

“Therefore be Imitators of God as Dear Children,” Eph. 5:1.

By Daniel Morris

The home, as God ordained it — and particularly the relationship of the family — reflects Heaven’s promise. Paul calls this line of thought “*a great mystery*,” Eph. 5:32, so we must be careful not to go too far into uncertain things and “*think beyond what is written*,” I Cor. 4:6, for “*the secret things belong to the Lord*,” Deut. 29:29.

In what is revealed, we can appreciate more about Christ and the church. God taught Adam in the beginning that a man shall leave and cleave “to his wife and the two shall be one flesh,” Gen. 2:24, and that relationship becomes the basis for Paul’s explanation of Christ and the church, Eph. 5:32. Conversely, from the last half of Ephesians 5 we learn much about marriage by considering Christ and His beautiful bride, the church. In fact, our families can be an earthly taste of heavenly bliss if they reflect God’s wisdom, light, and love.

The epistle, however, speaks first to all individuals in the household of God, not just the married. In Ephesians 5:1 Paul writes, “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*”

“As Dear Children”

Here the Holy Spirit likens each individual Christian to a “*dear*” child. There are many places in Ephesians where Christians are likened to children: Eph. 1:2,5,16,17; Eph. 2:3,4,19; Eph. 3:15; Eph. 4:6; Eph. 5:1,8. Paul also reminds them of the change in their paternity. We, too, like the Ephesians, were once sons of wrath (2:3) and disobedience (5:6). But God (2:4) brought us near by the blood of Christ (2:13), making us alive with Him (2:5), so that now we put on a new man (4:24), which was created according to God. This recalls the language of the first sons ever born (Gen. 5:1) where sons are begotten in their father’s likeness. This is the natural way of children and their parents. “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Many children will imitate their fathers more than listen to them. If a father is acting contrary to the things he teaches, the children will more than likely bear the image of his example rather than his words. We must warn that mother cannot lead the household in spiritual health without father committing himself to these principles. Too many children do not turn out like Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). Mother is as devoted as Eunice, but father is absent in spiritual things. Many children are no longer seen at church after a certain age. Why should they come? Dad never or rarely did.

We, however, are children of a perfect Father Whose teaching is perfect, Heb. 12:9-11. We are children loved by a Father Who loves us always for our own good. In I Thess. 2:7-8 Paul demonstrates the way the Father of glory loves his dear children:

(1) Cherishing them like a mother does her own. (2) Affectionately longing for them. (3) Well pleased to impart the very best gifts — namely the gospel of God — and even his own life. (4) Toiling night and day. (5) Additionally, Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:14-15) that it is his job, imitating God as Father, to spend and be spent for the children. Why does he do this for these children of God? I Thess. 2:8 explains: “*You had become dear to us.*” We are the dear children of God. He has gladly given the best of heaven, sending the Son of God to toil night and day for us, even giving that Divine life in the body of man on the cross.

No child could be more dearly beloved by his parents than is a Christian by the God of our Lord Jesus Christ

Briefly, let parents make application in their own households. All the days’ energy and activity are easily consumed with the care of the children. How much is leveraged to care for

their souls (Eph. 6:4)?

Be Imitators of God

Live the life befitting saints. Beloved children do not bring shame on their household (Prov. 23:24-25; 10:1). The foolish son forfeits the inheritance God the Father graciously extends (Prov. 17:2; Eph. 5:5). Many wayward sons have acted so shamefully that their earthly father declared, "My son is dead to me." We, too, can commit sins which make us return to being "*sons of wrath*" (Eph. 5:6), because instead of imitating God as dear children, we are "*sons of disobedience*."

The text emphasizes three ways we should therefore walk:

1. "*Walk in love*," Eph. 5:2. Galatians 5:14 teaches us all the law of God is fulfilled in love. Love as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us. Kindness, genuine compassion, and forgiveness are easier to do because Christ first loved us (I John 4:10-11). We should tremble remembering the example of Christ loving us to His own terrible and earth shaking hurt (Rom. 5:8; Matt. 27:51). A man is so little, and what is required of him to love his brethren is so small in comparison, it is truly a small thing for a child of God to walk in love.

2. "*Walk as sons of light*" (Eph. 5:8-14). This is the light of the Lord, wherein He guides us in all truth, righteousness, and goodness. Seeking to please our Father, as obedient, beloved, loyal, faithful children, we seek out the things He approves of, and shun whatever His word exposes as unapproved (2 Timothy 2:19; John 7:17-18).

3. "*See then that you walk circumspectly*" (verse 15), walking in wisdom (Col. 4:5), considering the consequences of your steps. "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God*" (Rom. 8:14). This wisdom to redeem the time, step by step, comes from understanding what God's will is. We could revel in drunkenness and similar sensual pleasures, or we can be filled with all righteousness, with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 5:18).

As we follow the text, we should observe one more point: the walk which imitates God is not a solitary process. No man can do this alone. We cannot love the "*dear children*" of God from afar (Heb. 10:24-25). We cannot build up those of our own household, nor the Lord's household, if we do not meet together as He describes, being "*filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs... giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God*" (Eph. 5:19-21). No one can regularly forgo the assemblies of God's children and say he walks circumspectly.

Our Heavenly Father was preparing salvation and adoption in Christ before He ever formed the first of us (Eph. 1:4-14). He has been preparing this inheritance and extending us grace, mercy, and faith through His word all along. Some of us have refused to listen, but let those who *have attended to the* "whole counsel of God," and "*obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine*" imitate Him, as beloved **children** (Acts 20:27; Rom. 6:17).
