

Are You a Copycat?

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:1-2
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Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, Thou hast loved us still. With that echoing chorus in our minds, turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 5:1-2 where we see the supreme manifestation of the love of Christ for his people and the implications that it has for us here today. Ephesians 5:1-2 is our text for this morning,

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

It's obvious from reading Scripture that we need examples to follow. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." In Hebrews 13:7, it says, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." It's rather humbling to realize that as we come to Christ and as we enter into the Christian life that we really don't intrinsically, intuitively know what we are supposed to do with that and what Scripture does is tell us to look for examples, look for that which would be a pattern, a model, which you could follow and train and condition your heart to live in like manner. Scripture calls us, in a sense, to be copycats. I realize that's it's more romantic in an American sense to be a self-made man and to say, "I earned this," and as Frank Sinatra used to sing, "I did it my way," but that's not a noble virtue in the Christian life. The Christian life is to be one of imitation, of patterning after something else that is ahead of us, that is beyond us, that gives us a way to aspire to greatness and to aspire after a higher level than we would have attained on our own. Be imitators, it says.

Well, this text here this morning takes the Gospel example of our Lord Jesus Christ and applies it to our lives and it goes further even than simply saying imitate this, it gives us the reason and the understanding to shape the way that we live. It's very important to realize and to think about this text as more than simply giving us a direction for a particular problem that we might be having today, maybe in a relationship or a family situation. What this is laying out is a pattern of life for us. This is an entire disposition, an entire mindset about how you are to live and to understand the reason for your existence.

This is a wonderful text and we're going to see the Gospel's application to our lives, first of all, in verses 1 and 2, and then we're going to see the Gospel motivation for our lives in

the latter part of verse 2 and that's going to be our structure for today. But what we're seeing here, what's being held up before us, is God commanding us to consider the example of Christ, to understand the example of Christ and then to live accordingly in a life that follows after that and shapes after what we have already seen Christ to be like.

Let's look, first of all, at the Gospel's application. The Gospel's application. In a fundamental way, you and I are meant to be imitators, copycats; to see what someone is like and what someone has done and to act like that accordingly. Just as a young child sees the way that his parents act and starts to mimic the mannerisms and the words and the conducts of his parents, hopefully in a good way, so also we as the children of God are designed to look at our Father and say, "That's what I need to be like," and to realize that it's not just the authority of God's word and the commands of God's words that shape our lives and that we respond to but – watch this – the moral force of his character has a persuasive influence on the way that we think, the way that we feel and what we give our lives to as our priorities. His own character provides the force of influence that draws us and says, "I want to be like that." And when you have been born again and you have the indwelling Holy Spirit, you have a nature given to you that is like the divine nature, then you are inclined in this direction. I promise you, if you are a true Christian, that what we are about to see from this text is something that you are already predisposed to receive. Your sympathies are already in agreement with what this text says here and that's why it's a joy to be able to open it up to you here today.

Look at Ephesians 5:1 with me again. Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Therefore gives a conclusion from the preceding discussion. Those of you that have been with us over the past several weeks know that Paul has been working out the implications for our ethics, our moral code, from having been born again. That we are to set aside falsehood, verse 25 of chapter 4. Set aside anger in verse 26. And we put on instead the nature of Christ: the love, the grace, the mercy of Christ. Look at verse 29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification so that it will give grace to those who hear." Verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath be put away from you. Be kind to one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

So the remnants of the old man we put aside and we embrace, we put on like a new garment, we put on like a new garment the mannerisms of Christ, the character of Christ, and we aim our life after that. Why do we do that? Because he loved us. Because he gave himself up for us. Because that's the right thing for a child to do, to pattern himself after a worthy parent. That's why we do this.

So here in chapter 5, verse 1, Paul says, "Therefore." He's kind of summing it all up. He's pulling this all together and is going to centralize the theme, in a way, that is memorable, that is powerful, that is impactful, and even more is undeniable in terms of the moral authority that it carries over the hearts of the redeemed. Based on God's grace to us, we should live accordingly. We should try to become, we should aim our lives and our efforts to become like that.

To imitate God is a command that appears only here in Scripture, although there are other places in Scripture where similar things are said. Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, he said, "You are to be perfect, like your Father in heaven is perfect." So the standard is the character of God. He says through the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1, "Be holy for the Lord your God is holy." Even this very basic observation is really critical. We all share in that tendency to want to compare ourselves with other men and say, "Well, I'm better than So-and-so. I'm better than Hitler. Or I'm better than Jane who is sitting across the aisle from me here in the church. I know what her life is like and I'm better than that." We compare ourselves with men and we puff ourselves up as if we had some kind of righteousness to be proud of. Scripture does not make that the standard of comparison. Your design, your goal, your desire, is to look at the perfect excellencies of the moral character of God and say, "That's what I want to aspire after." It's not that I want to be better than the guy on the street. That's no kind of standard at all. That's no aspiration. That's no goal to pursue after. You say, "Well, the goal to manifest the character of God, that's a pretty lofty goal, isn't it?" And you say to yourself, "Yes, it is. In fact, that's why I want to pursue it is because I want to reflect the one who has saved me."

So let's clarify something as we say this before we get deeply into the text: this command to imitate God comes with an implied limitation; something that's obvious from the context but is also obvious theologically: you cannot imitate the infinite attributes of God. God is omniscient. He is omnipotent. He is omnipresent. You cannot imitate that. Theologians call those and other like attributes his incommunicable attributes. They do not transfer from God to men because they are the unique possession of God alone. You are a creature. You can never be uncreated. You are finite, God is infinite. We can't be like God. We can't imitate him in that way. There is a gulf between him and us that cannot be bridged in those kinds of considerations.

Even redeemed men cannot share in those characteristics but what we can imitate are what theologians call his communicable attributes. Those moral qualities in the character of God that are personal and relational and holy that we can model after. God is kind. God is loving. God is just. And we are able, especially as redeemed people, to be kind and to be loving and to be just in our dealings with others and it is in that sense that we are called to imitate God here in this text from the Apostle Paul. You as a redeemed man, you as a redeemed Christian woman, you can reflect the character of God in these ways, in fact, you are commanded to do so.

So it is your duty and it is your privilege to be separated from your former life of sin and to continually become like this as the command indicates, "Therefore be imitators of God." It could be translated, "Be becoming like this. Aim at. Make it your pattern, your habit to persistently pursue this." Even when you fall short, you renew the zeal to be like the God who saved you.

Now, why? Why can't you just be your own man? Be your own woman? Why can't you just be any old way that you want to? Well, look at the text with us. That would be completely inappropriate to live in rebellion against God; to live in defiance to God; to live in indifference to God. No, that's totally inappropriate. Why? Look at verse 5, it's

because we are beloved children. You have been the object of God's redeeming love. You have been born again by the Spirit of God who worked repentance and faith in your heart so that you willingly came to Christ for salvation and God placed his Spirit in you and, as we saw in Ephesians 1, adopted you into his family. Well, isn't it appropriate those of you that are parents, don't you have a sense that it's appropriate for your children to respond to you? You want them to respond in love and to give you their affection and devotion because you gave life to them? Well, multiply that by infinity and you see the obligation and the responsibility and the privilege that is ours. We've been born again by the living God who has been gracious to us in our sins and reached into our sinful lives and adopted us into his family. Made us his child. Gave us a full inheritance that belongs to the children of God and included us in that despite our unworthiness to receive such a gift.

Well, what can you do in response to that kind of abundant love and mercy than to say, "I want to be like him. I want to be like my Father." The little boy that goes out with a ball and bat and tries to mimic his father's instruction in it, you know, it's just motivated by the simplicity of love and devotion of that little heart toward one that he looks up to. Well, mature that and make it spiritual and make it that which is responding to Christ and you see what it is for us. "I want to be like him." That's deep in the heart of every true believer. "I want to be like that." So it's our privilege to aim our character after our Father.

Well, what is he talking about specifically here? Paul here gives us this broad command, "Be imitators of God," and it's so broad and there are so many attributes of God that you consider that it would almost blow your brain and explode your understanding to say, "Well, where do I even start being like God?" Well, Paul here goes on and he specifies exactly what he's talking about. He doesn't blast it with a shotgun that goes in a lot of different directions, he uses a silver red bullet and he targets it and he hits this bulls eye and says, "Here's what I'm talking about," verse 2, "and walk in love." Be imitators of God and walk in love. Present tense command. Ongoing pattern of life. Make this your habit. Make it your repeated manifestation of character to be marked by this kind of love.

Walk in love. What does that mean? Do you know what that means? Walk in love? A pattern of life conduct, we get that, but what's this love of which he speaks? A word so abused in modern language. Let's be sure that we're thinking biblically about it because biblical thinking will result in biblical clarity which will bring into your life biblical obedience which is appropriate in response to God's word.

What does it mean to walk in love? Well, let's say this for starters: he is not talking about a sentimental feeling. He's not talking about having these emotional, sugary feelings toward God or toward other people and that it's just a matter of how you feel subjectively inside. "I love him. I love that." That's not it. If you're only thinking about it in something that is sentimental, that's not what he's talking about at all as the text will go on and make clear to us. Do you know something else, beloved, when he says to walk in love? Understand that he's calling you to more than occasional impulses of good will. This is a walk. This is a progress. This is an ongoing pattern and character of life. It's a walk. It's a

development. It's a growth. It is ever the object of what we would want our character to become and what we aim and give our effort toward.

So it's not simply a brief passing impulse and then you get on with the rest of your life. That's not it, and as we're also going to see, it's not something that selfishly minimizes the inconvenience to yourself. There is a self-giving that's involved in what we're talking about here. And I just think that it's really important for us to understand these things, that when Scripture calls us to a life of love, to a walk of love, for us to understand that we're not talking about the way that you feel about any particular thing and we're also not talking about something that – watch this, this is so really, really important – we're not talking about something that you wedge into an otherwise selfish life that says, "Well, I'll accommodate this while I'm doing my own thing and pursuing what I want," and I'm out doing whatever I want and along the way I'll work in a little bit of love along the way. That's not it. That's not it because, as we're going to see, the pattern that he sets forth is not something that is convenient, it's a matter of complete self-sacrifice. It's a matter of the way that you structure your entire life in response to the salvation which Christ purchased for you and in response to the people of God for whom Christ gave himself for. This is a total ordering of your character around the priorities of Christ that we are seeing manifested.

Another thing that we should say about it: this is distinct from a slavish, external obedience to a moral code. When Paul says, "walk in love," he's not saying, "Make sure that you keep the rules and that you keep up external appearances." You grind that out and you do what's expected and you keep up appearances before your family or before the people in the church or the people in the world and you just kind of grind it out because that's what you're supposed to do without any heart engagement or any affections that are directed toward it. No, it's not a legal, external, cold obedience to a list of rules. That's not it at all.

What is it then? To walk in love is to set your life pattern, to establish your life priorities, to express a sacrificial seeking of good for others, particularly for the people of God. The whole context of this Ephesians letter is written to the people of God. It's written to the church at Ephesus. Probably a circular letter to other people of God. This is giving a general statement and if you look back, just to remind you, chapter 4, verse 3, if you would, to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Chapter 4, verse 12, that the saints are devoted to the building up of the body of Christ to become a mature man, the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. We're to grow up in all aspects, verse 15, into him who is the head, even Christ from whom the whole body, what body? The body of Christ. His context here is especially oriented at the people of God. At the church. At the redeemed. Sure, there's a spillover effect in the way that we interact with people in the world, but there is to be this element of self-sacrifice in our thinking and our disposition toward the people of God, the people within the church, that defines the way that we set our priorities and the way that we spend our time and the way that we give of ourselves and our resources. We walk in this self-sacrificial manner that is designed to set before us the seeking of the good of the people of God for the glory of God. That's the call.

You see, to walk in this kind of love, this self-sacrificial way, it's generous, not stingy. I'm not talking simply generous financially: generous with time; generous with love; generous with patience; generous with forgiveness within the body of Christ, within your family life. Do you another think that you can say about it? It's sincere, not cynical. It's earnest, not sarcastic. It's humble, not self-promoting. Nothing more inconsistent than to be a Christian that just talks about yourself because that's not the nature of love to be self-focused, self-promoting, self-adulating.

So what we see here is something that is completely comprehensive in the way that we orient and the way that we think about life. It's incredible how much Paul says in just such a short sentence. Where do we get the spiritual power to live that way? How is it? I mean, look, I promise you that what we're talking about here is absolutely impossible for an unregenerate person to do, particularly in the world in which we live. It is impossible for someone to live in this kind of self-sacrificial way that is designed for the glory of God.

Where do we get the power then as Christians to live this way? Well, the Holy Spirit indwells us and helps us and shapes our affections in this way. We rely on the Spirit of God to help us, but Paul here in this passage gives us one of the primary ways to define your affections and that is that he points us to the love of Christ as we were singing about just before the sermon began. He points us to the love of Christ and in a particular way, a particular manifestation of the love of Christ that defines everything else and when you understand what he is saying about the love of Christ in what follows, you find something that shapes your affections. You find something that defines your priorities as a redeemed person. It makes you want to copy Christ. It makes you want to imitate him because you see the great loveliness, the great worth, the great value, how laudable and how commendable Christ is and then you realize that Christ exercised that on your behalf and your heart of stone is just melted before it in a way that says, "I just want to respond to that. I want to give my life over to imitating that love which has been given to me. Maybe I don't become a missionary. Maybe I don't go into ministry. But whatever I do, I want my life to be oriented toward becoming like that. And it's not just a matter of what I do in my life and what kind of hours can I get at work and what kind of house can I have and what kind of car I drive, all of a sudden that stuff looks really cheap and cheesy by comparison." And you realize that what matters to me, what you should be saying as you go through this is to say, "What's most important, what my first priority of life is is that I want to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and let these other things come or go in the providence of God as they may, but what matters is that my character, who I am, has to become like that because that's so supremely important."

That's why I say this redefines life. This redefines the reason that you exist. And for you young people, you young guys that are there on my right, some of you over on my left, look, this matters to you. You're on the front end of life and you have the opportunity set before you to set your affections on Christ and while you're still a teenager, to set your affections in a way that, "I am going to give my life over to Christ to somehow resemble the way that he gave himself over to me." That should be your priority if you're a

Christian young man. And if you sit there with a cold heart and say, "I don't care about this," just realize that what you're saying when you say I don't care about it is, you're saying, "I'm not a Christian," and then there's a whole other realm of things that need to be dealt with. No, this is a moral compulsion and not against the will of a true Christian, this is what we desire. What could be a higher motivation for life than to say, "I'm going to become like him"?

Well, what was he like? That brings us to point number 2 here: the Gospel's motivation. The Gospel's motivation. Look, this is the word of God. This is Christ speaking to his people, commanding them and directing them through his word and so we need to pay attention here. We need to give heed. We need to hear and heed what is said here. What we're about to enter into when we see this Gospel motivation, what we're about to enter into is the biblical Holy of Holies. This is most sacred ground that we're about to enter into. We should come reverently to this verse. We should come expectantly to this verse. We should come obediently to this verse because what we're about to see is the Apostle Paul explaining the motivation of the Lord and what the Lord did. The Lord who appointed him to ministry, he's now going to unfold it in a way that is designed to shape the people of God and the holy Son of God, the eternal Son of God and what we're going to see about his sacrifice on our behalf here in the next several minutes is something that is most holy. This is the climax of the purpose of God. This is central to the purpose of creation. This is why the world exists. It is because it was designed to put Christ on display in this manner so that he could secure a people for himself who would share eternity with him in a relationship of love and honor and glorify him forever. All the other stuff, the politics and all of that, it's irrelevant by comparison.

We're looking into here what the holy Son of God did and that which we benefit from and so we come reverently and expectantly and it's appropriate if you're under the sound of the word here this morning, to pay attention. Paul helps us understand why we pursue this walk of love. He explains to us why it's necessary and not just why it's necessary but why it is attractive. Look at verse 2 with me here. There are times, you come to certain texts where it's just a fearsome thing even to preach it because it's so sacred. It's so precious and you feel a little bit like Isaiah, "I'm to speak these things? A man with my unclean lips?" Ah Lord, take the burning coal and touch our tongues and touch our ears that we would receive this in a worthy manner.

"Walk in love," it says. Look at verse 2 with me. If you don't have a Bible with you, there are pew Bibles in front where you can get them. Ephesians 5:2, "just as," here's the parallel, "walk in love like this. Walk in love in a way that resembles what I am about to describe to you. Walk in love just as Christ," notice this, "just as Christ also loved," who? "You." If you're a Christian, look, this is direct and personal. It's not simply a vague statement of love as if Christ had sentimental feelings to the world and did something on the cross that would be an example. It was more than that. It wasn't impersonal, Christ loved you this way. If you name the name of Christ, you're saying that what's described here in what follows was a gift to me. I was on the receiving end of this because this is central to being a Christian.

And having received love, then you respond in love. You see, when Christ through his word calls you and commands you to walk in love, understand this, beloved, this is really important: he doesn't call you this way from a remote, distant throne like the king that sends out servants or armies to do his dirty work for him while he enjoys the pleasures of royalty undisturbed. That's not how Christ did it. The holy, eternal Son of God loved us in this manner in that he laid aside the robes of deity which were his in heaven and entered into earth to do something. He humbled himself.

Look at what it says here: he loved you and what did he do? "He gave Himself up for us." He loved you. He gave himself up for us. Paul goes back and forth in the second and the first person. "He gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." We're going to unpack what this means here. Christ loved us this way: we benefit – watch this – you and I are the eternal beneficiaries of undeserved love. Of love which we could not have asked for, demanded or earned. We are on the receiving end of a gracious love from Christ that secured our good, not only for this life, but through all of eternity.

And what kind of love was it? It was a sacrificial love. And to explain his love, Paul here makes a profound statement about the meaning of the cross, a multi-faceted statement about the cross and I gladly at this point acknowledge my debt to S. Lewis Johnson for some of the things that I am about to describe to you. What can we say about the love of Christ? Well, understand, look at it here with me again. Let's set the text clearly in our minds. Chapter 5, verse 2, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us." Where did he do that? Where did he do that? He did it at the cross. Paul here is making a statement about the theological significance of the cross and how we benefit from it. The crucifixion which we're going to talk about more on Tuesday.

What can we say about this death of Christ on the cross? What was going on there and how does it relate to you living and pursuing a walk of love in this life? It is strong, it is mighty, it is powerful motivation. What can we say about what Christ did on the cross first of all? About his act of love? First of all, we say this and this all motivates us to live this way: first of all, it was voluntary. It was voluntary. Look at verse 2 with me, it says that just as Christ also loved you and what did he do? He gave himself up. By an act of his own volition, he set himself forward to be the sacrifice for your sins. Christ chose to lay himself down so that we might have the eternal benefit of salvation. He who had the prerogative of judge over your sin rather than executing the penalty immediately upon you, instead in compliance with his Father's wishes said, "I will give myself up. I won't exercise the prerogatives that belong to me. I won't cling to those things that are mine. I will give myself up for the benefit of my people."

Look over at Philippians 2. We need to see this. That's just the next book over in your Bible. You should find that. Paul here in Ephesians 5:2 is speaking along the same lines as what he describes in Philippians 2:5 where he's illustrating the virtue of humility but pointing to the same source as his example. Philippians 2:5 says, actually start in verse 4 because this helps with what we're looking at today. "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves

which was also in Christ Jesus." What attitude is that? "Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." What was the love of Christ like? What was his humility like? Walking down a staircase is one way to picture it: he stepped down from heaven into humanity and as a man he said, "I did not come to be served but to serve." So he didn't come in order to receive the acclamation that people give to royalty, he came to serve these sinners like you and me.

So he stepped down from heaven to human life and then what did he do? He who was eternal from the beginning? He who is eternal life? Humbled himself to the point of death. Down. Down. Not just any death, death on a cross. A degraded, shameful death appointed by God for Christ. He stepped down all the way to that. From the glorious throne room of heaven down to death on a cross. Why? Because he's humble. Because he loves his people. Because this is what was necessary to secure their eternal salvation. That's why. Well, step back. Step back from it all and ask a question: who does that? Who is like that? Christ is. You see, you've got to remember that he gave himself up like that for you. Do you see the moral, the affectionate response that that requires? That that engenders? That that motivates you to? Because that's what we're supposed to see here.

Go back to Ephesians 5. Paul says, "Christ loved you and he gave himself up for us." You don't have to turn there but I want to read John 10:18 because this verse always strikes me and it fits here. In verse 17, John 10:17, Christ says, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again." Then what does he say? "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative." Christ did this because he wanted to. Think about it, reflect on it, beloved, and let it change your character: Christ did this, stepped into this world, stepped into that shameful sacrifice, that shameful glorious sacrifice, he did it because he wanted to and he wanted to because he loved us like that. Here is love unexcelled. Unsurpassed. Unequaled. Love like that. Love that by the force of redemption, by the force of the divine influence upon our hearts, love by a perfect example, draws us to want to be that way too.

You know, I don't know about you, I don't want to be a selfish Christian in light of such a selfless Lord. The shame of being selfish and self-centered in the Christian life in response to how selfless Christ was is unthinkable, isn't it? When did you last give yourself for the people of God? When did you last selflessly hand things over to Christ and do something just for the sheer joy of obedience to Christ and because you knew it would glorify him? Some of you, I know, have a lot to say in your recent past but we have to ask ourselves these questions, "Am I fundamentally selfish or selfless in response to the love of Christ?"

Paul says here he gave himself up. It was voluntary. Christ's love – hear me on this – Christ's love comes to us as a free gift which he purchased with his own resources, specifically his own life blood. He did it voluntarily. He did it gladly. He did it freely. He gave himself over to a shameful death on the cross so that you could be redeemed. Wow.

What else can we say about his sacrifice for us from this text? Well, let's look at it. Let's just walk through it. "Just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us," uh-oh, stop there. For us. He gave himself up for us. The second thing that we can say: it was voluntary, it was a substitution. Christ's death was for us. What Paul is saying here is that he died in our place as believers. The judgment that should have fallen on you, fell on Christ instead. He voluntarily entered into your shoes. He voluntarily took the certificate of judgment that was written against you and said, "I'll take that one. I'll place it on myself," and subjected himself to the wrath of God on the cross so that you would not have to go through that wrath yourself. He died in your place.

Christ was innocent. You were guilty. Christ had no sin. You had a lot. But instead of you suffering in hell forever as the rightful price of your rebellion against God, Christ stood in your place at the cross. Listen, in remembering how lovely and innocent and perfect and godly Christ was, in light of that remember this: Christ suffered pains equal to eternal judgment on the cross on your behalf. He died as a substitute. In selfless love, Christ offered his life on the cross so you could receive a free gift of forgiveness. He stood in your guilty place and received your punishment. Beloved, think about it, he did that before you were even born. He did that before you could even ask, so great was his love on behalf of us. Scripture tells us over and over again to look at the cross and see the love of God on display.

In Romans 5:6, reiterating the point that this was a substitution, the Bible says, "While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In our place. In your place. In your stead. He took the wrath of God in himself. Why? So that you would not have to. You know, you run out of words to describe that kind of love. That kind of generosity. That kind of grace and mercy.

Beloved, what Christ did in this act of substitution was God treated Christ as if he had lived your sinful life so that God could treat you as if you had lived Christ's sinless life. That's the principle of substitution and all of your wicked thoughts, your wicked words, your selfish defiance, your indifference to God, your indifference to the commandment to love him with all of your heart, soul and strength, to love your neighbor as yourself and all of the violations of that, Christ said, "Father," in essence, "Father, treat me like I had done that because I want them to go free. Pour it out on me. Pour it on me on the cross because I love my people and I want them to be free. I want them to be forgiven. I want them with me for all of eternity." That's what Christ did for you. That's love. It was a substitution. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

What else can we say about this sacrifice? It was voluntary, it was a substitution. There is another word that is good for you to hear: it was penal. P-e-n-a-l. Christ, when he was on the cross, made a penal sacrifice on your behalf. What does that mean? Simply this: he was paying a penalty for you when he died. Look at chapter 5, verse 2 again. It's all right

here in the text. Christ, it says, gave himself up for us and what was he doing? What was the nature of that giving on the cross? It was an offering. It was a sacrifice. Using language that is reminiscent of the Old Testament sacrifices where people would put their hands on the animal in a symbolic transfer of guilt and the animal would be slain as a substitute for their sins. In like manner, Christ offered himself up and said, "Father, these people I know deserve a penalty. They deserve your judgment because law violators are subject to the penalties of the law." Justice must be upheld. God's law cannot be compromised. God couldn't simply sweep it under the rug without a penalty being paid. Your sins require judgment and what did Christ do? He said, "Father, that judgment, put it on me. Put it on my shoulders." The wages of sin is death. Justice requires that law violations be punished.

So Christ was there on the cross doing more than offering an example of love, although it was that. This wasn't simply to influence you morally. Christ was there paying a penalty at the hands of God and he did it for you. He fulfilled everything that the law required against your sins when he died on that cross. You know, I think if I was reviewing it rightly it would move us to tears. It would overwhelm us as such great undeserved mercy being shown to us. "Lord Jesus, you in all of your perfection, Lord Jesus, you in your great worth, me being who I am? What are you doing? No, the justice should fall on me." And Christ says, "No, I love you, my child. I do this for you because I want to." This is voluntary. "I'll take your place. You could never pay the price anyway. I'll take your place. I'll pay the penalty on your behalf. That infinite debt that you have, I'll take my infinite being and apply it to your account."

Whatever the mystery of this substitution is, somehow the weight of being punished eternally for your sin, Christ felt that. Christ paid that. Christ endured that in his separation from the Father when he hung there and said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It's as if heaven itself had turned its back and he was alone on the cross. Why? Because someone told him to? No. Because he wanted to. Because that's the kind of loving Savior he is. Make no mistake: Christ endured the blow of divine justice against sin on your behalf if you are a Christian. It is the grounds upon which you can be forgiven. No other way.

So it was voluntary. It was a substitution. It was penal. One last point and this is a sweet one. What we're about to see here on this final point is why you can be secure in your salvation. Why as we sing, "Bold I approach the eternal throne." This is why we can be confident. This is why we can be secure. This is why we face death without fear. This is why we pursue a life of love, a walk of love, it's because this death of Christ was also a satisfaction. It was a satisfaction.

Look at verse 2 with me again, Ephesians 5:2, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." He offered himself to God as a sacrifice, not to Satan. And what was it? It was "as a fragrant aroma." What does that mean? That sounds kind of weird, doesn't it? What this is saying is that the death of Christ rose up to God like the smoke of the burnt offerings in the Old Testament rose up. Scripture says it was a pleasing aroma. It was a sacrifice offered in compliance

with what God requires and with a worshipful heart in the Old Testament, an offering out of purity of devotion to God, it rises up and though that sacrifice didn't take away sin, it still pleased God because it was offered in conformity with what he wanted. Well, in an ultimate sense in a like manner, the death of Christ rose up, not in smoke but in a spiritual sacrifice and God the Father received that death as something that was sweet to him. The aroma, the effect of that was satisfying to him. Sniff, sniff, "Ah, that's what I wanted." That is fragrant. It is sweet. It is like perfume to the Father because it pleased him.

What does that mean? It means this: it means that God is completely satisfied with the death of Christ as the payment for your sins. There is nothing else for you to do to turn away the wrath of God because Christ has already done it. It was sufficient. Complete. Perfect. Nothing to be added. Nothing to be taken away. Here's the implication of that: because Christ's death satisfies God the Father, God no longer holds your sins against you if you're a Christian. He will not, let it be said with emphasis, God will not take your sins into account at judgment. Those have been wiped away. Cast into the bottom of the sea. Separated from you as far as the east is from the west. Your guilt has been removed. Christ's righteousness has been applied to your account and you are now fit for the presence of God. If you died now, you could instantly go into the presence of God without fear.

Because it was a fragrant aroma, God was satisfied and so here, let's back up from it all and kind of wrap all of this up. What are we saying? That you and I who are great sinners in Christ have a perfect Savior who made a voluntary, substitutionary, penal sacrifice on the cross for us that satisfied God's demands for judgment forever. And why did he do that? Because he loved us. Because he sought our good at his own personal expense. That's a great gift of love, isn't it? What price would we pay on that? I think it was Isaac Watts that said, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my all."

That's why we walk in love. We're responding to one who loved us first and your life has been given to you, your Christian life has been given to you, the days that you have left are a gracious gift from God given to you so that you would use them as a platform for displaying love and submission to this Christ who loved you first in such a great incalculable way. And in response we say, "Lord, I want to be a copycat. I want to be like you. I want to be like that. That's my goal in life, it's simply to be like that." Is that your aspiration? Do you look at the cross and say what Scripture says should come? "Lord, let me be like you."

Let's pray.

For you sinners who have not come to the cross, I invite you to receive Christ today. He is the only way to God. That perfect sacrifice, that blood atonement, that substitution, was made for sinners like you. Why would you reject a loving offer of salvation from a loving Savior that is designed for your eternal blessing? Come to Christ and be saved.

Father, for the rest of us, help us to imitate you. Help us to walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.