

Bottom Line – Eph 5:1-2

Eph 5:1-2. If I were to put a label on these two verses, it would be “bottom line.” Because these verses contain the essence of what Paul has been saying in all of chapter 4. For 32 verses he’s talked about our unity, our growth, our new nature, and our life. And he *ends* it here with the bottom line. Saying . . .

[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.

Most of the time, the word *therefore* indicates a new line of thought in Paul’s writing. Like in 4:25. *Therefore* Paul says, *having put away falsehood*, do the following: speak the truth; watch your anger; work hard, and so on. He adds to what he already said with a new line of thinking; where the rubber meets the road.

But occasionally, the word *therefore* winds *up* an argument or discussion; giving us the bottom line. Like here in v1. Having just told us to do things *characteristic* of God, he sums it up by saying *therefore, be imitators of God*. Bottom line. Despite the chapter break, that seems to be the flow of thought.

Plus, Paul uses the same kind of expression and same *word*, in v1, as he does in v32. “Be.” *Be kind to one another*, and *be imitators of God*. Same word, used the same way. Moving from the specific to the general. The bottom line.

➤ Now, you might wonder, “Why then, is there a chapter break? If v1-2 are connected to chapter 4, why do they start a new chapter? Doesn’t that indicate a new thought?”

Not necessarily. Chapter breaks, and even verse divisions, are not inspired. In fact, the New Testament chapters didn’t come along until 1227; over a *millennium* after it was written. And the *verse* separations even later; 1551. They’re super *helpful*, don’t get me wrong. And most of the time spot on. But they’re not perfect.

(https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/bible-special/question8-why-is-the-bible-divided-into-chapters-and-verses.cfm)

So instead of starting a new thought, Paul gives us the bottom line of his *previous* thoughts. A 3-fold bottom line. The first is this:

Live like God (v1)

No kidding. *Be imitators of God* it says. Do *what* he does, and *how* he does it, with the same heart and motive. Imitate him. *Be* like him, think like him, and live like him.

You say, “I can’t do that. No way. He’s God.” And to some extent, you’re right. You *can’t* live like him. Not flawlessly. Not completely. He’s sinless and you’re not. He’s perfect, you’re not.

But you can *try*. In the strength that God provides, you can *strive* to live like him. *Try* to emulate him. *Try* to be like him. And you should. That’s the point. Not perfection, but sanctification. Becoming more and *more* like him.

➤ The question is, in what *respects*? Certainly we can’t be omnipotent like him. Or omniscient, all-knowing. So *how are* we to live like him? It’s one of *two* questions that beg for answers here. First, *how* are we to live like God? In what ways?

Let me give you 3. From right here in Ephesians. Three attributes *Paul* most likely had in mind, having just written about them; and 3 attributes we’d do well to cultivate and imitate.

The first is . . .

1. Holy and blameless

Live like God, holy and blameless. Just like Paul said in 1:4 – we should *be holy and blameless before him*. Or as God himself said it in Leviticus 11:44 – *Be holy as I am holy*. Holy in *all* your conduct Peter said. (1 Pet 1:15) If we’re going to *live* like God, be *imitators* of him, we have to be holy and blameless like him.

The impossibility of which, should make us all the more thankful for his mercy and grace. Which makes us all the more holy and blameless. Because we have an attitude of gratitude. That’s the first way to live like God.

2. Full of forgiveness

Live like God, full of forgiveness. We talked about it last time from 4:32. Forgive one another, just like God has forgiven you. Completely, immediately, and permanently. That’s being *full* of forgiveness.

And just so you understand, it’s rarely a one and done sort of thing. In order to forgive completely and permanently, you’ll probably have to forgive *repeatedly*. For the same offense. Every time the bitterness washes over your soul. Immediately letting it go and praying *for* that person instead of *against* them. It’s one more reason being *full* of forgiveness is so vital. Because we have to do it so much. Repeatedly.

But it *doesn’t* mean all *consequences* are removed. Just because you no longer hold something against somebody, doesn’t mean you should withhold all the consequences. Think parenting. Consequences are teaching moments that drive home the point; even though you’ve forgiven. And God doesn’t remove all *our* consequences every time he forgives.

Nor does being full of forgiveness mean that you should submit yourself to the repeated *abuse* of someone in your life. Forgiving them over and over, and staying put. Like an abused wife. In that case, forgiveness still *applies*, but one of the consequences *may* be having nothing more to do with them. Especially if there’s no repentance and fruit.

Whatever the case, if we’re going to *live* like God, imitate him, we have to be full of *forgiveness* like him.

And then third, a third way to live like him, is to be . . .

3. Rich in mercy

2:4 – God, *being rich in mercy* . . . *made us alive together with Christ*. He’s rich in mercy. And Jesus said in Lk 6:36 – *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*.

Does that describe you? Are you compassionate toward those in *sin*? And those who sin *against* you? Do you withhold the punishment they *deserve*, in order to bestow the grace they don’t? That’s mercy. And if we’re going to imitate *God*, we have to be *rich* in it. Free with it. Lavish. (Summary)

Holy and blameless, full of forgiveness, and rich in mercy. Three attributes we'd do well to cultivate and imitate. That's the answer to the first question. *How* are we to live like God?

➤ The second question, still under this first point, comes from the *second* part of v1 – “as beloved children.” *Be imitators of God, as beloved children*. As someone who's part of his family through faith and repentance. Faith in his Son, and repentance of your sin. Because the moment you turn to him, he adopts you as one of his *beloved children*.

The question is, how do beloved *children* imitate him? Bottom line? Eagerly and securely. We ought to be **eager** to live like God. Enthusiastic about it. *Excited*. Like a little boy is eager to be like his Dad. Or a little girl wants to be like her mom. The dad uses a real hammer, and his son uses a plastic one. Mom dresses nice and her daughter plays dress up. They're eager.

If you're grudging or lacking in your childlike desire to be like Abba Father, something is wrong. Because children are *eager* to live like those they love. *Eager* to live like those they admire.

➤ Second, is **secure**. Having been adopted into his family, we ought to be secure. *Secure* in his love; *despite* our failures. *Secure* in his provision; despite our *needs*. Secure in his *protection* despite our fear. As beloved children of God, insecurity ought to be the *furthest* thing from our heart and mind.

Nor should we think and act like *servants* trying to earn a wage or curry his favor. We're children. Full-on heirs. With the biggest trust fund in the world; everything we need for life and godliness. (2 Pet 1:3) And a guaranteed inheritance for all time.

So whatever you do, live secure; *eager* to be like God. Holy and blameless, full of forgiveness, and rich in mercy. Bottom line.

Second, the second part of this 3-fold bottom line, is to . . .

Love like Jesus (v2a)

Live like God, and love like Jesus. Or as Paul says it in v2, *walk in love, as Christ loved us*. Walk, as in “conduct your life;” or “live your life.”

So to walk in *love*, means to conduct your life in a loving way. Just like Jesus. *Walk in love as Christ loved* it says; when he *gave himself up for us*. Live your life in a loving way, just like he lived his when he died. Make sure it's infused with *that* kind of self-giving love. Bottom line.

➤ But why love? Why does Paul single *that* characteristic out among all the others? Why not grace? Or Joy. Peace. Hope.

Because *love* is foundational. Love is prerequisite. Get love right, and all the other virtues follow. Get love *wrong*, and all the other virtues stall. It's pretty hard to show grace to someone, if you don't love them. Pretty hard to be merciful or forgiving, if you're not loving.

➤ But once again, this raises the question of *how*. If we're to love *like* Jesus, we need to know *how*. *How* did he love? Once again, 3 ways.

1. Freely

Love *freely* like Jesus. V2 says, *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*. He wasn't coerced; he wasn't forced; and he wasn't pressured. He *freely* gave. He *freely* loved.

How about you? Do you give of *yourself* freely? Bless *others* freely? *Freely* show your love to those around you? *Freely* extend it? Or do you withhold it? Because being so forthright makes you feel uncomfortable. Or you think people don't deserve it.

Or maybe you just don't *feel* like loving freely. To which I would say, Jesus didn't either. Not always. Like the night before his crucifixion when he said, “Father, *remove this cup from me*.” This cup of wrath. (Lk 22:42) He didn't *feel* like loving us on the cross. *Freely*.

And we certainly didn't deserve it. Just like the mockers, scoffers, and soldiers when he lovingly said, “Father, forgive them” while *hanging* on the cross. (Lk 23:34) *They* didn't deserve his love, and *we* don't deserve his love. Yet he offers it freely. And we should too.

Second, love . . .

2. Sacrificially

He gave himself *up* it says in v2. To death. Sacrificial to the core. And loving to the core. **1 John 3:16** says it this way: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*.

He gave himself up, and laid his life down. Sacrificing *his* life for *ours*. Dying for *us* so we wouldn't have to. Not eternally; condemned in the throes of hell; separated from God and others. He spared us from that by taking our place.*****

And Paul says, love like that every *day*. *Walk in love, as Christ loved us*. Make it a part of your life. Dying to *your* interests and *your* desires, for the sake of others. Their interests, their needs, their desires. Love *sacrificially*.

And third, love . . .

3. Boldly

Whether it's consorting with sinners, or challenging saints. That's what Jesus did. He bucked the norm and defied the culture; the secular *and* religious culture. Not to mention the cancel culture. It existed then, too. Pharisees and Sadducees. And the Roman gov't.

Did Jesus care? No. He loved anyway. Saying what's right, opposing what's wrong, blessing the meek, reaching the lost, confronting sin, facing danger, you name it. About as bold as it gets.

And every last part of it, was borne out of love. Love was the impetus for his boldness, the fuel, the staying power, everything. No love, no boldness. Bottom line. Love like Jesus.

And last . . .

Remember the cross (2b)

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Paul's referring to Christ's death on the cross. Reminding us what it did; what it accomplished. Starting with the fact that . . .

1. It spared us

Remember the cross, because it spared us. Over and over again the Bible says that Jesus died for us; or *gave himself up for us*, v2. Him for me.

In theological terms, it's called the **substitutionary atonement**. Substitutionary, in that Jesus died in our place; he was our substitute. And atonement, in that his death was a sacrifice of forgiveness and reconciliation. That's what atonement means – a sacrifice for the purpose of *forgiveness* on God's part, and restoration of our *relationship* with him.*****

Remember the cross because it spared us from punishment.

2. It pleased God

That's the idea of a *fragrant offering* in v2. It's a phrase used throughout the Old Testament to describe animal or *food* offerings that pleased God.

And the two most important reasons they did so, was the heart of the person *offering* the sacrifice, and the perfection of the sacrifice itself. That's why God required lambs without blemish, and hearts that were genuine. One without the other wasn't pleasing; wasn't acceptable.

But Jesus was. Because his heart was *completely* yielded to God. And his *life* without blemish. (Heb 4:15; 9:14) Which made his death on the cross pleasing and acceptable to God in every way, for all time. Remember that. The cross pleased God.

And . . .

3. It appeased God

We don't normally think of it this way, but that's the implication of the phrase *sacrifice to God*. (2b) In other words, Jesus died to *appease* him; appease his *wrath* for our sin. Like a peace offering under the *Old Covenant*.

And it's not only implied, it's explicit. **1 Jn 2:2** says – *He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins*. The appeasement of God's wrath for our sins. That's what it means. Necessary, because God *hates* our sin. And requires payment for it; consequences. But when *Jesus* died, and we claim his death as our own, by faith, God's wrath is appeased. Satisfied. Never to return.*****

I'd say that's cause for remembrance.

And last, remember the cross because . . .

4. It blesses us

It blesses us by offering the New Covenant; God's promise of salvation by grace through faith. It blesses us by *guaranteeing* our salvation. And it blesses us by perfecting us for all eternity. **Heb 10:14.**

By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified [becoming more and more holy]. The death of Jesus, on the cross, blesses us.

➤ Which is why we set aside time every 4-6 weeks at The Lord's Table to remember it. Often enough to keep it in the forefront of our minds, but not so often that we become numb to it. A time to unite our hearts in communion with Christ and one another, and remember the bottom line. To live like God and love like Jesus.

So take a minute to reflect on that. A minute to thank him and pray. A minute to repent of your sin, recommit your life, and rekindle your love.

And if you've never believed in Jesus in the first place, you've never claimed him as your substitute, by faith; now's the time. Believe in him as your Savior, and receive him into your life as Lord. To live and love *his* way, from now on. (**The Lord's Table**)

➤ At the last supper, with bread in hand, Jesus said, "*This is my body, which is for you.*" Meaning the bread we hold, as we observe the same thing, is symbolic of his *sacrifice* on our behalf. A sacrifice that appeased God's wrath for our sin. Remember the cross.

Then, cup in hand, he said, "*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*" In other words, this cup and what it contains, is symbolic of the promise of salvation, the New Covenant, that Christ's blood bought and guarantees. Remember the cross.