

## **“The Quest for Excellence in Our Relationships” Ephesians 5:1-2**

### *Introduction:*

1. Our theme as we look at the second half of Ephesians is “Building Better Relationships”. We have seen that everything begins with a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot live in a new and better way unless you have new life in Christ. Our chief goal is for you to know the living God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Knowing the Lord is the only way for you to have joy and peace, and we want you to have real joy and peace with God.

2. We have seen also that once we know the Lord, we are to live in conformity with our new position. Are you right with God and one of his adult sons? **Therefore**, live like you are! We should exhibit a consistently Christian lifestyle. This involves “putting off” ways that are pagan, such as falsehood, sinful anger, theft and unwholesome talk and “putting on” ways that are godly, such as speaking the truth in love, becoming self-controlled, working to be one that shares with others and using your communication skills to build others up.

3. During Kyle and Trevor’s high school days, they both were on the track and field team. I liked to attend their meets to cheer them on. I wondered as I watched them run, “How did my two sons become so fast?” Dads, aren’t you glad when you see your sons do well? Anyway, many times at the meets, I was “drafted” to help run various field events. One of these was the high jump. Since I have about a two inch vertical leap (please no wisecracks that it could be three inches if I wasn’t overweight!), I enjoyed watching young men and women jump over the bar. During the high jump, the bar is started at a certain low level and is gradually raised as the athletes either all clear it or miss three times until there is a winner. In these two verses the Lord the Holy Spirit raises the bar for us. The Spirit wants to bring out the best in us, so he says, “Aim high! Put these thoughts in your minds, and you will have better relationships with others.” Let us listen to his voice in God’s Word now.

### *Exposition:*

I. We can develop excellence in relationships when we view others and ourselves from a new covenant perspective.

A. In the church we must see each other and ourselves as “dearly loved children”. Cf. Col 3:12

1. This will produce a proper “other-esteem” and “self-esteem”. For example, if we both know that God dearly loves you and that God dearly loves me, we will treat each other with appropriate respect and tenderness.

2. This will also “cleanse our motives”, so that we can minister in a context of grace. If we know that God loves us, we will not be ministering to win his love, but because we are loved and we want others to enjoy his love.

*Illustration:* In high school, I always wanted to play basketball. In order to try out for the basketball team, you either had to be on the football team or the cross-country team. (Our basketball coach ran a full court zone press and you had to be in shape from day one!) Since I couldn’t play football due to a gymnastics injury, I joined cross-country. However, I was running from the wrong motives, and I think this hindered my progress as a runner.

B. In the world we must represent God as one of his dearly loved children. Mt 5:16

1. If we know the Lord, we may not live in the world as some kind of secret agents. The Lord Jesus wants us to openly proclaim his lordship. Mk 8:38

2. We must take our stand boldly in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in our occupations. As we do good works, people will notice them and bring glory to God.  
*Apply:* What good works are you doing? Who is noticing them?

II. We can develop excellence in relationships as we build up a sense of our new covenant responsibilities.

A. The responsibility of imitating God

1. Failure to consider ideas like this contributes to a low view of the Christian life. But see how different the true Christian lifestyle is from mere morality and religiosity! We are to imitate God.

2. How do we imitate God?

- a. By loving our enemies – Mt 5:44-45
- b. By showing mercy – Lk 6:36
- c. By being holy – 1 Pt 1:15-16
- d. By loving one another – 1 Jn 4:11-12
- e. By having a humble attitude – Ph 2:3-8

*Apply:* Most of us can handle only a few challenges at a time. So then, to avoid overload, using the preceding passages, what situation in your life demands a particular type of imitating God?

B. The responsibility of living a life of love—“walk in love”

1. Since God has loved us, love is the sphere in which we are to act. Notice how this agrees with other ethical instruction in the New Testament Scriptures. Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:27; Rm 13:8-10

*Transition:* Now the important question is, “What is love?” Can you and I define it as we please? Can we do whatever we want and then claim that we are “acting in love”? No, not at all!

2. God defines what true love is. This touches on some sensitive, personal, but crucial points (5:3-7). Love in itself will always do what fulfills the law, but since we are sinners, we need the commands of the New Testament Scriptures to define what the way of love really is. Sin has the penchant for twisting and perverting “love” for its evil purposes.

III. We can develop excellence in relationships from the motivating power of new covenant ethics.

A. The standard of new covenant ethics: as Christ loved us

1. We must love with his kind of character—“as Christ”. In order to do this, we must keep his model before us. Note how practical the Bible is. God gives us models to imitate, the chief one being Jesus Christ. But this requires us to have a fully developed idea of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must be often in the Gospels.

*Action Step:* In your Bible reading, rotate in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with other books. Read them to see how Jesus acted in specific situations. What was his attitude? What did he think about certain things? How did he feel? What did he do?

2. We must love in his kind of way—“loved us and gave himself up for us”. When he loved us, he gave himself “as an offering and sacrifice”. The price tag of his love read “death—the death of the cross”.

*Apply:* Now look at your spouse, your fellow believer, your neighbor and your enemy, and ask, “How am I to love this person?” You love them by setting your affections on them to give yourself for his or her good, even if it cost you yourself. “But pastor, I can’t love that way!” No, you can’t! It’s impossible! But not for God! Gal 5:22

B. The goal of new covenant ethics: as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God

1. The chief end or goal of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

All of our lifestyle must conform to this end of worship. When you love someone as God would, you are displaying the greatness of God before that person.

2. Living this way pleases the Lord: “as a fragrant offering”. As a new covenant priest, your love toward another person is a spiritual sacrifice that pleases God. The Lord sniffs it and says, “Ah! I sense the sweetness of my own love in my child’s way of life. I love that fragrance. It is far better than any French perfume or expensive cologne.”

*Conclusion:* Our first goal at FBC is that you might become a follower of Christ through the gospel. Our second goal is that every follower of Christ would truly follow Christ according to the gospel. If you are not sure if you are really a follower of Christ, ask someone. We will be glad to share the good news about how you might be right with God. If you want to become a better follower of Christ, we think you’re in the right place for that, too. If you need some help, ask one of the leaders of this church. All of us are here to encourage you in your daily walk.