

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 12 – August 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009

### **Ephesians 4:30 -5:2**

**“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

**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.”**

Dear children of God,

How many know what a putpocket is? No, not a pickpocket, but a putpocket. There is a program being started in London which has taken 20 former pickpocket experts and has turned them into putpocket people. While a pickpocket takes things out of people's pockets, a putpocket puts things back into people's pockets. These former pickpockets felt guilty for their past life and they are contributing back by going and finding unsuspecting people and putting money back in their pockets. They will be giving back about \$100,000 dollars.

This is very similar to the life of Christian. The Christian has a heart full of sin and a life full of sin. But God came and gave us another chance when he came and died for us and worked faith in our hearts to believe the work he did for us. At that moment our heart changed. We no longer live to serve ourselves and our sinful nature, but we live to serve our Lord and Savior and our fellow Christians. We don't live to love ourselves. We instead live to love and thank our Savior. That is why we will use the theme today:

### **Theme: Walk In Love!**

- 1. Avoid all bitterness**
- 2. Forgive each other as God forgave you**
- 3. Imitate Christ, who gave himself up for you**

In the book of Ephesians, Paul reveals God's plan to gather his people of every time and place into one invisible church under Christ. Paul speaks of God's intention to bless his people so richly that they cannot help but praise God's name; and Paul assures us that among his greatest blessings, it is the desire and the work of our gracious God to keep us as the dearly loved children he has made us to be in Christ.

I tell you this up front so that you will not receive the message that follows as mere advice on how to live a happier life, or worse as a directive on how to earn God's love. No, God addresses us today as people who already have his love as a free gift—a gift that he doesn't want us to throw away but to treasure. So he speaks to the sinner and the saint in each of us, urging you and me to WALK IN LOVE.

Earlier in this same letter Paul writes, **“You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14).** On the day when you first heard the gospel -- for so many of you that was at the time of your baptism -- on that day, God claimed you as his redeemed -- the people he bought and paid for with the blood of Christ. On that day God proclaimed you forgiven of all sin and he promised you that all the blessings of heaven will be yours on the "day of redemption"-the day when you will no longer need forgiveness because Christ will return to remove all the sin that is in you and to remove you from all the sin that is around you.

God has given you his word that such a day is coming. More than that, he has sealed you with his Spirit. In other words, he's left his Spirit inside of you as a deposit. He's given you this one good thing from heaven now so as to assure you that he's coming back to give you all the good things of heaven very soon. So when Paul says to you today, "**live a life of love,**" he is speaking to you as someone who is already God's child. He's speaking to you as one who is sealed with the Spirit.

Paul wants you to remain that way, so in love and concern he warns, "**Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**" (Ephesians 4:30). The first time I ever decided to take a look inside of a computer, a sticker carefully placed across the computer's cover and frame stopped me dead in my tracks. It read "Warning: Removing this seal voids all warranties." I didn't want to do that. Grieving God's Spirit with whom we are sealed for the day of redemption could cause his removal from our lives and so void God's warranty -- the promised blessings of heaven. You and I don't want to do that. So we better know what sorts of things grieve God's Spirit.

Paul tells us, "**Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice**" (Ephesians 4:31). One of the reasons we refer to God's Spirit as Holy is because he makes us holy by bringing us to faith in Christ through the gospel and, then, through the gospel, he empowers us to live as the holy people God declares us to be. The Spirit stays with us to keep us holy and to use our words and actions to make and keep others holy. So the Spirit is grieved when our thoughts, words or actions hinder the work he wants to do in us and through us.

With that said, I'll ask you, have hindered the Spirit's work by holding a grudge? In a moment of anger have you ever once shouted at someone? Have you ever called your spouse, your child, your parent some horrible name? You know you have. Like me you've grieved God's Spirit many times. What a foolish and dangerous way to live. There's a limit even to the Spirit's patience. Though God in his grace has sealed us with his Spirit, we have not always kept in step with the Spirit. We have not always lived a life of love.

Instead we have done what God forbids and we have failed to do what he commands. Haven't we? Paul says, "**Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other...**" (Ephesians 4:32). When Paul says be kind, he means that we are to be useful to one another. We are to do things for each other that reflect the love of God that is in us. We are to show compassion to people who are troubled or suffering, doing what we can to relieve them of their pain. And when we are wronged in some way, instead of holding a grudge, we are to be forgiving and so live a life of love.

I hear Paul's words and I can't help wondering, what's wrong with me? Do you ever wonder that about yourself? We see people who are hurting, but we lift no finger to help them. How can we be so selfish? How can we be so callous so as to allow another person to be burdened by guilt because in our selfish pride we refuse to speak a word of forgiveness? People, the evidence is overwhelming. Each of us must say with Paul in **Romans 7:18-19, 24: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).** Body of death -- what a fitting way to describe what sin has worked in us and brought to us--nothing but death. Our sin has left us dead by nature and, therefore, powerless to save ourselves from dying eternally in hell. So can anyone, will anyone rescue us from sin's awful curse? Oh yes. In the very next breath Paul shouts, "**Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" (Romans 7:25). Why thanks be to God? What does Paul say in our text? "**...In Christ God forgave you**" (Ephesians 4:32).

The word Paul uses here to speak of God's forgiveness literally means "to show favor, to give grace." God is willing to spare us from the punishment we deserve; not because he's willing to overlook our sins. No, Paul says God does this for us "**in Christ.**" In other words, he forgives us in connection with all that Christ has been and has done on our behalf.

First God shows us grace in connection with what Christ has been for us. Jesus saw the trouble we sinners brought upon ourselves. He had compassion on us and in the greatest act of kindness ever displayed, he offered to blot out our sinfulness from God's sight by covering us and our sin with his own

perfect life of love. That's double grace isn't it! God gives us the credit for the gracious love that brought Jesus here to help us. He's been perfect on our behalf and God now counts that perfection as ours.

Secondly God shows us grace in connection with what Christ has done on our behalf. Paul explains in the closing verse of our text: **"...Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2)**. We have Christ's perfection as a free gift of grace, but there was still the matter of all that bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and every other form of malice in our lives. God could not merely pretend that all of this sin of ours had never existed. It had to be dealt with. The soul that sins must die! So in love Jesus offered to take our place under God's death sentence. He sacrificed himself for all of us on the cross and in this way the stench of our sins before God was replaced with the sweet fragrance of Christ's offering. In other words, the Savior's sacrifice was acceptable to God as payment in full for all sin. To prove it God raised his dead Son to life.

This is why God shows us grace. This is why God hasn't taken his Spirit from us. He is so gracious to us for the sake of his Son who is both our perfection and our payment for sin. So you see there's nothing we have to do to earn God's grace. Jesus already did that for us. So instead of spending our days trying to buy God's favor, we can use our time to thank him for giving it to us as a free gift. What better way to do that, than by letting his grace flow through us to people in our lives. Paul has just such a life of thankfulness in mind when he says, **"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32)**. The kindness and compassion we show to one another is a thank-offering to Jesus who says, **"Whatever you [do] for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you [do] for me" (Matthew 25:40)**. God's love for us in Christ moves and empowers us to love one another. We say with the Apostle John, **"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19)**. And, my friends, we forgive because he first forgave us! We forgive each other. You of all people have no reason to hold a grudge. You know better than anyone else that every sin that has ever been committed against you has already been paid for by Christ. For the sake of Jesus, God forgives the sinner sitting next to you no less than he forgives you. Live a life of love as one who is forgiven by God-as one who treasures that forgiveness for yourself and for the people around you.

And live a life of love as one who is dearly loved by Christ! We've already spoken of Christ's great love for us. It is that same love that Paul would now have us show others when he says, **"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us gave himself up for us..." (Ephesians 5:1-2)**. Christ's love for us and this world of sinners is the greatest love of all. It is a self-sacrificing love that gives itself away, expecting nothing in return.

It's been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. But in our case, imitation is the sincerest form of thanksgiving. Christ's unselfish love has freed us all from our selfishness. We have no need to spend our time and our energy on ourselves. Even now Jesus loves us dearly and is taking care of us in every way. Knowing and believing this, we are free to spend our love and our lives on others. We can sacrifice ourselves for family members and coworkers, for friends and strangers too -- not in the sense that we can pay for their sins. We don't have to. Jesus has done that. So all that is left to us is to spend our lives bringing Jesus' love to the people he has lived and died for. We want everyone to hear about that love from us. We want everyone to experience that love through us.

But to accomplish this we will need the Savior's help won't we! For even our attempts to thank him leave so much to be desired. Seeing that this is so, we have reason to go back to Jesus day after day, hour after hour, taking our sins and failures to him in repentance, and receiving his love and forgiveness through the gospel he has given us. This too is by the Savior's design. He uses this unending cycle of repentance and forgiveness to keep us his people safe until the day of redemption, drawing us ever closer to himself, and by his blessing, giving ever more reason and ever more power to live a life of love always to the praise and glory of his saving name. Amen.