

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Those two verses summarize the message of the entire Bible. Of course the command is impossible to follow unless you have put on the new self that Paul wrote of in the preceding chapter. The new life is only possible because of what is offered to us in the sacrifice of Christ.

This command to imitate God is an abbreviation of all the commands in Scripture. The Law of the Old Covenant is there to give us an idea of what is consistent with the character and nature of God. Throughout the commands given in the Old Covenant, God tells us to do something because He is the Lord. (Leviticus 18:4) That is not to say simply because He is the boss, but rather, because what He has asked is consistent with who He is. He tells us to be holy because He is holy. (1Peter 1:16) He tells us to be merciful because He is merciful. (Luke 6:36) Paul had just written for us to forgive because He forgave us. (Ephesians 4:32) We are to be perfect because God is perfect. (Matthew 5:48) That was Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

God is the standard for all behavior. Being made in His image was being made without sin. As long as man chose to act consistently with the nature of God in whose image they were made, they remained in that sinless image of God. But what happened to them is instructive to us today, for the pattern of temptation has never changed. The tempter spoke to their imagination to encourage them to desire something that was inconsistent with the nature of God, pride! "You shall be as gods." (Genesis 3:5)

It was an incredible honor to be the one creation made in the image of God. What a joyful existence they would have had had they have been content with that! But instead, they wanted to be more than the image of God, they wanted to *be* gods. It is a completely unrealistic desire. God is infinite and eternal. We are created beings. Desire overcame reason. Contemplation of the lie deceived them into the first act that was inconsistent with the image in which they were created. (Genesis 3:6)

How ironic that the thing that tempted them was the lie that they could be gods, when in fact the action marred the image of God in them. Satan is quite a deceiver. (Genesis 3:1) He promises what he can never deliver. As we swallow his lies we swallow his poison and end up further from what could have been. Paul had written in the previous chapters that we have all gone down this path. We were all ruled by the enemy of our soul. (Ephesians 2:1-3) We all inherited this sinful nature of fallen Adam. (Romans

Commented [notes1]: Leviticus 18:4 (ESV)

⁴ You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God.

Commented [notes2]: 1 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Commented [notes3]: Luke 6:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Commented [notes4]: Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Commented [notes5]: Matthew 5:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Commented [notes6]: Genesis 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Commented [notes7]: Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Commented [notes9]: Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins
² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -
³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

5:12) But since we have the offer of new life in Christ Jesus, since we have awoken from death and Christ has shined on us, we can now imitate God. (Ephesians 5:14) We can be merciful and forgiving as God is toward us because of Christ. We can be holy, in the sense of being separated to serve God instead of selfishness. We can even be perfect, as this word also means mature. You see, spiritual immaturity is to be self-focused. Godly maturity is to be focused on the will of God in loving and serving one another. (1John 4:16)

Commented [notes10]: Romans 5:12 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-

Commented [notes11]: Ephesians 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Paul had just written that the Ephesians were to ²⁹ *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Ephesians 4:29-32 (ESV) Therefore, be imitators of God. When God speaks, He speaks what is good for building us up. His words always fit the occasion. They give grace to those that hear. God does not grieve His Holy Spirit for they are one. We should act in oneness with the Spirit. God is not malicious. He wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1Timothy 2:4) He loves the world. He is kind and tenderhearted and ready to forgive. (Isaiah 1:18) That is why we should imitate Him.

Commented [notes12]: 1 John 4:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

After all, we are dearly loved children. A child is to be like their father. If the child is dearly loved, they should turn out to be loving children. I ask you, could we be more dearly loved than we are by our heavenly Father? It behooves us then to be like Him in loving others. (1John 4:11)

Commented [notes13]: 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Commented [notes14]: Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Some have a difficult time with the word "imitate". It can also mean "follower". But we must understand the way "follower" was used in Jesus' day. It meant one that desired to take on the attributes of the one they followed. That is to imitate the one they followed. We struggle with the word because we know doctrinally that the Christian life is not about merely striving to do good. The change must come from the life of Christ in us. (Galatians 2:20) And yet, Paul is giving us all these behavioral guidelines. The reason for these instructions is that we don't mature instantly. Sanctification is a process. So we need these guidelines to help us act in a way that is consistent with the nature of God, until it comes spontaneously from the renewed mind and heart. (Romans 12:2)

Commented [notes15]: 1 John 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Commented [notes16]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We need the Holy Spirit, but we also need teaching. Jesus taught His disciples for three years and then they received the Spirit. They needed both. Our flesh would so subtly

Commented [notes17]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

deceive us, that we need the clear guidelines of the Word to help us discern what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh.

We need to make an effort to cooperate with the Spirit. Paul tells us to *make every effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3) Peter gives us a whole list of things which we are to *make every effort* to add to our life. (see 2Peter 1:5-7) Imitating God is not a passive thing. It is recognizing the areas in which your life does not conform to His image and putting a stop to those things. It is also recognizing where you need to add the very virtues of God to your life, which is only possible by the enabling power of the Spirit.

The second verse gives us the greatest demonstration of what we are to imitate. *² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* It is to follow the example of Christ Jesus. It is to live in love. Everything Jesus did was an act of love for fallen humanity. The cleansing of the Temple was for the sake of Gentiles who wished to pray there. (Isaiah 56:7) His healing and feeding of the multitudes showed the heart of God to humanity. (Matthew 12:15) His waiting until Lazarus died was to give us hope of resurrection. (John 11:25) Even His rebukes to the religious elite were to waken them from their religious stupor and help them turn to a real relationship with God. (Mark 10:21)

Every day of His life, He did not live as He would choose but as the Father directed Him. (John 8:28) He gave Himself up for us! That is, of course, the cross on Golgatha to pay for our sin; but it was also every day, in love, serving, teaching, healing, loving, and ministering to the needs of mankind. That is imitating God who gave His only Son. That is to walk in love.

The verse commands us to live in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. Impossible? Absolutely, that is, without the power of the Holy Spirit and a daily striving to imitate God. Jesus showed us it is possible by relying on the Spirit and obeying His Father. That's why that command is to do AS He did. We are to give up our lives for one another. (1John 3:16) That is quite contrary to our culture, but it is true Christianity.

I get a little weary of the same old argument that Christians are just like Muslims in that they have made war on cultures and killed many. This is being pounded into the head of the younger generations. NO! People using the name of Christ acted contrary to the teachings of Christ during the Crusades and the Inquisition and a few other times. Christianity teaches us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44) on a personal level and leave wars to the governments to whom God gives that authority. (Romans 14:3-4)The

Commented [notes18]: Ephesians 4:3 (ESV)
³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Commented [notes19]: 2 Peter 1:5-7 (ESV)
⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,
⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,
⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 56:7 (NIV)
⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Commented [notes21]: Matthew 12:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all

Commented [notes22]: John 11:25 (ESV)
²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

Commented [notes23]: Mark 10:21 (ESV)
²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Commented [notes24]: John 8:28 (ESV)
²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

Commented [notes25]: 1 John 3:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Commented [notes26]: Matthew 5:44 (ESV)
⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Commented [notes27]: Romans 13:3-4 (ESV)
³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,
⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

New Covenant teaches us to serve one another in love, to follow Jesus in giving up our lives for others. Real Christians live lives of sacrificial service to others.

Love for others was to be the main indicator that someone was truly a follower of Christ. Jesus told His disciples, 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.* ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” John 13:34-35 (ESV) That is a Christian!

We had a great need. We had a sin debt that we could never pay. The blood of sacrificial animals was only a sign that the price of sin was life itself. It was in the very love of God that Christ *gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* A fragrant offering was first mentioned in regards to Noah’s sacrifice after they exited the ark. (Genesis 8:21) It was an offering of gratitude for saving them from the wrath of God. Later in the instructions for worship that God gave to Moses, there was the whole burnt offering that was said to be a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Leviticus 1:9)

The burnt offering was to be consumed completely. There was nothing kept back for the priests or for the one that gave the offering, as in other sacrifices. It symbolized entire commitment. This is what Paul is implying when he says that Jesus gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The burnt offering was an atonement offering, meaning a covering of our sins. Only Jesus’ sacrifice could truly cover our sins once and for all because the demand of justice was met on the cross. (Hebrews 10:10) Jesus was *delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* Romans 4:25 (ESV)

Now we return to the thought in the first verse. Be imitators of God. Here is how Jesus lived a life of love. He gave Himself entirely, nothing held back, everything on the altar, so that we might have life. In the letter to the Romans Paul says it a little more directly. ¹ *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* Romans 12:1 (ESV) In other words, since God has been so merciful to you by allowing Jesus to become a whole burnt offering for you, do as He did. Put yourself on the altar of service to God. Hold nothing back. Be consumed in loving service to Him. (1Peter 1:2) Let your entire life be a sacrifice each and every day. Hold nothing back. After all, that is what He did for you. Imitate God! Give yourself up for Him.

This is radical! But it is the message of the Gospel. Jesus said that if we would be His disciples we must take up our cross and follow Him. (Matthew 16:24) He asked, “Why

Commented [notes28]: Genesis 8:21 (ESV)

²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

Commented [notes29]: Leviticus 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Commented [notes30]: Hebrews 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Commented [notes31]: 1 Peter 1:2 (NIV)

² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Commented [notes32]: Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say." Luke 6:46 (NIV) He warned us that, "No man can serve two masters." (Matthew 6:24) He taught that it was only in losing your life for Christ's sake that you would find life. (Matthew 10:39) All of these teachings are saying the same thing. Offer your life completely to God. He expects nothing less. The image can only be restored when you lay your life down and let Him live in you. He must be our everything, because any less a position in our life leaves us as lord over some area of our life. That is not only detrimental to us, but it is less than what He gave to us.

It is like the way I refer to marriage. Marriage can't be 50/50 and work. It has to be 100/100. Each partner must completely give themselves to the other or there will be conflict or at very least quiet resentment. So it is with our relationship with Jesus, which Paul refers to as a marriage later in this chapter. (5:32) Jesus has given 100%. He gives 100% daily. He is always hearing our prayers. (Hebrews 7:25) He is always considering what is best for us. (Romans 8:28) His love for us is unwavering. What response does that deserve? The only appropriate response is 100% or our love. That is why the Great Command is to love Him with our all. (Mark 12:30)

Now let's hear these two verses again. *¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* Will you heed this command? Will you be an imitator of God as His dearly loved child and live in love each and every day? It's giving up your life, but it is also a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. What else are you going to live for?

Questions

- 1 Why did God give us commands?
- 2 What is the eternal stand for morality?
- 3 What is Satans m.o.?
- 4 What is the image of God? How is it restored?
- 5 Why must we strive?
- 6 How do we live in imitation of God?
- 7 Give examples of Jesus walking in love.
- 8 How can you spot a Christian?
- 9 What sacrifice was said to have a pleasing aroma to God? Implication?
- 10 What is so radical about the Gospel?
- 11 Give me one good reason why I should give my life to Jesus.

Commented [notes33]: Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Commented [notes34]: Matthew 10:39 (ESV)

³⁹ "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Commented [notes35]: Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)

³² "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

Commented [notes36]: Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)

²⁵ "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Commented [notes37]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Commented [notes38]: Mark 12:30 (ESV)

³⁰ "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."