

INTRODUCTION

Today we are going to talk about “The Difference Between Real and Counterfeit Love” but in the weeks to come we’ll be talking about things like time management, and what the Bible has to say about getting drunk on wine and then the evidences and the signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Then you come to the last part of the chapter and that’s the classical section on marriage. Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands. Husbands, love your wives. When we get to that section, I’ll be doing a special series from Ephesians called, “Home Improvement Jesus Style.” So we have some really good sections of chapter 5 that we are going to be looking at in the weeks to come.

Do you really know what real, genuine love is? The world has a cheap imitation. An Eskimo said to his sweetheart, “Sweetheart, I’ve just driven a dog team over a hundred miles of snow just to say I love you.” She looked at him and said, “That’s a lot of mush!” A lot of times when people are saying, “I love you,” they don’t really understand what the Bible means.

Ephesians 5:1-7. “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 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. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them.”

I. GOD’S PATTERN FOR PERFECT LOVE

In the first two verses we see God’s pattern for perfect love, Jesus. That’s why the Bible says in chapter 5, verse 2 that we are to love even as Christ loved us. When I was a child growing up, I was not a very good artist. I could hardly draw a breath. I was not very artistic, but I could put a thin sheet of paper over a picture and trace it and that’s what God is telling us to do. Our pattern for perfect love is Jesus and we are to put our lives beside that and our love ought to be like the love of Jesus. That’s how we are to imitate God that’s where we are to mimic God when it comes to love.

1. Agape love forgives

Agape is a Greek word that means “unselfish love.” There are three characteristics of agape love (just see if you measure up). Number one, agape is forgiving. It is always being willing to forgive someone who has wronged you. You probably think I’ve been talking a lot about forgiving others lately and I have, because this passage of scripture talks about it. Last week Ephesians 4:32 said, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Real love always forgives. If you want to know what love is sometime just go back and read 1 Corinthians 13. It says, “Love is patient and kind, love is not arrogant or boastful love is not rude” and you go on and you read about love and this is one of the striking

things about true agape love. It says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." Are you the kind of person who keeps a record when people have mistreated you? They have hurt you and you keep a mental record a list of what they have done. Somebody's on your list and they have been on your list for a long time and you haven't been willing to forgive them? That is not true agape love.

Maybe you heard about the two little boys who were discussing and fussing at school. One of them bragged, "My daddy has a list of men in this town that he can beat up and your dad is on the top of the list!" This made the other boy angry and he went home and told his dad and that made his dad even angrier. His dad stomped over to that guy's house and knocked on the door. The man said, "My son says you have a list of men in town that you can beat up and that my name is on the top of the list." The guy said, "That's right." That fellow put up his fists and said, "I don't think you can beat me up. What are you going to do about it?" The guy said, "I'm going to take you off my list." Now that's great advice for all of us. If you have somebody on your list you are still angry at you haven't forgiven them, take them off your list! Then tear the list up and throw it away. Get rid of it. The three most healing words in the human language I don't think are "I love you," I think the three most healing words are, "I forgive you." You don't have to wait until someone asks you to forgive them. Just forgive them because that is the nature of God's love forgiving.

2. Agape love is unconditional

Number two: Agape is unconditional. That means you never attach the word "IF" to agape love. God doesn't say, "IF you'll clean up your act, I'll forgive you and I'll love you." He says, "I love you unconditionally." That's interesting because in our relationship with God, a lot of the things we have are conditional, for instance answered prayer is conditional. God doesn't just say, "I'll answer your prayers." There are some conditions we have to meet. Jesus said, "IF you abide in me, my words abide in you ask what you will and it will be done." There are some conditions to answered prayer. There are some others. Blessings are conditional. God says, "IF my people called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways then I'll hear their prayers, heal their land, and forgive their sins." There are some "ifs" involved but when it comes to love, there is no if. God never says, "I will love you IF..." He says, "I love you. Period." That means we ought to be willing to love others unconditionally.

Sometimes husbands will say to their wives, "I would love you if you would just quit nagging me." Or the wife will say, "I would love you if you would just get out there and get a job that can provide a living for us." We tend to attach ifs to love. That's not agape love. Parents, never say this to your children, "You'd better behave if you want God to love you." God loves us whether we are good or bad, whether we are evil or righteous. God loves us. Period. God may not bless us and he may not bless those children, but don't say, "You have to do this, or God won't love you." His love is unconditional. The easiest thing to say is for me to say to you "I will love you if you love me. I will love you if you treat me kindly." But that's not agape love. Agape love says, "I love you even if you don't like me. I love you even if you mistreat me. I love you even if you say unkind or untrue things about me. I love you unconditionally." That is agape love and Jesus is our pattern for it.

3. Agape love is self-sacrificing

The third characteristic of agape is it is self-sacrificing. It is never selfish. It always surrenders its rights. It never demands its rights. That's a key to help you understand if you are loving. Are you always demanding your rights? This is my right as an American. This is my right as a husband. This is my right as a Christian. Christians don't demand their rights. They surrender their rights. Verse 2 says, "Love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." Human rights are like traffic rights. You can demand them, but sometimes it gets you in trouble. If you are standing in a pedestrian walkway and the light changes and says, "Walk" and you see an 18-wheeler barreling down the street that's not going to stop, I don't think you should stand out there and say, "I'm demanding my rights. I have the right of way." I heard about a man who did that his name was Ben Maye and this is what they put on his tombstone.

*Here lie the bones of old Ben Maye
Who died demanding his right of way.
He was right dead right all along
But just as dead as if he had been dead wrong.*

When you start demanding your rights that is not agape love. Agape love is always self-sacrificing. Now that's agape. That is God's perfect pattern for love Jesus.

II. GOD'S PENALTY FOR PERVERTED LOVE

The rest of this passage deals with this God's penalty for perverted love that is his judgment and his wrath because beginning in verse 3 the Bible describes what true love *isn't*. Wherever God has something genuine, the devil has his cheap imitation. Some time ago somebody from our church asked me if I had a Rolex watch. I said, "No." He said, "Would you like to have one?" I said, "I don't want to buy one. I don't think you should spend that much on a watch." He said, "I have one I'll give you." He said, "I want to give you this Rolex watch. I just got back from Mexico." And he handed me a watch that looked just like a Rolex except it kind of ticked instead of going all the way around and of course you know what it was. It was a cheap imitation. It had the face on it and looked like it but on the inside it wasn't a Rolex. That's what the devil does. He takes God's pure agape love and offers a cheap imitation to the world. A lot of people think that they are in love or they think they know what love is and it's just a cheap imitation of the real thing. Agape love is never demanding, but perverted love is always dominating and demanding and controlling.

Mark Twain loved to tell the story about the man and woman who had just married. This was back in the horse and buggy days. They were leaving the church and the horse bolted out of control. The man said, "That's once!" And finally got the horse under control. They went a little further and the horse bolted again. The man said, "That's twice!" And he finally got the horse under control. Well, the horse bolted the third time and the man didn't say a word. He just climbed out of the buggy, walked up to the front of the horse, pulled out his pistol and shot the horse dead between the eyes. His wife was wild with anger. She said, "What do you mean doing that to that beautiful animal? That was a valuable horse. How dare you do something like that!" He looked at her and said, "That's once!" Do you know people like that? They are so demanding

and controlling—that’s not real love. Agape love surrenders rights, perverted love demands it.

1. Sexual sin

Here we see six marks of perverted, imitation love. The Bible says, “God’s wrath is already directed at people who practice these things.” I want to say up front it is possible for a born-again Christian to sometimes stumble and fall into these sins, but I want to say it loudly and clearly a true, redeemed person cannot habitually practice this kind of lifestyle, because it’s the devil’s imitation. So, let’s see what they are. Number one those who practice sexual sin. The Bible says they are not part of the kingdom of God. God’s wrath is against them. Verse 3 says, “Among you Christians there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality.” You and I know we live in an age where sex is in front of all of us all the time. You may think the times are different today than they were two thousand years ago when God gave this standard. Wrong. When Paul wrote these words to these Christians in Ephesus, the building that dominated that city was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world called The Temple of Diana. It was a temple dedicated to fertility. Every day, ritual prostitution was practiced there. They bowed down before a statue of Diana, the Goddess of Fertility, who was a multi-breasted idol. Sexual sin was rampant.

My college archeology class went to some of the ruins at Pompeii and because we were archeology students they let us see some of the things the general public didn’t see and I want to tell you I was embarrassed. Pornography and immorality was terrible two thousand years ago. It’s bad today, but sometimes people say, “That was then, this is now.” Believe it or not the times have not changed that much. We live in a sexually inundated society and God says, “You be pure, Christians. Even though the rest of the world may be sinful, you remain sexually pure.” This means, according to the Bible, sex is to be practiced only between a husband and a wife in the relationship of marriage. Any other use of sex is an abuse and is sinful. Any other use premarital sex is a sin. I thank God for all you teenagers who filled out that card, “True love waits,” saying “I will wait I will remain sexually pure from this time on until I get married.”

Extramarital sex is sin, sexual immorality and the Bible says that as a Christian, you should not practice it. Am I saying that if you practice that, you won’t go to heaven? No. The Bible does tell about some people who fell into that sin and David is an example. He sinned, but he repented of his sin and it was not part of his lifestyle. There are a lot of people sitting in church pews every Sunday who for years and even at this moment are practicing sexual immorality and you know it. You are deceiving yourself thinking it is all right. If you can practice that continually, you need to repent or you need to get born again one or the other. You will not practice it. That’s what the Bible says here. “Don’t even let there be a hint of it in your life.”

2. Moral impurity

The second sign is moral impurity. The Bible says in verse 3, “There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity.” That word for “moral impurity” basically means “not having any kind of moral standards.” Two weeks from tonight we are going to be having an “I Love America” celebration right here that’s on July 2nd and I am going to preach a message that God has burned into my heart. I’m still working on it. I’m calling it: “America: From Beaver

To Beavis," because for the first 180 years of our nation's history it seemed like we had a moral standard: The Ten Commandments but it seems that in the last 30 or 40 years, our nation is trying to live without any kind of moral standard and it is leading us to disaster morally, emotionally and relationally. We have to re-establish a moral standard. To tell you how bad it has gotten a couple of years ago in San Diego, California, a feminist judge in a child custody case awarded custody of a child to the father and his homosexual partner even though his biological mother wanted custody of the child and she was a fundamentalist Christian. The judge determined that in the opinion of the court it would be damaging for that child to be raised in a fundamentalist Christian home, but she let that child go live in a homosexual home. We have lost our moral foundation. Moral standards are like sidelines on a football field and if you go outside those lines, you are out of bounds. Can you imagine football without boundary lines? The quarterback tosses the ball to the halfback and he runs and runs and runs until two miles later he is still running with no boundaries. God established boundaries, and he says, "Don't go outside these lines. If you step over that line it is a sin." We need to have goals in life and we need to have boundaries in life and this is talking about the kind of lifestyle that has no moral standards.

Today there are those who would say, "Any moral standard you want to have is okay." This is called "values clarification." It sounds so nice and neat. Let me tell you what it is. Sometimes they ask little kids tough moral questions like, "Suppose your dad commits a crime and you know about it. Are you going to turn him into the police?" Do you know why they ask a question like that? Not because they say there's a right answer and a wrong answer, they just want that child to formulate their own moral standard. So, what they teach them is something like this: "If you decide to turn him in that's fine; that's your moral standard, but if you decide not to turn him in that's all right also, that's your moral standard. Just develop your own standard of morality." In America today we say, "It's all right to practice sex with as many as you want just do it safely. It's okay to shoot up as long as you use a clean needle and we will provide you with that." I want to remind you, they are not called, "The Ten Suggestions." They are The Ten *Commandments* and we need to return to God's moral standard for our nation and our lives. When everyone makes their own choices, it's like in the book of Judges where it says, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes" and that led to disaster.

3. Greed

Number three is greed. This is not talking about economic greed it's talking about greed for other people. It's the word *covet* like the Tenth Commandment that says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." It is an insatiable desire for more and more pleasure, more and more people, more and more possessions, more and more everything. Love says "give," greed says "gimme."

4. Obscenity

Then, number four. There is "obscene talk." Look at verse 4. It says, "nor should there be any obscenity." If you claim to be a Christian, you should clean up your mouth. I know I'm looking into the faces of some of you folks who say you are Christians and you say they love Jesus, but during the week have a totally different vocabulary. You use profanity on a regular basis. You have heard it on television you have heard it in movies you read it everywhere and so you

practice it. I want to tell you why a Christian should not use obscenity. It's because Ephesians, 5:4 says, "nor should there be any obscenity." God's word says it and that's enough. That ought to settle it for you as a Christian. I'm just not going to speak that way because the Bible says it.

I know some of you are exposed to it. I work in a sheltered environment. I work on the church staff and I don't hear a whole lot of cussing up here among our staff, but I know it is different for a lot of you. How many of you have to work in a place where there is profanity every week? Let me see your hands. There are a lot of you. I think you ought to prepare a sign and put it on your desk or your workstation that says, "Thank you for not cursing." "Thank you for not blaspheming." "Thank you for not profaning God's name." "I don't want you to smoke because your smoke is going to offend my nostrils." "I don't want you to cuss because your filthy language is offending my ears." As Christians we ought to stand up and speak cleanly. We shouldn't have dirty language.

5. Gossip

The next word he uses in verse 4 is a word for "empty talk." It is the Greek word *morologia* we get our word *moron* from that. The word *moron* just means *empty*. It means you shouldn't use idle, useless chatter gossip, just shooting the breeze, talking just to be talking. Jesus said one day you are going to have to give an accounting for every idle word you speak. He didn't say every evil word he said every idle word you speak. In other words you should use your mouth for thanksgiving and praise and speaking good things not just empty talk.

6. Coarse joking

The final one is this. He talks about how there should not be any coarse talking or crude joking. Crude joking does not belong in the life of a Christian. Now you say, "Are you saying I shouldn't tell jokes?" No humor is healthy. Humor is wonderful. The Bible teaches the therapeutic value of laughter. It says, "A merry heart does good like a medicine and we are to rejoice in the Lord always." In fact, there is something wrong with a Christian if they always have a sour spirit. It's not talking about laughing. It's talking about gutter humor. Specifically, it is a Greek word that means "to turn a word in on itself," which means somebody says something totally innocent, but somebody else takes it and makes a sexual innuendo out of it, a double entendre. Some of you do that and are proud of the fact you are good at that. Others are great at it. Johnny Carson was probably the best in the world. Don't worry, I'm not going to quote him, but do you remember when Arnold Palmer was on his show a few years ago and made a totally innocent statement? Johnny Carson picked up on it, turned it around he baptized it in the moral sewer and it got a big laugh, but it also got a big lawsuit. This is exactly what this is talking about. Taking an innocent statement and making something dirty out of it. Do you know people like that? Have you ever practiced that yourself? The Bible says that should not be in the life of a Christian.

Verse 6 says, "Be careful. Let no one deceive you with empty words." Empty words are false assurance. The false assurance that some people have that leads them to think they are a Christian and they can live any way they want to. They were there in the church at Ephesus. Sin all you want to you're under God's grace you're forgiven and you are going to go to heaven

anyway. If you are living that kind of lifestyle, you cannot claim to be a Christian. Either change claiming to be a Christian or change your behavior. Alexander the Great was a great general. One day a deserter was brought to him and Alexander said to that soldier, "What is your name, son?" "My name is Alexander." (the same as the general's) That made Alexander the Great so angry he said, "Change your name or change your behavior." That's what I say to some of you today. Either change your name and quit calling yourself a Christian or change your behavior. The Bible says God's wrath is already resting on these people who practice this.

You say, "I don't believe that. I know some people who are living in sin; in fact I'm living in sin, pastor, and God's wrath is not on me. I'm pretty happy right now. I'm being blessed. I have more money than ever before. I'm healthy, God's wrath is not on me, you are wrong!" God is long-suffering! Hold on, because one day his wrath will be revealed. You have a choice; you can choose God's loving forgiveness or you can choose to reject that the only other choice you have is God's eternal wrath. The choice is yours.

Look what true love is. God says, "I love you. I forgive you. I love you unconditionally. My son gave his life for you." That's why he says, "I command you that you are to be forgiving love others unconditionally give up your rights for others." Then you look at that last list and God says, "That should not be a part of your life. Repent of it turn from it and begin to walk in love."

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S PATTERN FOR PERFECT LOVE

Characteristics of Agape love

1. Forgives
2. Unconditional
3. Self-sacrificing

II. GOD'S PENALTY FOR PERVERTED LOVE

1. Sexual sin
2. Moral impurity
3. Greed
4. Obscenity
5. Gossip
6. Coarse joking



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes