

A Sweet-Smelling Aroma

Ephesians 5:1-2

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. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

As we studied in the message last week, our obedience to this command for us to be “imitators” of God” will not be an easy task for us; because with this command, God is elevating our relationship with Him into a much higher “Spiritual realm”, a place where most of us have never been before.

Note carefully, the wording in this first verse. Here we are commanded to be “imitators of God” as His “dear children”. These words “dear children” are not given in the manner of a general platitude, like that which is so often used in today’s context where a person follows after the teachings of a “spiritual leader”. Not at all! This is very intentional wording and we must not mistake its meaning. These precious words, “dear children”, are intended to confirm a real and actual relationship between us and God as “sons and daughters” of His, the dear ones whom God has adopted and received into His family through salvation.

And as we have studied on other occasions, it is no small matter to become a true “child of God”, to be a part of His Royal Family; because that position carries with it far greater responsibilities and authority than we have ever known or experienced before, authority and responsibility that is not given to the rest of the world, those untold millions of unsaved people who do not have the privilege of calling God their “Father”.

No, you and I are in another realm of relationship altogether. We are really and truly His “dear children”. And because we are His “dear children”, He uses very specific means and methods and provisions to guide and instruct us in our learning process and in our behavior, provisions like “Sanctification” and “Holiness”. To be “Sanctified” and to be “Holy” is to be “set apart”, “separated out” for the purposes of God alone, a precious “state of being” that defines us and sets us apart from the ways of the world.

And God begins that precious “setting apart” the very first moment we are saved. Yes, as the Parable of the “Wheat and the weeds” reminds us, we must remain here, nestled together the “weeds”. But at the same time, we are “separated out” from them, from their ways, and their manner of thinking and from their philosophies.

But even though God is doing most all of the work taking place within us, He is not to be alone in that task. You and I, His “dear children”, are clearly commanded to join with Him in that effort and intentionally work to “set ourselves apart” from the ways and the philosophies of the world. We find those words given to us in Romans 12 . . . Listen!

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

It is clearly given within these words that God knows us well. He knows that our flesh and our minds are filled with many deep-seated failings and errors, both in our beliefs and in our behaviors, corrupt philosophies and ways that we have adopted as we have lived in amongst the world and its systems. And to put it a familiar expression, we can see that we have a very “steep learning curve” ahead of us, changes that even the most devout of believers will struggle to attain too.

. . . As I have pondered these words, and considered where we are now in our thinking and where we need to be if we are to become true “children of God”, the Lord brought back to my mind a recent message given by Reverend David Jett of Crossgates Baptist Church in Jackson. In that message, he referred to a research project and a popular book that came out from that research project entitled “Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers”. And while the researchers focused on the beliefs of youth in America, their conclusions apply to all age groups, because the philosophes teenagers hold have been developed over several generations.

The study found that people today have beliefs in a moral system that is not exclusive to any of the major world religions. And they summarized those beliefs into what they have labeled “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”, having the following tenets:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Folks, these five tenets truly do summarize the “sum total” of most all the beliefs that are held, not only by American youth, but by most all the people of the world. And sadly,

these beliefs permeate and even dominate the core religious beliefs within most all of the mainline Christian churches in our land today.

But please understand, these beliefs are absolutely wrong, so wrong that they rise to the level of “heresy” within our modern church. And that is why we read these words here from God that plead with us to change. Listen!

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And (“listen”) do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

If you and I are ever to become “Imitators of God” as His “dear children”, we will need to abandon all of these “moralistic therapeutic values” and instead turn our hearts and minds to the only One who knows and defines real truth, to God and God alone; because as you will note in these beliefs, God Himself barely gets a mention. Yes, it is acquiesced that He created us, but beyond that, He is only a “handy servant” to keep around in case we might need Him. Otherwise, we are essentially on our own to do as we think best.

And that is a pathetic condition of soul for us to be in. And as was said a moment ago, we will have a very, very “steep learning curve” ahead of us if we are ever to get from the condition we are in to the place of “true righteous and holiness” that God wants for us.

We have been so well schooled throughout our lives in this manner of thinking. From the very first moments we began listening to our teachers in grammar school to the college professors that have trained us up and have trained up the next generation of teachers that will be teaching our children, these subtle and beguiling tenets have been at the core of all learning models. I can recall them so very clearly because I sat under this exact teaching, good, well-meaning, devoted teachers and professors that truly meant no harm, but who had simply accepted and “bought into” these corrupt tenets. And I am not just casting stones at the public school system and our public colleges. I would suggest that many of these same tenets form the basis for much of the teaching that takes place within many of our private schools, and even within those schools that call themselves “Christian”. It simply is what has been taking place.

A few years back, the Administration at French Camp Academy decided to reevaluate its core teachings and principles, and we concluded that the methods and the content were sorely lacking in basic biblical truths. And from that study, immediately committed

ourselves to the revamping of most all of the methods and content of instruction, and not just in the classroom, but throughout the whole ministry. The resulting curriculum developed into what is now called “Biblical worldview” teaching.

It is only in such radical changes of beliefs and teaching that we can ever hope to rise to the level that is spoken about here in Romans 12:2,

2 . . . be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

It is only with renewed and transformed minds that we can become true “imitators of God” as his “dear children”; and to also be able to train up the next generation to be “His dear children”.

. . . May I make one more very emphatic distinction, one that is at the core of this error? And that distinction is that, a person can be the most moral person they could ever hope to be, but still not be saved!

May I say that again, a person can be the most moral person they could ever hope to be, but still not be saved!

Yes, a person should be very, very moral, but morality alone cannot save a person’s soul. It is only the shed blood of Christ, and our receiving Him as our personal Savior that can save our souls.

The difference between these two conditions of souls is strikingly obvious. The one offered in these tenets of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” can provide some very good living standards and can make a person look very “godly”, but those benefits are only good for these few years that we exist in our flesh. In contrast, the truths and the promises that God offers to us in salvation through the shed blood of Christ enable us to really and truly be Godly, not only for the days of this life, but also throughout all eternity.

And please know that the shed blood of Christ is the one and only pathway that God offers to our becoming real and true “imitators of God as dear children”. That truth is emphasized for us in this next verse, verse 2. Listen!

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. (Ephesians 5:2)

Folks, these are “plain” words that “plain” men and women like you and me can understand. Yes, as those researchers acquiesced, there really is a God. But the One

True God of the scriptures is very, very different from the One they imagined. The One True God revealed in these scriptures is Jesus Himself. And He did not just create the world and then take a step backwards to let us have our way in the world, doing the best we can with what we have. No, He instead saw our dilemma of sin and gave Himself for us that we might have life, eternally. Verse 2

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. (Ephesians 5:2)

Being “moral” truly is a very good thing, but simply being “moral” does not account for all of those other moments of life when we fall woefully short of the “perfection” that is demanded of us in the laws of God. And that is why we need more than just a system of morality. We need a Savior.

And once we do receive Christ as Savior, instead of simply being good moral people who are trying to look like God, a whole other condition of soul will take place within us. We will actually become pure and holy, just as He is.

And yes, our transformation will have good morals interlaced all within it. But we will also actually begin to become like Christ. And out of us will flow rivers of living water, “grace” flowing out into every life that we come into contact with, blessing everyone that God brings along our pathway. And then, just as with Christ, the fragrance of your and my behavior will rise up to God and become a sweet-smelling aroma to His nostrils.

Again yes, God really does want you and me to be moral, but it is only the sacrifice of His dearly beloved Son that gives that special “sweet-smelling aroma” to His nostrils. And that is the level of “imitation” that God is calling you and me to pursue.

And, may I say that it truly is a pursuit, one unlike any we have ever done before or have ever imagined doing, not a pursuit for “personal goodness and happiness”, but rather a “pursuit” after a Person, God Himself and to have a relationship with Him that others will see and desire for themselves.

It is then and then alone that it can be said of us that we have become “imitators of God as His dear children”.

And it is then and then alone that, as with Christ, the fragrance of our behavior will rise up to God and become a “sweet-smelling” aroma in His nostrils.

Praise be to God!

Listen, as we close . . .

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