Pentecost 17 Ephesians 4:29-5:2
September 27, 2020 491-493-303/316-369

As Dearly Loved Children – Imitate Your God!
I. In how you talk.
II. In how you act.
III. In how you love.

Dear Christian friends,

Put yourself in **Joseph's spot** in the OT reading. Do you think Joseph's sinful nature wanted a CHANCE TO SETTLE some **old scores**? His brothers had done him MAJOR WRONG. Now with their dad Jacob dead there was **no one** to stop Joseph from GETTING EVEN. But HOW did Joseph handle it? As a ***"dearly loved"*** AND graciously forgiven CHILD of God! ***"Joseph comforted them and spoke kindly to them."***

Go to the **gospel** reading. Peter's catching on to **God's love** and **forgiveness**. He's in a GENEROUS MOOD – or at least he thinks he's being generous. But just to be sure he asks Jesus, ***"Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me? As many as seven times?"*** Jesus then makes the point that **forgiveness** is not a MATHEMATICAL EQUATION – a keeping score. Forgiveness is a matter of OUR IMITATING our heavenly Father.

There will be problems in our **personal relationships**. Nobody is perfect – STARTING with you and me! As we deal with those **problems** – REMEMBER, you're a child of God! INSTEAD OF LISTENING to your **sinful nature** or following the ways of the **world** AS DEARLY LOVED CHILDREN – IMITATE YOUR GOD! **Imitate** your God 1)in how you talk, 2)in **how** you act and 3)in **how** you love.

I. In how you talk.

"As dearly loved children" imitate your God in **how you talk**. The TONGUE – what a wonderful gift from God – yet WHAT A WEAPON it can be when it's used by the **devil** or controlled by our **sinful nature**. James had this to say about the tongue – ***"All kinds of animals …have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who are made in God's likeness. My brothers, things should not be this way."*** We've probably all been STUNG by **another** person's tongue. I'm sure we've **all had** HARD TIMES controlling **our own** tongues.

By God's grace and **mercy** we are God's ***"dearly loved children"*** and that will affect HOW WE USE our tongues. ***"Do not let any unwholesome talk come from your mouths."*** The word ***"unwholesome"*** literally means ROTTEN – STINKING – and so it's worthless. ***"Unwholesome talk"*** can refer to the LANGUAGE we **use** – to WHAT we're talking about – the jokes we tell – to HOW we talk about other people. ***"Unwholesome talk"*** certainly includes MISUSING God's name by cursing and swearing.

"As dearly loved children" of God we need to give **all** our talk the SMELL TEST – does this stink – SMELL ROTTEN – to my heavenly Father? IF SO then why am I talking this way? **If so** I need to stop **right away**! We can get so used to ***"unwholesome talk"*** that it no longer stinks to us. If we would record ourselves through a **whole day** and then replay it **at the end** of the day I wonder if we'd be shocked to hear some of it. "I said THAT?! I really complain a lot. I never should have said that!"

"As dearly loved children" imitate your heavenly Father **in how you talk**. LOOK HOW our **heavenly Father** always talks to us – He speaks ***"the truth – in love."*** God can be BLUNT at times. He will RAISE His voice **if needed**. But God prefers to speak in QUIET, WINSOME ways. God doesn't always say what we WANT TO HEAR. He'll come right out and **tell us** we're wrong or that we need to

repent **immediately**. But God is never SMUG about it. It's always ***"the truth – in love"*** – FOR OUR GOOD.

So instead of "GARBAGE talk" – speak ***"only what is beneficial when there is a need to build up others, so that it will be a blessing to those who hear."*** That's what Joseph did. BEFORE we open our mouths and perhaps put our **feet** in them STOP AND ASK yourself, "What would my **heavenly** Father say? HOW would He say it?" ***"As dearly loved children"*** imitate your heavenly Father.

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." The Holy Spirit is the One who brought us to faith in Jesus and made us God's children. The Holy Spirit living and working in us is THE PROOF that we really are God's ***"dearly loved children."*** With a Spirit-worked faith in Jesus we LOOK FORWARD to ***"the day of redemption."*** ALREADY NOW – trusting in Jesus – we have God's forgiveness of all our sins – we enjoy God's **love**. AND we eagerly look forward to **eternal life** in heaven when we'll finally be done with all **sin** and **temptations** – with the **devil** and our **sinful natures**. HOW THANKFUL we should be to the Holy Spirit! That I should now ***"grieve"*** – SADDEN – HURT the Holy Spirit by how I talk? NO WAY!

From talk Paul **proceeds** to actions – **actually** to EMOTIONS affecting our actions. ***"As dearly loved children"*** imitate God…

II. In how you act.

"Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice." "Bitterness" is that FOUL TASTE left in your mouth. ***"Rage"*** is the temper FLARING UP. ***"Anger"*** is that LINGERING resentment that festers and eats away at a person. As that CHURNS AWAY **inside** of us it can boil over into **quarreling** – NAME CALLING – all kinds of **meanness** and spite. It's NOT PRETTY **no matter** how you look at it.

What causes this ***"bitterness, rage, etc."***? It can be the way people TREAT us – or how they TALK TO or ABOUT us. It can come from REAL ATTACKS on us – or attacks we just imagined **as real**. Let's not kid ourselves. We can see this mess TAKING ITS TOLL in marriages and **families** – among friends and **neighbors** – at work – at school – even at church. WHAT HURT – what MESSES and DESTRUCTION the devil has worked by **getting people** to carry grudges and nurse **resentment**.

Yes, people don't always talk or treat us in the **right way**. **Yes**, people hurt us – they take advantage of us – ignore us – MAKE FUN of us – sin against us. **Yes**, it's NOT RIGHT – it's not FUN or fair. But rather than GIVE IN to our sinful natures – ***"get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling …every kind of malice."***

Rather than give in to the sinful nature ***"as dearly loved children"*** imitate your God. ***"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one other, just as God in Christ has forgiven us."*** Instead of that FESTERING anger and resentment ***"be kind."*** Literally the word means to BE USEFUL. People may use us but don't let that **stop you** from BEING USEFUL -HELPFUL – to them. Instead of the ***"bitterness and rage"*** be ***"compassionate"*** – TENDER-hearted, not HARD-hearted. Don't rejoice in your **enemy's** MISFORTUNE. ***"If your enemy is hungry"*** – DON'T GLOAT over it but ***"feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink."*** The Christian way is NOT do to others AS THEY have done to you. If someone's nice to you – **you be nice** to them. If someone's mean to you then you can be mean to them. The Christian way is not to IMITATE OTHERS in **how they treat** us but ***"as dearly loved children"*** to IMITATE HOW our heavenly Father treats us. IMITATE your God in showing love and **forgiveness**.

III. In how you love.

Peter thought he was being GENEROUS when he offered to forgive his sinning brother ***"as many as seven times."*** AFTER THAT it's obvious that the person is taking advantage of you. **After that**, FAIR is fair – ENOUGH is enough. But is that how God has **forgiven us**?

What was Jesus' point with that parable? Sure other people sin against us. But what are THEIR SINS **against us** compared to OUR SINS **against God**? There was no way that **first man** could ever pay off his debt. According to the **customs of that day** his master HAD EVERY RIGHT to ***"order that he be sold, along with his wife, children, and all that he owned to repay the debt."*** FAIR is fair. He had HIS RIGHTS. Even doing that **wouldn't** FULLY REPAY the servant's massive debt.

Is this starting to get PERSONAL and UNCOMFORTABLE? Some people like to think GOD OWES them a good life, good health, a good time. We need to understand WHAT WE OWED God – perfect obedience to **every commandment** our **whole** life. GET OUT your catechism and read through those commandments again. Just take what **Paul talks about** here. Has any ***"unwholesome talk"*** ever come out of your mouth? Have you always spoken ***"only what is helpful for building up"*** someone – never CUTTING them down – **never** gossiping about anyone? Have you ever carried a **grudge** – sought to **get even** – rejoiced in the **misfortunes** of others? Are you GETTING THE PICTURE? Would you like God to IMITATE US and say, "FAIR is fair – ENOUGH is enough!"?

God had EVERY RIGHT to make our lives now a **living hell** and then condemn us to eternal punishment in the **real hell**. But INSTEAD OF INSISTING on **His rights** God showed us **amazing grace** – totally undeserved love. God didn't shrug off our sins with an, "Oh, well, that's OK." God forgave us ***"IN CHRIST."*** There is no forgiveness WITHOUT JESUS and His cross. ***"Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."***

What grace! What forgiveness! Jesus paid off **our debt** IN FULL. God gives us ALL THE CREDIT for Jesus' holy life. Jesus perfectly obeyed all the commandments IN OUR PLACE. God took all our sins -the sins of the whole world OFF of us and put them all on His own SINLESS Son. Jesus was punished IN OUR PLACE **for our sins**. Jesus was forsaken – **we** are forgiven. Jesus went through hell on His cross – CLINGING to Jesus we are going straight to heaven when we die. God's forgiveness is NOT LIMITED to **x-amount** of times but is FULL and FREE and FOR ALL sins – all because of Jesus and His perfect life and innocent death. BECAUSE of Jesus – TRUSTING in Jesus – we are forgiven. We are the ***"dearly loved children"*** of our heavenly Father. We are heirs of eternal life in heaven.

Now – when problems arise in our relationships – AND THEY WILL! – ***"Be imitators of God as His dearly loved children. And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*** Amen.

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