[1] Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. [3] But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; [4] neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. [5] For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [7] Therefore do not be partakers with them. [8] For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), [10] finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. [11] And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. [12] For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Text: Ephesians 5:1-12 A 3/8/26 Passion History: Jesus Before Pilate Psalm 16 Resp. Ps.: 22
Hymns: 141 (1-5), 363, 397 (tune: #493), 394

RETURN TO LOVE

To our Redeemer's glorious Name
Awake the sacred song:
O may His love, immortal flame,
Tune every heart and tongue.

He left His radiant throne on high,
Left realms of heav'nly bliss,
And came to earth to bleed and die –
Was ever love like this? (TLH # 394:1, 3)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

My parents loved us boys. They wanted us to be happy. All too often, sinning made us happy. Since our parents loved us and wanted us to be happy, they should have been happy when we sinned. That kind of thinking would not have worked at all with my parents. Sadly, there are people who think that way about God.

Why should God love us? We're reminded, *"You were once darkness."* Jesus knows the darkness of our human nature, as we see from what He says in our text. It's amazing that God can love us, but He does! Jesus loves us so much that He died for our sins on the cross. As we're told, *"Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."*

"We love [God] because He first loved us" – 1 John 4:19. That God can love a sinner such as I causes me love Him in return. We show our love for God in the way we think, what we say, and how we act. We're urged, *"Be"* (literally, from the original, *"Keep on being!"*) *"imitators of God as dear children. And walk"* (literally, from the original, *"Keep on walking!"*) *"in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us."* Jesus is very loving and caring toward us.

Jesus is humble and self-sacrificing. Jesus is not hateful. Jesus helps us in any and every need. He tells us, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5). Instead of thinking only of ourselves and what we want and what makes us happy, Jesus' love for us teaches us and moves us to love Him and serve Him in return.

Jesus tells us, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). We show our love for God by doing what God says. In the Bible God tells us in plain language what's right and what's wrong. The Bible says, *"Sin is the transgression of the law"* (1 Jn 3:4, KJV). If we disobey what God says in the Bible, that's sin. Our Old Adam is always resisting God. The world is constantly changing its moral values, usually for the worse. Satan whispers in our ear, *"Did God really say…?"* (Gen. 3:1). We need to keep hearing and studying God's Word so we know what's good for us and what's not.

Two of the biggest temptations we face are sexual immorality and greed. Look at what's portrayed in movies, TV shows, books, and magazines. Our flesh is attracted to the world's immorality. But our Lord, whom we love and want to serve, tells us, *"Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints."*

The Lord says, *"Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting."* … "*For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."* We're not to take part in sin, and we're not to gossip about it or joke about it, either. By gossiping about the sins of others we vicariously revel in their sin. We secretly wish we could join them. By gossiping about the sins of others we try to bring them down so that we don't look so bad. We try to blame our own sin on other people and our circumstances. Our Lord tells us, *"Instead let there be thanksgiving."* There's so much for which we can thank and praise God. There are many good, positive, constructive things with which we can fill our minds and our conversations. We want what we say and our attitudes and our lives to glorify God before others.

God says, *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."* … *"Do not be partakers with them."* God says to expose sin for what it is. Sin isn't funny. Sin isn't glamorous. We're not to fantasize about sin. We're not to participate in sin. Sin isn't acceptable in any way. Sin is wrong. Sin is inexcusable. If we play with fire, we're going to get burned. The psalmist urges us, *"You who love the LORD, hate evil!"* (Ps. 97:10). *"Flee … lusts,"* the Bible warns us (2 Tim 2:22). When someone or something tempts us to do wrong, we need to get away.

"For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Sin is so appealing to our flesh. But let's not fool ourselves. If we're going to live a life of indulging in sin and not be sorry for it and not ask God to help us turn away from it, we'll suffer the consequences. We can't be at peace. *"'There is no peace,' says the Lord, 'for the wicked'"* – Isaiah 48:22. We set ourselves on the broad path that leads to hell (Mt 7:13). Either we serve the Lord and enjoy His blessings, or we serve the ways of sin and bring God's judgment on ourselves. Sexual immorality is made to look so appealing. But how does it look to those who

have caught a terrible disease from it or destroyed their marriage and family by it? They can't undo what they've done. Worshipping wealth is glamorized, but worshipping wealth destroys relationships and leads to empty dreams and empty lives. When people turn away from God and try to make their own way, it always brings problems. God's way is the good way – the way of true happiness and blessing.

We're told, *"Now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord."* Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (Jn 8:12). Jesus is like the sun. You and I are like the moon. On our own we can't shine the way God wants us to. Christ's love shines on us and in us, and we reflect Christ's love in our lives. Jesus' love fills us and overflows in us toward Him. By nature, we're not good in God's eyes. Our loving Savior teaches us to do what's *"good, right, and true."* Jesus helps us to learn what's pleasing to Him. The Apostle Paul says that everything is *"sanctified by the Word of God and prayer"* (1 Tim 4:4-5). As we keep turning to the Bible and asking God to guide us, He'll lead us in the right way.

Some people actually think that because God made them and God wants them to be happy, God is OK with them living in whatever way they think makes them happy. That kind of thinking doesn't work with good parents. Why does anyone suppose that that kind of thinking works with God? Such thinking appeals to our sinful flesh. When we're tempted to think that way, we need to return to God's love for us, and what it means to love God.

God is love. Jesus shows us how much He loves us by giving His life for us. His love for us moves us to love Him and live for Him. Sadly, we often sin. But Jesus died for sinners. Jesus' love teaches us to turn away from sin and to live our lives in Him and for Him instead.

> My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.
> Now hear me while I pray; take all my guilt away;
> Oh, let me from this day be wholly Thine!
>
> May Thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire!
> As Thou hast died for me, oh, may my love to Thee
> Pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire! Amen. (TLH # 394:1, 2)