

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change
“Imitating Agape”
(Ephesians 5:1-2)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City! My name is Kevin Haah, one of the pastors here.

We've been studying through Ephesians. We are in a middle of a series called Gospel Driven Change.

Let's read Ephesians 5:1-2:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

II. Imitating God's Agape Love.

This passage is calling us to be imitators of God. The word for imitator is this word *mimitai* where we get the word mimic. It means to mimic God. It doesn't mean to mimic God's omnipotence or omnipresence, what theologians say are "incommunicable attributes" of God. These are attributes that only God has. In Woody Allen's movie Manhattan, there is a conversation that goes like this: "You think you're God!" Woody Allen's character responds: "I gotta model myself after someone."

That's not the kind of modeling Paul is talking about. He says to model after the essence of his character. He says to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The word for love here is *agape*. In English, we only have one word for love. We say: I love the Lakers, I love my new jeans, and I love God. Or we say: I love my parents; and we say to our lover: I love you. Love can mean a lot of different things. In Greek, there are four different words for love. *Storge* means affection love, the kind of love that grows on you. *Philos* is brotherly love particularly between friends. *Eros* is romantic love, the kind that gets your heart pumping faster. But, the word for love used in this verse is *Agape*. *Agape* means self-sacrificial unconditional love. It is the love that gives yourself for the benefit of

others. It wasn't a common word. But, it is used all over the NT to describe the love that God has for us, and the kind of love we are called to mimic. We are called to mimic God's Agape love.

In fact, this Agape love is at the heart of who God is. 1 John 4:7-8 says, "7Dear friends, let us love (agape) one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (agape).

Agape is not just something God does. This passage says He is Agape. It is who He is. That means He can't help loving you. He can't stop loving you. It doesn't matter what you do, how many times you have done it, you can't lose God's love for you. It is who He is. God may not be happy about what you are doing, he may not approve of what you are doing, but he can't stop loving you because it is his nature to love. Now how do we know he loves us? Let's read on (1 John 4:9-11).

9This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

It is the cross that demonstrates God's love for us. If you want to know how much God loves you, you just have to look at the cross. That's what he did for you because he loves you, he wants the best for you. God's not out there looking for stuff that you did right and wrong, God loves you. You can't do anything to make God loves you more and you can't do anything to make God love you any less. I know some of you are going to through a difficult time and wondering if God really cares, why you are going through such difficult time. I can't tell you why you are going through what you are going through, but I can tell you one thing: it's not because God doesn't love you! He can't stop loving you! And now, he is calling us to Agape love other as God Agape love us.

In Fact, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul says, "1If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a

faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

He says if we don't have this Agape love, even if we can do all kinds of things, speak all kinds of languages, prophecy, know all things, and faith that can move mountains, if I don't have Agape love, it's like noise. It's completely irrelevant. It doesn't matter what you accomplished! It doesn't matter how much people like you! It doesn't matter! Why? Because God is Agape!

Here's another way to put this: To say God is Agape is to say that it is in his nature to demonstrate grace, because Agape is demonstrating grace. We have been talking about how there is a movement from an ethics of justice to ethics of grace. Agape is the ethics of grace. That's why when you read what Agape is like in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, it sounds like grace, not justice:

“4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8Love never fails.”

This is what God is like. I think when Paul wrote this by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I think what he was thinking about not just about an abstract concept of love, he was thinking about what God is like because God is Agape.

Listen to it like this: God is patient, God is kind, God does not envy, God does not boast, God is not proud. God is not self-seeking. God is not easily angered. God keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.” This is who God is.

Do you see what God is? Do you see what Agape is? You have to take that knowledge to your heart, the core of your being. And allow it to overflow.

III. How Do We Get the Power to Live Like This?

Now, when we hear stuff like this, a lot of us have the desire to love like this but don't have the strength. Like Jesus said, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

Here's what's going on. Here's why we are so weak:

We are created to be a being that rely completely on God. All we need is God. God is to be the source of life, the source of security, the source of joy. We need God the way we need air, water, and food. We are desperate for God. But, we are alienated from God; we are separated from God because we decided to walk away from God. But, we have this inner hunger for something—some yearning for something in our hearts. I think it is a yearning for approval, a yearning for significance, a yearning to feel like we matter, a yearning to feel loved and accepted, a yearning for righteousness. Our lives are about quenching that yearning.

So, we become like a black hole. Do you know what the black hole is? Scientists tell us that there are places up in space there where it sucks up everything around it. Even light can't escape. It swallows everything up. We are like a black hole. If God is not filling us, we try to get other things to fill it. We are sucking up from our environment, sucking in light proton. We suck in everything. We have this need to impress, the need for approval, the need for love, the need for security. We take everything and everyone and suck them in to fill our needs. We can't help it. We have this need, this hunger for life. We can't help it. We get life from comparing ourselves with others, finding areas where we feel superior. We get life by judging others. We get life by using others. We are sucking life out of people. We are hungry and that's what we are feeding ourselves with. It affects every relationship. "How will it benefit me?" "Should we make a deal?" Love is always because of something. I love the way you make me feel. "You make me feel like a natural woman." It is always quid pro quo. It's a deal. Love in the justice framework, in the let's make a deal framework, is not fulfilling. It's frustrating because at our core being, we need more. That part of me is still hungry. If you believe that God loves you because of _____, you will still go around hungry.

Agape love is not a deal making love. It is the other oriented love. Unconditional love. In the world, there is *eros*, romance, you can have *storge* love—affection for someone, you can have *philos*, brotherly love, but you can't have *agape*. Love without judgment, opinion, without any consideration for the merit of the other person. If you

look at it from the justice/negotiated view, loving your enemies does not make any sense! You can't negotiate with your enemy. There is no room for agape love. How do I get more love for others? If you are operating in the justice/negotiated contract worldview, you can't get there. The whole thing has to be blown away.

God is the opposite of black hole. He gives away. God is others oriented. He is the explosion of light and love. He is the supernova of love. That's who he is. God cannot help but to express himself in unsurpassable love.

In God's design, God is supposed to overflow to us and we overflow to others. We are like the moon, God is the Sun. We are supposed to reflect his love. He wants to flow his love in us so that we can overflow to others. Remember, agape is others oriented love. God's agape flows towards us and we towards others. The glory of God is the glory of the agape love. His glory is agape love.

Agape is loving from the center of fullness. It is love that loves without feeding yourselves. You can't stop the agape love of God. You can't stop the Sun by throwing ice at the Sun. It's not going to stop. So, you don't have to strive to get God to love you, he already loves you.

Religion is negotiating with God.

The gospel is a call to agape love, and it is finally possible to do so because we can tap into the truth that God is agape, and if we received this by faith, if we really believe it, then we will not try to get full off of others and things because Christ has already given it to us! We can be free! We will be able to love others and be others oriented.

So NT command to love, is not a rule, this is what it looks like to live under the reign of God who loves. **THE LOVE OF GOD COMPELS US:** It is living out of fullness. There are two ways of living: you can live as a desperation (to get full) or you can get full and live your life as a celebration. You can pretend like he does not love you and that he is not a source of everything, and live like a black hole. Or, you can receive this love, get full and be free!

We are free to dance! I am free! I can be what Christ calls me to be!