And that doesn't mean you have to be a sissy, it doesn't mean you're some weak person, in fact, I want to suggest to you being hateful and angry and retaliating is weakness, but loving in the face of hatred, that is strength and that's the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I ask, dear Lord, that you would help us to walk in love that our life, our conduct, our behavior would be characterized by the love of Christ that's been shed abroad in our hearts.

I wonder with our heads bowed and eyes closed, I wonder if there would be some folks here who would say, "Preacher, I need to work on that. I really need to put some effort and attention walking in love as God instructs us here, as God mandates us, and I need the Lord to help me." Is there any like that? "Preacher, I need to work on that." My hand is raised. I need to work on that. Maybe there's an individual you're thinking about that you haven't been as loving to as you know the Lord would want you to and their name is in your mind right now and their face is right there. Maybe we need to do some business with God and then do some repairs with them. It requires humility, "I'm sorry," and start being kind. It requires a filling of the Holy Spirit to enable this. This doesn't come naturally. God has to help us. But if we want it, we decide, God will help us. Is there some here that would say, "Preacher, I know someone that's unsaved and I want to show the love of Christ to them particularly that they would come to Christ and be saved," is there any like that, anybody like that? Amen. Hands raised. We had somebody, one of our members, I forget who, somebody recently said, "I'm praying that I can see 12 people saved this year." Man, what a loving thing to be able to share the gospel and see other people saved. One last question, is there someone here this morning that would say, "Preacher, I'm not saved. I don't know for sure my sins are forgiven, on my way to heaven." You say, "I'd like to know that. I'd like to have it settled." I'm telling you, God loves you, Jesus loves you and he wants to save you but you've got to come to him. You've got to come to him. Is there any like that, "Preacher, pray for me. I'm not sure my sins are forgiven. I'm not certain of a home in heaven. I don't want to die and go to hell." Any at all? Anybody at all, upraised hand. Any?

Father, bless now our invitation. You've spoken to our hearts and now, Lord, we want to respond in faith and agree to you and submit to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.