



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Ephesians

"Pleasing the Spirit"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] . . . Chapter 5 verse 2. If you have your Bibles open, follow along. Paul writes:

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Now, that expression "just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" can be translated "because God in Christ has forgiven you." Earlier in our study, we had an example of that back in chapter 1 verse 4. Paul writes – and I'll begin with verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Probably better

to translate that "because He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." We have the same expression in the Greek text here, "just as" or "because" God in Christ also has forgiven you. In other words, this is the reason you should forgive others, because God has forgiven you.

Well, Paul draws some implications from that. He says, "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we are thankful for your blessings. We are thankful for the many ways in which you care for us, many ways in which you look after us. You have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. You have redeemed us from the pit, have saved us by the precious blood of your Son, and you have sealed us with the Holy Spirit. We have the third person of the Trinity literally living within us. He whom heaven cannot contain has come down and inhabited us, taken up residence in these vessels of clay and, Father, we must marvel over the great privilege, the great blessing that that is for us.

So, Father, I pray that as we study the Scriptures this morning and we consider that blessing that we have the Spirit of God within us, that we have been sealed with Him, you might give us a sense of the greatness of that blessing and the greatness of that privilege and that that might have its influence upon our lives. May we be men and women who seek not to grieve the Spirit but to please the Spirit. So we commit our time of study to you and pray you'd bless us and build us up in the faith.

We pray for other needs that our members have, and we think of the unemployed, we think of the sick. We pray for blessings upon them. We pray that you'd give encouragement and direction where it's needed. We pray for Elizabeth Dean and ask that you might give

healing to her. We pray that you'd bless others as well in the same way, Margaret Dietrich and Zara Syrian. We pray that you might give that blessing of healing. We pray for Ray Klein, we pray that you would give healing, and most importantly that you would give salvation, open his heart to receive the truth.

We pray for ourselves, Father, and your blessing upon us, not only in this hour but in the hour to come with the Sunday school classes. We pray that you would bless those who teach and bless those who listen. Prepare hearts for that and for us this evening when we come again and gather around the Lord's table. May it be a time of blessing, may it be a time of edification. May that be true for us now as we sing our final hymn and as we look at the Scriptures together. Bless us in all that we do, that we might be built up in the faith, that we might go forth from this place well equipped to be your ambassadors, prepared to offer the gospel in word and deed to those whom we see. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] As we begin our lesson this morning, Paul has given the Ephesians a general exhortation to holiness. This is what we looked at last week. In verse 17, he admonished them to walk no longer as the Gentiles walk and then in verses 21 through 24, he reminded them of what they had learned when they first heard the gospel, that they were to lay aside the old self and put on the new self, which God created in righteousness and holiness, and having believed, that is what they did. They became new creatures in Christ and so they are now to live like new creatures.

But Paul is not finished exhorting, and in the next verses he continues in much more detail. Here, Paul gets down to what one writer calls the nitty-gritty of Christian behavior, and he deals with sins such as sins of the tongue and the temper and theft, sins that are poison to the body of Christ. The worst sin, however, that a Christian must avoid is the sin that is given in verse 30, that of grieving the Holy Spirit. That warning, in it, Paul indicates one of the most important truths of the Bible, a truth that we must never forget, and

that is that the Holy Spirit is a person and He is the third person of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity and of the personhood of the Holy Spirit is taught in both the Old and the New Testaments. It's not as clearly developed in the Old Testament as it is in the New, but it is there. At the beginning of the Bible, we see it. In Genesis 1:2, Moses writes that the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. He was moving, He was acting in creation. There is a seen in that a purpose and thought. In Isaiah 48:16, the prophet gives the words of the Messiah, who identifies Himself as the first and the last and then says, "The Lord God has sent me and His Spirit." Well, that is the three persons of the Trinity.

The Father sent the Son and He sent the Spirit. The Spirit is sent just like Christ is sent, and they are presented as being on the same level with one another. There are other examples, but it is really in the New Testament that the personality of the Spirit is made all the more clear. In John 14, for example, the Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples after He left this earth. He calls Him the paraclete, the comforter, the helper, and He says of the Spirit in verse 26 that He will "teach you all things."

Now, the grammar in that verse is very important because the word "He" is a masculine pronoun as though the Lord and John are making the point that the Spirit is not an "it," not a thing, but is a "He," is a person, and He is one who teaches us as a person does. He is one, Paul says in Romans 8:26, who prays for us. What we must remember is that the Holy Spirit is not a divine influence, not a mere force or power, but a divine person. He is the third person of the Trinity who can be sinned against. In Acts 5:3, we read that He can be lied to and in Ephesians 4, He can be grieved. Only a person can be grieved, and the fact that He can be grieved is a proof not only of His personhood but of His love for us.

We are most greatly grieved by those that we love the most. I think of what the Holy Spirit has done for us and I think we see the

great love that He has for every believer in Jesus Christ. Just think of what He has done for you. Because if you have received eternal life in Christ, then you have received it because of the work of the Spirit who brought you to Christ, who gave you new birth, who guides you in every step that you take and protects your path. He's constantly at work on your behalf – that's an act of love, acts of love and grace. So you are, as a believer in Jesus Christ, the special object of His affection and His infinite love.

And this one who can be grieved by the things that we do or the things that we think is also one who can be pleased by us as well. What gives Him great joy is our obedience, walking in a manner worthy of our calling in salvation. John writes to his readers in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." Now, that's an inspired statement, and if that's true of John the apostle, it is certainly true of the Holy Spirit. He has no greater joy than in seeing us walking in the truth, walking according to our calling in our salvation.

Now, that should motivate us to holiness, and in the following verses, Paul gives us detailed instruction on how we should live, how we should walk and in doing so, how we can please the Spirit. His instruction is based on what he has already reminded them of in verses 22 through 24, that they had put off the old self, they had put on the new, they are new creatures. "Therefore," in light of that, he says, "laying aside falsehood, speak truth."

That expression, "laying aside," is a participle and it can be understood as either a command, a thing to be done, lay aside falsehood, or it can be understood as a statement of fact about a thing done, something that has already occurred in which it can be translated "since you laid aside falsehood." If that is Paul's meaning, "since you laid aside falsehood," and I think that it probably is the way we are to take this, though the other is a legitimate translation and a way that it's understood by a number of commentators, but if

we're to understand this in the sense of a thing that has been done, then it is again – or Paul is again – reminding the Ephesians of what they did when they came to faith. They laid aside the old self and its way of life, which involved falsehood, which involved lying, and so they are to speak truth.

Now, support for that is found, I think, in the word "falsehood," which in the Greek text has the definite article, "the," and so literally it is "the falsehood" or "the lie." It's the same word that Paul uses in Romans 1:25 of the Gentiles and their idolatry where he says that the Gentiles exchanged the truth of God for a lie, or literally for the lie, for idols. They exchanged the knowledge of God, that which is revealed in nature, for their own ideas, for a lie, and created idols.

Now, when the Ephesians came to faith in Christ, they laid aside the old self, and doing that, they laid aside the way of life of the old self, which involved idolatry. Idolatry is part of what characterized the Gentile way of life, the walk of the Gentiles, against which Paul has warned them, not to walk in it, and Ephesus, as you'll remember, was a city of great idolatry. It was the center of the cult of Artemis, a fertility cult. The goddess of many breasts, the goddess of immorality, and when they came to faith in Christ, they severed their connection with the idols, with the lie and the life of lying, and so they were now to live a different kind of life, a life that was consistent with the truth that they had embraced.

And I think that tells us a great deal about what Paul thought of false religions and false ideas about Christ. They are all the lie. Maybe the liberal Jesus who is considered a mere man, a good man but nothing more, or the Jesus of the cults, which in one way or another is denied of His deity or they may speak of Him as the highest of God's creatures, they may even acknowledge that He's preexistent or was preexistent, but He is a creature nonetheless and not very God of very God; begotten, not made equal with the Father; not the eternal Spirit

of God. Anything short of that is not Christianity. It is not the truth, and Paul calls it "the lie."

To one degree or another, before we came to faith, we were under the delusion of the lie. It may not have been as defined in our minds as it is in the minds of those who are in a cult. We may not hold it as firmly as some of the liberals do. But we were all, to one degree or another, under the lie, within it, in its grasp, but grace delivers from that, delivers from the lie, from all falsehood, and it brings us to Christ who described Himself as the truth. So since they, the Ephesians, since we, since all who have come to faith in Christ have put off the lie and put on the truth, we are to speak truth. We're to do that to everyone. We're to be truthful in all our dealings with all people that we meet.

But it's really not Paul's concern here as to everyone we deal with, with the world at large. Paul's concern here is with the church, it's with fellow Christians whom he speaks of as our neighbor. We are to be truthful with one another, not because that's a good example to the world, not because lying is a sin. All of that is true, of course, but that's not the reason that Paul gives for us speaking truth. He says we're to be truthful with one another because we are members of one another, we are a body. That is a major theme in the book of Ephesians. We are fellow believers joined in close fellowship, close relationship with one another. Fitted and held together, as he said in verse 16.

And in order to stay together and in order to function properly, to function as a body, we must speak truth to one another. We must be honest with one another. As one writer put it, a lie is a stab into the very vitals of the body of Christ because a lie is a shaft from the kingdom of darkness. Unity in a church, vitality in a church, must be based upon truthfulness within the church. It cannot grow, we cannot grow in our vitality, we cannot maintain and strengthen our unity unless there is truthfulness among our members. Paul's very concerned about this, very concerned about the use of the tongue, and

he will develop that point further in the text, but first, in verses 26 and 27, he deals with the temper.

He deals with anger and the control of it. "Be angry, he says, "and yet do not sin." Now, at first glance, that might strike us as strange, maybe contradictory, "be angry" and "do not sin." Isn't anger a sin? Well, not necessarily. In fact, Paul is quoting David in Psalm 4:4 where David commands that, commands anger, commands us to tremble – probably a reference to tremble in fear, tremble in anger. There is a good anger and there are times when anything other than anger would not be proper. We call that righteous indignation and we have examples of it in the Scriptures. We have an example of it – more than one – in the life of our Lord.

When Christ cleansed the temple, He did so in anger. Righteous anger, righteous indignation, and He cast out all the money changers for turning the temple, He said, into a robbers' den. Men were using the house of God, they were using the truth of God for personal gain. It meant nothing to them other than a means and a place to enrich themselves, and so they were cheating the people under the protection of God's temple, and it caused our Lord to burn with anger.

You see the same in Mark 3:5. He's in the synagogue and He became angry with the religious leaders because of their hardness of heart, because of their willful unbelief, and because in their unbelief, they were becoming a stumbling block, an impediment to the faith, to faith in other individuals there.

Sin and unbelief provoke anger in God and should provoke anger in His people. Indifference toward sin is wrong. In fact, one writer has said that a person who cannot get angry, who has no indignation, is a maimed sample of humanity. Righteous indignation toward hypocrisy, injustice – sin of any kind – is right. And that kind of anger can lead to righteous action. It did with Martin Luther. When he learned of the Roman church building St. Peter's Cathedral with the

money that it gained through the sale of indulgences to the German people, he became very angry.

An indulgence was a document that could be bought for a sum of money and promised that the buyer would have freedom from the temporal punishment of sin. Just pay a certain amount and you don't need to worry, and so the Germans could buy their indulgence and then they could go to the beer hall and they could spend much more of their money on that kind of living and do so without any worries about God dealing with them. Well, Luther objected to that, and it was his controversy with the man who was selling the indulgences, a monk named John Tetzel, that led to the Reformation. It was William Wilberforce's anger over slavery that moved him to undertake the long, hard fight to end the practice of slavery in England.

So anger is good. But there is a caveat, there is a warning. "Be angry," Paul says, "and yet do not sin." Anger can become personal. It can be nursed, and if it's nursed, it can then spill over into bitterness and hatred and vengeance. And so Paul gives a rule to keep that in check, keep that from happening. He says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." The point of that statement is: Resolve your anger quickly. J. B. Phillips in his paraphrase puts it this way, he says, "Never go to bed angry." That's a good rule for husbands and wives, for children and parents. It's a good rule for any relationship. The day that we get angry should be the day that we deal with our anger.

That can't always be done. Sometimes there are things going on in our life or situations that don't permit that, but the point is we should resolve the differences quickly, as quickly as possible. The reason that we don't do that when we don't do that usually is not because of time but because of pride. We don't want to take the first step in the reconciliation, particularly if we're the offended party, particularly if we're the one that had been sinned against, and so that becomes a problem. But to remain angry and to brood over a matter is to put our spiritual health at risk.

Anger can eat at our soul. Personally, we don't grow spiritually when there is bitterness in our life, and as a church, our ministry and our effectiveness as a church is frustrated when there is bitterness among our members because when anger becomes sin, it grieves the Holy Spirit, and it also gives us an opportunity or gives an opportunity to Satan. Verse 27: Do not give the devil an opportunity or literally, do not give the devil a place, don't give him a place within your church.

Paul doesn't explain how that opportunity is taken by the devil, but we can imagine in view of the context and in view of the importance that he places upon the unity of the church and all that he's saying here that the devil can take advantage of our anger, he can play upon our pride to produce sulking Christians and then with that try to turn a church against itself. So that's a great danger and Paul is very concerned about that, but there was more that concerned Paul, and so he moves on to dishonesty, to theft. Verse 28: Let him who steals steal no longer. Christians evidently were actually stealing. There were thieves in the church.

In fact, all that Paul has said here gives us a somewhat disarming picture of the early church. Deceit, anger, theft. Churches of the 1st century weren't made up of moral, middle-class, upright, and decent people. Many of the members of the church were people who had been drawn from the lowest levels of society. Slaves and thieves. Remember, they came out of paganism and this is a Gentile church. Many of them had worshiped Artemis of the Ephesians. They came out of that kind of background, and that is true of so many in the early church.

Paul gives us a sense of that in 1 Corinthians 6 when he describes some of the Corinthians. He says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the

kingdom of God, and such were some of you. The Corinthians Christians had been saved out of the very worst sins. They'd been thieves, they'd been adulterers, they'd been drunkards, but these are the kinds of people that God saves.

That's what grace is for, it's for those who need _____ and the Lord had saved them, and in saving them He had changed them. Paul says, "Such were some of you," in other words, they were thieves, they were adulterers, they were drunkards but they were no longer. When they came to faith, a great change had occurred and Paul goes on to say, "but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." In other words, they put off the old self when they came to faith and they put on the new. They became new creatures in Christ, and Paul expected them to now behave like new creatures.

Behaving like a new creature begins by realizing that we are that, that we really are new creatures, and so we're to reckon ourselves, as he tells the Romans in Romans 6, dead to sin but alive to righteousness. It's true. It's a reality and we are to live in light of that and conform to that truth. Now, that's what Paul is saying here. He's saying, "Steal no longer. Put that behavior away. It doesn't fit with the new self." Not for the 1st century Christian and not for the 20th century Christian, and I say that because that is still a great problem in our day as well.

I read a startling statistic. It's a few years old but still startling. Suppose it's not much different today than it was four years ago, but the statistic concerned the losses in dollars that department and chain stores suffer each year, and it broke it down according to employee error, which was ten percent, and shoplifting, which was another percentage, and then it had 60 percent of the losses that these stores suffer each year is due to employee theft, which amounts to \$16 million a day. That's a staggering figure, to me, at least, and you wonder, "Well, that's a lot of people involved in theft. Does that include some Christians?"

Well, I don't know, but I do know this: Christians are greatly influenced by the spirit of their age, and it is certainly possible that there are Christians involved in that. They were involved in such activity in the 1st century, and Paul is warning them against that, admonishing against it. But there are lots of ways to steal besides shoplifting or robbing 7-Elevens. We can steal from our employer by bad use of our time, by not giving proper service, by padding an expense account. An employer can steal from his or her employees by being oppressive, by not paying a decent wage. Well, Paul says stop stealing. There are all kinds of ways we can do that and Paul says stop.

And you know, that's not enough. It's not enough simply to stop stealing because Paul also says that we are to then work. "Let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good," and when Paul says that, he means work hard. The verb "labor" means literally become weary in it, so it means working hard. We're to be diligent workers and we're to make good use of our time. Notice the purpose for it. We're to work "in order that [we or] he may have something to share with him who has need." In other words, stop taking and start giving.

Now, that's the change that Christ can make in an individual. Dr. Johnson some years ago when he taught on this said this is the power of the gospel. It can turn a thief into a philanthropist. That is the power of the gospel. It does change lives. Rowland Hill was a great English preacher and influential man in the 1700s and early 1800s. At the funeral of his favorite employee, he astonished the mourners who were there at the ceremony with a story that he had kept secret for some 30 years. His first meeting with this man whom he had a great affection for and who he had employed for so many years was when the man attempted to hold up Dr. Hill.

He was a highwayman. He was seeking to rob Mr. Hill. Mr. Hill argued with him and offered him a job if he would visit him later, which he did. The man became a Christian, became a devout Christian

and a devoted worker. That was the change that took place in his life. He heeded the words of the apostle. He became a man who worked rather than robbed and that's the kind of power that the gospel has and that's the kind of change that it can produce. Thieves can be changed in to honest workers and more, they can be turned into philanthropists. God puts our hands to good use. That's pleasing to the Spirit.

In verse 29, Paul turns from the use of our hands to the use of our tongues - actually, he returns to that subject that he began back in verse 25, and here he says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." Speech is a gift of God. It's one of the things that separates us from the animals. It's one of the activities of God. He has spoken to us in the past in the prophets and in His Son. He has spoken to us words of life, given us great revelation, and He has given us that gift as well. So how do we use it? Speech has great potential. With it, Paul says, we can edify, we can build one another up.

But it also has the capacity for great damage, and so Paul warns against an unwholesome word, which means rotten speech. That's how the word "unwholesome" is used in the gospels. It's used of rotten trees that produce bad fruit, and an unwholesome word is that. An unwholesome word can be an off-color joke, it can be crude or obscene language, but I think more to Paul's point is not telling bad jokes or cursing or something like that but rather using words, using language, in a way that tears people down. He's putting this in contrast to building people up, and that would suggest doing that which tears a person down. It would refer to gossip and speak of discussing other people's faults and failures rather than helping those individuals.

That's really a common problem. Augustine recognized that after he became a Christian. Augustine went back to his home in North Africa and he established a monastery, and in his monastery, he put a premium on good books, on learned conversation, and edifying speech. On the table at which he and his friends would sit and eat and

have free conversation, he engraved these words: "Whoever thinks that he is able to nibble at the life of absent friends must know that he's unworthy of this table." And when that rule was not obeyed, when men did begin to nibble at their friends who weren't present, to gossip and speak behind their back, they were severely reprimanded. That's good because speech can be brutal.

We learned a silly rhyme when we were children: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That has to be one of the dumbest things we ever learned because that's just not true. Words may not break our bones but they can crush a spirit, and that's much worse. A parent can cripple his or her child with abusive speech. "You're worthless." "You're never going to amount to anything." "Why aren't you like the kid next door?" Something like that. A parent can cripple his child with those kinds of words, and I'd be surprised if any of you spoke to your children in that way, but imagine how you'd feel if you heard your son and daughter being spoken to in that way by, say, his or her teacher, you heard the teacher say, "You don't try. You're stupid."

Or we heard some of their friends or their peers laughing at them, talking behind their back, ridiculing them, making sport of them. What would that do? Well, that would make you angry, make you very angry. It would be painful to you. You'd be grieved by it. Well, if that kind of talk grieves us, how much more deeply does it touch the Holy Spirit? To hear us abuse one of His children grieves Him. So Paul warns against that in verse 30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." From the moment of faith, every believer has been sealed with the Spirit.

Paul made that clear back in chapter 1 and verse 13. A seal was a mark of ownership in the ancient world and that's what the presence of the Holy Spirit is. He shows that we belong to God, and here Paul says that we are sealed for the day of redemption. Now, "redemption" is a word that means freeing of captives, and that occurred on the

cross. That's where the payment for our freedom was made. That's where we were redeemed through the blood of Christ.

The day of redemption, however, looks forward to the resurrection, it looks forward to the completion of the redemption that Christ has achieved, and the Holy Spirit keeps us secure until then, which means He never leaves us, which means He is a permanent part of our life and because He's a permanent part of our life, He's very much aware of our conduct both good and bad. He's there with us through it all, and He can be grieved by what He sees and what He hears.

Now, what happens when the Holy Spirit is grieved? Well, Paul doesn't tell us. Spurgeon had some things to say about that, and he said that a number of things happen when the Spirit of God is grieved. He says He withdraws from us His joy, He withdraws from us His comfort and His spiritual power. Spurgeon likens it to a particular flower. He says our graces are much like the flower called the – I'm going to mispronounce it here, but the hydrangea – hydrangea, and that flower, as he goes on to explain, flourishes when there is water, but as soon as the moisture fails, the leaves fall.

That's a good illustration of our spiritual life. We have vitality when the Spirit is active within us, but when we grieve Him, that power is withdrawn, the joy is withdrawn. That's what happens in the Christian life. We stop being effective. That's not only true of the Christian personally, it's true of the church. Church loses its effectiveness when the Spirit is grieved and churches can come into that situation. You see that in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation and there is that threat of the removal of the lamp stand from the midst of various churches. They become cold, they become indifferent, and they don't care.

That's something a church must be concerned about. We must look at ourselves, we must ask ourselves, "Are we cold? Are we grieving the Spirit in our conduct, in our selfishness and our sin?"

And then we must search our hearts and ask us, "What is that sin?" Put it before the Lord and pray earnestly about it. Pray earnestly for ourselves, pray earnestly for one another, pray earnestly for this assembly. A number of ways in which we can grieve the Holy Spirit, and one of the major failures that we must avoid is unwholesome words. And so to avoid grieving Him, our speech should be used for edification.

We should be people like Job of whom it was said that he helped the tottering to stand and strengthened feeble knees. That's how he used his speech, to help. We should be like our Lord of whom it is said, "A bruised reed, He will not break, and a smoldering wick, He will not snuff out." He used His words to heal, He used His words to console, to guide, to direct. That's the way we're to direct our words, and that's the way that we avoid grieving the Spirit.

We are to avoid all kinds of evil and in the final verses of the chapter, Paul gives a list of bad attitudes and actions that we are to put off from ourselves and a list of virtues that we are to seek. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor" – clamor refers to loud quarreling – "and slander be put away from you, along with malice," and in their place, Paul says, we should be kind. Christians should be kind. That's something just to think about. We should be kind individuals. When people see us, they should know that we are kind, and that's what they should think about us.

Well, we should be kind, we should be tender-hearted, Paul says. We should be forgiving, just as God also has forgiven you. How has God forgiven you? Well, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, then He has forgiven you unconditionally and forgiven you without hesitation, and that's what we're to do. And Paul may mean that here but he may be indicating something else because, as I pointed out in our reading of the Scripture, the word that is translated here "just as" can also mean "because," in which case Paul is giving the reason or

the motive for forgiveness. We are to be forgiving each other because God in Christ has also forgiven you.

We deserve God's complete rejection but He forgave us, and because of that, we are to forgive others. We are to act like God acts, we are to act mercifully toward one another. We're going to fail one another continually because we are sinful people, and while we have put off the old self, there is still that law of sin within our members and we struggle with it and we'll struggle with it to the day we die. So we're going to fail one another. We must be a people that are tender-hearted and forgiving, to be a people who are kind and follow the example of our Lord Himself. That's the standard that Paul gives us and that's how he begins chapter 5.

He writes, "Therefore" - in light of His mercy, in light of the fact that He's forgiven you, because He's forgiven you, "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children." Believers in Jesus Christ are God's children. We are loved by God. Beloved children, Paul says, and in describing us that way, Paul is reminding us that we are new creatures and as new creatures, we are members of God's family. Therefore, we are to live as new creatures, we are to live as different from the world, and we are to be imitators of God. We are to show our family resemblance, our resemblance to our heavenly Father, by not engaging in wrong behavior, the kind that he has been describing here, and by not walking as the Gentiles also walk.

Instead, Paul says in verse 2, we are to "walk in love." Now, walking implies progress. It speaks of the course of one's life and not only the course of one's life but making progress, and so we are to be progressing in love, we're to be growing in love, acting in love, just as God does, and not only is the Father our example but also Christ is our example because He also loved us, Paul says, also loved us and gave Himself up for us, "an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." The cross of Christ is the defining act of love. There's no greater act of love that has ever been performed. It is the defining act

of love. Christ gave Himself. His life wasn't taken from Him; He gave it up.

His sacrifice for us was voluntary. Christ did not have to die. Christ did not have to enter this world, but He humbled Himself and submitted Himself in obedience to His father even unto death. He chose to die so that we, His enemies, might live. And His sacrifice pleased His Father. Paul calls it "a fragrant aroma." The picture he gives here is a little foreign to us, but in Paul's day, it was very common. People all over the world were familiar with an altar and a sacrifice and they were familiar with watching the flames of the altar consume the sacrifice and the smoke ascend up into the sky. They were familiar with that whether they were familiar with it from the temple in Jerusalem or the pagan temples all over the Roman empire.

Paul makes it clear that Christ's sacrifice was made to God, the one true God, and it was pleasing to Him. Literally, it was a fragrance of sweet odor, which is a way of saying that it was completely acceptable to the Father. It accomplished perfectly the salvation for which it was offered. That's how salvation was accomplished. Wasn't accomplished through the good life of our Lord. That made it possible. That was necessary, but it was accomplished through the shedding of Christ's blood at Calvary when He died in our place and paid for our sins. Salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life was purchased for us at great cost.

Now, if God did that for us – while we were sinners, while we were dead in our sins, while we were enemies, children of wrath, sons of disobedience – if He did that for us in that condition, then what should we do? We should do the same. We should love one another. We should be kind to one another. We should be forgiving. We should show forth all of the virtues that Paul has listed here. That's how we please the Spirit. In fact, that's how we please the godhead, the triune God. You notice how once again the Trinity comes out in Paul's thoughts. We are to imitate the Father who loves us and

forgave us in Christ His Son who died for us. And we're not to grieve the Spirit who protects us and keeps us to the day of redemption.

So these verses, in them Paul once again speaks of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – the Trinity. The one God in three persons. Now, if you know Him, then seek to please Him. Seek to please Him who loved you from all eternity, purchased you for Himself out of the slave market of sin and keeps you secure eternally. If you don't know Him, if you are here this morning without Christ, an unbeliever, then realize that you are that and in need of a Savior, and look to the Savior. Look to Christ who died for sinners and bore their punishment, punishment for all of their sins, in their place, so that all who trust in Him will be saved.

Trust in Him and in so doing receive the forgiveness of sins. May God help you to do that if you have not put your faith in Christ. And if you have, then realize that in coming to faith, you put off the old man with its ways, its way of life, and you have put on the new man, you have put on the truth. You're clothed in Christ. Now live consistently with that. Live a life that's pleasing to Him, pleasing to the Spirit, pleasing to the Son, pleasing to the Father. May God help you to do that, help each of us to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we will read a passage such as this and we see ourselves in it in so many ways. The various attitudes and actions that Paul condemns and warns us against, we must confess that we are guilty of those and we will continue to be guilty of them, but we know that your power is a power that changes, that the gospel brings about a complete change in us so that we become new creatures and we have within us the Spirit of God, and His power can effect great change in us.

And we know that you not only can do that but you are doing that, and so we look to you, Father, to change us, to change our attitudes, to change our actions, make us more conforming to what's

pleasing to you and in so doing please the Spirit and not grieve Him. We confess that we have done that, and we pray that you would change us; and where that is a particular problem, we pray that you would bring it to light within us, that we might look to you for renewal. Bless us with that, bless us with greater love for one another, bless us more importantly with greater love for you. We pray these things in the name of Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. Amen.