THE EXHORTER

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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JUMP START # 308

Eph. 5:1,2- "therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

The apostle Paul shoots for the grand and lofty concept of God's people acting like God. Elsewhere in the N.T. Paul said "be imitators of me as I am of Christ." That is hard enough, imitating an apostle, but here he wants us to imitate God.

We understand there are limits. God doesn't sin—never, ever. We do. God is all powerful, we cannot be. God knows all, we don't. God has always been, we haven't. God is to be worshipped, we are not. Paul is not saying, "become God," for that is impossible. What he is saying is, in character, imitate God. Paul qualifies what he means by saying, "walk in love." God loves. The famous verse "for God so loved the world….." one of the first songs we ever learned was "Jesus loves me, this I know…" God proved his love by sending Jesus. In the Bible, love was connected to actions. It wasn't just a warm feeling. God loved, so God did things.

These verses follow what Paul said in the fourth chapter. That chapter begins with unity of the disciples. Then it moves to describing that each of us has a function and a part to fill within the church. Everyone is needed and everyone has something to do. As that ends, we are instructed to develop the character of a Christian. We are to be kind, forgiving, tender-hearted. The example is of how God has forgiven us.

Then comes our verses today—imitate God. Walk in love. God doesn't have favorites. He doesn't play the games of "I don't like you…" that some never seem to grow out of. Not God. Just look at Jesus. He was accused of eating with sinners and the outcasts. He invited himself to the homes of people like Zaccheaus, who was a chief tax collector. He washed the feet of his disciples, including Judas'. He touched lepers, he healed the servant of a Roman soldier, he helped Gentiles. God loved the world. And his greatest demonstration was that he died for the sins of the world. (1 John 2:1,2) even those who nailed him to the cross. God loved all. God wants all to be saved.

In that way we are to imitate God. That's not easy. Not everyone is loveable. Some are grouches. Some are mean. Some just want to be left alone and they will tell you that. Some want to take advantage of others. Imitate God. Do good to all. Be kind to all.

(over)

We all have people that we love to be around. It's that way in the neighborhood. It's that way in church. It's that way at work. There are always the Zaccheaus' in life. They are up in a tree looking. They are curious, but they don't have the nerve to approach. Jesus stopped. He spoke. He included. In doing that , some fussed at Jesus. That's OK. He did the right thing. The same will happen if you do that as well. Some will fuss. Some won't want to love at all. But go ahead and do it---it's what God wants.

Imitate God. What a grand concept. Give it a try today!

Roger Shouse

Some additional thoughts:

Monday- Matt. 5:43-48
Tuesday- John 13:34,35
Wednesday- John 14:23
Thursday- Rom. 5:8
Friday- 1 Cor. 13:4-8
Saturday- 1 Pet. 1:22