

## Teaching Children to Get Along

11<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/08/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ephesians 4:17-5:2 Pastor Keith Besel

5:1-2 [summarizes Paul's teaching in this section] **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”**

### Introduction

- ⊗ Well, how has your summer been? As children, summer is the “best” time of the year; when you can sleep late; hang out with your friends; and do as you please (within reason).
  - ➔ I remember feeling like I was finally “free”! Free from all the rules of school and the schedules everybody else makes for you. Free to play the day away with my friends on the block, Bobbie Wheeler, Jeff Bowick and Gerry Lauck.
  - ➔ When I was older and had the responsibility of an afternoon paper route, I would hustle through my route so that I could quick – jump on my bike and meet my friends at the city pool, where we would swim until the pool closed at 6pm and then go home for supper. Do you remember the names and activities you did with your childhood friends?
- ⊗ Now as an adult, it's still fun when we're able, to watch our children interact with each other; at least when they cooperate with one another. But that's not always the case, is it?
  - ➔ I remember especially with my friend, Gerry, we didn't always get along. In fact he's the only one that I ever got into an actual fistfight with, and just because I pushed him into a girl when we were fooling around one day.
  - ➔ Of course, problems never arise between siblings, do they? Oh yes they do – those brother and sister, sister and sister, brother and brother fights – those can get pretty intense at times.
- ⊗ If only we could find the formula for what it is that makes children get along with one another – that must be part of the definition of what it means to be in heaven, I think.
  - ➔ There are parenting books, and tips and so-called “secrets” galore that say they have finally found the answer. But in the end it seems like there are basically two ends to the spectrum of approaches. At one extreme there is the permissive approach and at the other extreme there is the strict, authoritarian approach. Wise parents, though, generally seek to land somewhere in between those two extremes.
- ⊗ Of course our heavenly Father – He is the wisest parent of all. And in our text this morning, He teaches us, as His children, how we are to get along with each other.
  - ➔ He knows the best of all teaching methodologies; the strengths of both approaches and how to optimally apply those to each person in every situation.
  - ➔ So we human parents; we can draw some very good advice from God's word here. But understand folks, God isn't really speaking to parents here through Paul today. No, He's speaking to all of us as children, no matter our age, because after all we are His children.
- ⊗ So, put aside your parenting caps for now, and buckle up for a ride as God's children, because until we learn to live together as God's redeemed and chosen children, we cannot serve Him as He desires in any other role.

### I. Our Father teaches us as His children

- ⊗ One of the foundational points that Paul says we must understand is that God our Father teaches us as His children – not the other way around.
  - ➔ In chapter 4:30, Paul assures us, “You were sealed for the day of redemption”. That’s a promise. That’s how we know that we are His “beloved children”, as Paul refers to us at the end of chapter 5:1.
- ⊗ To be “sealed” as His “children” is baptism talk, because baptism is the visible act by which God puts His seal on us; marks us “with the sign of the cross” upon our forehead and hearts to “mark us as one redeemed by Christ the crucified” (baptism liturgy).
  - ➔ Once He seals us there, God also takes responsibility from that day forward for raising us; for teaching us the things that a parent teaches a child; things like how to get along with one another.
- ⊗ This is Paul’s intention for the last three chapters of Ephesians that we’re going through this summer. His emphasis is that you and I learn how to live with each other as fellow Christians; as children who are blessed to be in God’s family.
  - ➔ But just like all kids, we sometimes get along and other times not so well. For the younger children this is things like squabbling on the ball field; or fighting over who gets which seat in the car for the first leg of the trip; or hitting each other with water balloons.
  - ➔ But as adult children now our squabbles are things like this: destroying another’s reputation through gossip (“can you believe what she wore today in church”, “I can’t believe he said that in Bible Study”); or fighting and scheming for a job that the other person wants; or wearing each other down with verbal abuse.
  - ➔ That kind of behavior is not acceptable among Christians no matter the age. It’s a sign of what Paul talks about in verses 17-19 when he talks about being “darkened in understanding”, having a “hardness of heart” and “becoming callous” so that we give in to “sensuality” and practicing “every kind of impurity”.
- ⊗ God intends to lead us to a better kind of interaction as His children. This is every parent’s dream, isn’t it? having children who are kind and forgiving of one another rather than bitter and angry. But how can parents make that happen? How does God make it happen in and among us, His children?

## **II. Our Father has His don’ts and dos for getting along.**

- ⊗ To begin with, as a wise parent God has His dos and don’ts for getting along. Remember those two extremes I mentioned before?
  - ➔ The extreme permissive approach is when the parent allows the child to be fully responsible for his/her own development. That child has to learn on his own how to get along. It’s as if every day of life is a free-for-all. These parents think that independence lets the child develop her creativity to the fullest.
  - ➔ But unfortunately, children in such totally permissive homes often develop an egocentric, “me first” view that leads far beyond something as minor as throwing water balloons.
  - ➔ What’s more, these children often grow up to resent their parents for not “caring enough” to give them guidance as they were growing up.
- ⊗ Certainly God does not take this kind of “anything goes” attitude with His children.
  - ➔ In fact He cares so much that when we sin Paul says in verse 30 that this “grieve(s) the Holy Spirit of God”. The Holy Spirit, you see, is the one who teaches us God’s will. He’s the one who

shows us God's love; who grants us faith and works to sustain us in that faith into salvation. So yes, He is grieved when our lives don't reflect that love.

→ Some of you know what that's like; how a parent feels when a son or daughter hurts someone else's child, or perhaps commits violent crime or maybe rejects what you have done and then storms out of the house at age 18, vowing never to come back.

→ To see a child go the wrong way in life; getting caught up in things like drugs or alcohol or sexual activity outside of marriage or other unchristian relationships – this breaks a parent's heart to the core.

✘ Well, this is what you and I do to the Holy Spirit when we hurt one another; when we reject everything God has done for us in creating, redeeming, and caring for us; when we turn away from Him and His loving will of what He has giving us in Scripture for our care and protection and good.

→ Yet, our Father cares about us too much to just sit back and see whether we'll figure it out on our own. He's not about to take a "boys will be boys" or "children will be children" attitude when we Christians hurt one another. No, He directly commands us in verses 31–32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

→ This means as Christians, we are not living the Christian faith if we fight with others, carry grudges or talk evil about other believers. It is not alright for Christian families to raise voices in anger – even and especially within our own homes. In verse 26 Paul says, "Be angry and do not sin...". So if you become angry, before you address it with the other person, you must be able to do so in a manner that is not sinful. It must be done in Christ's love.

✘ This is God's family rule. He's very clear, we are to be kind and compassionate and forgiving. When one of our brothers or sisters is hurt at the death of a loved one, it's our job to help care for and support them. When someone is feeling weak or going through a difficult situation, we make adjustments to lend a hand and offer a shoulder or a listening ear. It's what we do as family.

→ And yes, even in the face of another's sins and failures, we are to be quick to remember how Jesus forgives us in our sins and treat that brother or sister with a forgiving heart as well.

✘ God is no permissive, "sit back and watch" parent. Instead He longs and aches, for us to be kind and compassionate to one another.

### **III. Our Father teaches and parents us in love.**

✘ Neither can we place our Father into the category of the other extreme and label Him as a strict authoritarian.

→ Yes, He has dos and don'ts, but these are exercised in love rather than blind and controlling force. Most of us have seen or heard of others who rule according to the authoritarian model.

→ They say things like this: "Do it because I said so". "And if you don't, you're going to get it". This approach gets results by issuing threats, calling names, and putting children down. Some argue that "at least it gets results, because the kids do what I want them to do or else they pay".

→ But we see that those so-called "results" only last as long as the fear of punishment exists. But once they are able the child quickly leaves the family all together.

- ✘ This is not how our loving Father operates either. He doesn't want grudging outward "results". He wants hearts, and so He works inwardly in our hearts to bring about a loving response; a willing and joyful desire to live for, and obey our Father.
  - He is proud to call us in chapter 5:1, His "beloved children". And He proved His love for us all when Jesus sacrificed Himself for us (5:2). There is no greater demonstration of love than that, as Paul says, Jesus' death for us is "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God".
  - Yes, it pleased our Father because it removed the sin that separated us from Him. Think of whatever it is that you consider to be the most pleasing aroma to you. When you find that smell what do you want to do? You want to savor it; to breathe deep and rest there in that moment, right?
  - This is how our Father views all of us in light of what Jesus has done for us when He "sealed" us for the day of redemption and washed us of all sin in baptism, to make us His own.
- ✘ And you see, Jesus' love for us is the love that now teaches us to love one another; to get along with each other in patience and love; in forgiveness and compassion.
  - Paul calls us to "be imitators of God" (5:1). When a child has a loving parent we see that they mimic what they see and hear, by doing it themselves. This is what God desires of us – that we see His extreme love for us in Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection; that we then strive to mimic that sacrificial love with our own brothers and sisters – at home, here at church, and everywhere we are in this earthly life.

## Conclusion

- ✘ To help us with this, God has provided a loving, protective and caring family; a household where His name is honored and glorified; a home where His Word is read and taught and where His people seek to follow His lead in living as He desires of us.
  - This place; this house is His Church – the Holy Christian Church which is the body of all true believers in Christ. Yes, this place is filled with sinners, but we are sinners who are sealed and redeemed by the blood of Jesus; sinners who are here to have our sin dealt with by our loving Father.
  - This is where our Father teaches us as His children how to "get along". This is where we know we are loved and forgiven even when we don't.
- ✘ This is not a place like so many in our world, being at one extreme or the other with no reasonable option in between. We do not live as God's children in a "free-for-all" of self-entitlement; of doing whatever we want, nor do we live here under an authoritarian rule that leaves us as puppets just following blindly out of fear.
  - No, we are Christians; children of God who are growing up each day in His most loving family; living in His unfathomable and amazing grace with joy; with the privilege of our fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus here with us as well.
  - Do we always "get along"? Not always, but we still love each other all the same and our Father is teaching us and guiding us and growing us in His love for each other every day. May it be so, in Jesus' name and by His grace. Amen.