

Ephesians 4:32

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] How was Valentine's Day for you? Forgive me if that is an unkind question. For myself, I came close to messing up but recovered just in time. Half past six on Friday, and with the rain lashing down, you remember what it was like on Friday late afternoon, it was storm weather in Aberdeen. And at that time of the day, I made my way to Morrison's to buy some flowers, and that was bad timing, leaving it till late in the day on the 14th. All the classic red roses, or anything red for that matter, were long gone. However, there was a rather fetching, if unconventional, Scottish bouquet that caught my eye. And I can recommend it. It's a very nice bouquet. You might want to look out for that. And in the absence of any better option, I bit the bullet and bought the bouquet. I can do alliteration just as well as Alex Salmond. So, as I did what you do on those occasions, I began to remove the price sticker that was prominently placed on the bouquet.

And having done that, and as I did so, I must say with the thought going through my mind that the bouquet looked a lot pricier than it actually was, which is always a good thing, I made my way home, thinking that all was well. But there's a twist in this Valentine's tale. I got home, I handed over the Scottish bouquet to be met with a reasonable observation, so you didn't take the price tag off. You see, there was a second price sticker on the bouquet that had deviously escaped my notice. Now, why any retailer would put two price stickers on a bouquet of flowers escapes me, but there you go.

Well, what does a bouquet of flowers given on Valentine's Day mean? It's a symbol. It does or can symbolize love. It's possible, of course, to have the symbol without the reality it is intended to represent. I wonder how that might often be true and how many times that was true even in this past Valentine's Day, the symbol in the absence of the reality. To call it a symbol is not to say that it's unimportant, but symbols are meaningless in the absence of the thing they represent. And today, I want to consider that thing. I want to think about love, a love that is deep. As Christians, we are deeply loved, and we are to love deeply. And it's these two parallel and intimately connected realities that I want us to think about in the light of what Paul says in the verses that we've read in Ephesians. We are deeply loved, and we are to love deeply. The verses there in Ephesians chapter 4 from verse 32 through to the second verse of chapter 5 express these two fundamental realities. And what I want to do is discover in our text how we are deeply loved and how we are to love deeply. And we'll see, we'll discover, I anticipate, how the call to love deeply mirrors the reality of our being deeply loved. It is because we are deeply loved that there is this call upon us to love deeply.

[3 : 5 2] I'm going to divide what I have to say in this matter in two sermons. What we are, we are deeply loved, and what we do, we are to love deeply. I suppose if we had to capture the teaching of these verses in one sentence, we could do no better than quote a verse from the Bible. In 1 John chapter 4 and verse 19, we love because He first loved us. That captures really everything that we are going to say as we consider the verses in Ephesians, though those verses will enrich that essence that is captured by the verse in 1 John. Well, let me lay out what I would hope to cover in both of these sermons, and then we can proceed. First of all, with regard to what we are, we will discover that we are deeply loved in these ways, or these aspects of being deeply loved are dealt with in our passage. First of all, we are forgiven. Then in verse 32, just as Christ, or just as in God, God forgave you. We are forgiven. That is what we are. We are forgiven. But secondly, we are dearly loved children. That's what we find in the first verse of chapter 5. And then thirdly, we are loved, as that is described in verse 2. Now, that might seem very similar to the second reality, but as we consider them and get into a little bit more detail, we'll see that there's a helpful distinction to be drawn between these three realities that Paul presents concerning Christians. Who we are, what we are. We are deeply loved. We are forgiven. We are dearly loved children, and we are loved.

Now, that leads on, or is connected with, how intertwined in these verses Paul also presents to us what we are to do, and we are to love deeply. As those who are deeply loved, we are to deeply love, or love deeply. And we can see what the three elements of that are also. That we'll be considering more carefully this evening. The first element is that we are to forgive others. We are forgiven, yes, and consequently, we are to forgive others. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other. But then secondly, we are to imitate God. As dearly loved children, we are to imitate our Father. And then thirdly, we are to live a life of love, or what is literally said there by Paul in verse 2, we are to walk in love.

We are to love deeply, forgiving others, imitating God, and walking in love. But this morning, we want to focus our attention to focus our attention on what we are. We are deeply loved. And the first aspect of that that we've already highlighted is that we are forgiven. Let's just read again verse 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Christians are forgiven sinners. We're sinners like everybody else. And we're as much sinners as everybody else. But this is what distinguishes us, that we are forgiven sinners, forgiven by God. But what does our text, or this verse, verse 32, teach us about God's forgiveness? What do we discover about this forgiveness that we are granted, that we enjoy from God? And there are three aspects of this forgiveness, of God's forgiveness of us, that I want to highlight this morning from the verse there, verse 32. The first thing that I would want you to notice is that God's forgiveness is grounded in grace.

[8 : 05] It's grounded in grace. Now, you might say, well, I know that's true, and we know that's true on the basis of so many passages in the Bible. But in this verse, it would seem that the word itself, grace, doesn't appear. But actually, it does in a curious way. The verb that Paul uses that is translated on both occasions there in verse 32 as forgiving, or as God forgave you, is the verbal form of the Greek word grace. Now, English has no equivalent verb, but if we were to try and find a literal translation, it would be something along the lines of to act graciously. And the verb can be used in the sense of generous or gracious giving. You may remember that just a couple of weeks ago, we were looking at Romans chapter 8 and verse 32. And in that text, God is said to graciously give us all things.

And that graciously give us is another occasion when this same verb is employed by Paul. But here, in this verse, at the end of Ephesians chapter 4, Paul uses the verb with the sense of forgiving. And by doing so, and really this is the point that I want to stress, he grounds the forgiveness of God in the grace of God. That God forgives sinners is an act of pure grace. God has graciously chosen to forgive us.

All we do, all we can do is gratefully receive his forgiveness. And notice that this forgiveness that Paul speaks of is what we might call a done deal. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, something we do in the present, continue to do into the future, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

It's a done deal. He has forgiven you. This isn't something that you hope for or aspire towards. No. As believers, you have been forgiven. God in Christ forgave you.

[10 : 25] If you ask the question, and the question might emerge in the light of what I've just said, if you were to ask the question, well, when did that happen? When did God in Christ forgive us?

Well, the answer is multilayered. There was a bishop of Durham at the turn of the 19th century, Bishop Moule, and he deals with this verse and answers that question in the following way, and I quote, it, that is, our forgiveness or God's forgiveness of us was done in eternity from one viewpoint. It was done at Calvary from another. From yet another, it was done on your personal coming into union with Christ by faith. But whatever we choose to trace it from, forgiveness is an act towards the believer of immeasurable and holy, unmerited mercy. God's forgiveness is grounded in grace, and Paul demonstrates that or lays stress on that even in the very word and verb that he chooses to use to speak of God's forgiveness. That's the first thing that we can say about the nature of this forgiveness that we enjoy. But the second thing that we can say, and it's very connected with the first, is that God's forgiveness of us is an expression of the kindness and compassion of God. Returning to our verse there in verse 32, notice how our forgiving of others, which is something that we'll return to, but notice how our forgiving of others, that is to be just as God forgave you, is presented as an expression or tangible evidence of kindness and compassion. Be kind and compassionate to one another.

How? In what way? Forgiving each other. The forgiving of each other is an expression, it's evidence of the kindness that we bear, of the compassion that we hold for others.

Now, the point that I want to make is this, that from that, I think we can legitimately deduce that the same is true of God. His forgiveness of us is also an expression of His kindness and compassion towards us. And I would urge you and encourage you to never, ever lose sight of the tender truth that our God is a kind God. His kindness finds expression in His gracious willingness to forgive us.

[13:14] And our God is a compassionate God. How often in the Gospels do we read of Jesus being moved to compassion? Our God is a God who cares and loves deeply, a God who is moved by the plight and pain of a sin-sick world. And this compassion finds tangible expression in His gracious willingness and desire to forgive us.

So, this forgiveness of God that we enjoy is grounded in grace, but it's also an expression of God's kindness and compassion.

But there's a third aspect of this forgiveness that I want you to notice here in the text, and it is this, that God's forgiveness is secured by the saving work of Christ. Notice carefully what Paul says there in verse 32, because every word tells a story. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. And I'm wanting you to fix your attention there on the manner in which God's forgiveness of us is described by Paul as being in Christ, just as in Christ God forgave you.

And what Paul is recognizing by expressing himself in this way is that the forgiveness granted graciously by the Father to sinners is grounded in or secured by the work of Christ. God forgave in Christ.

And we can express that even more starkly. God is only able to forgive on the grounds of the finished work of Christ in the place of sinners. Forgiveness. Your forgiveness was secured at a high price, the death of Jesus in your place, just as in Christ God forgave you.

[15:31] So, we are deeply loved, and the first aspect of that deep love that God bears for us finds expression or is represented by this truth that we are forgiven, a forgiveness that is grounded in God's grace, that is an expression of the kindness and compassion of God, and that is secured by the saving work of Christ. But the second aspect of this deep love that God bears towards us is represented by the manner in which in chapter 5 and verse 1 Paul describes us as dearly loved children.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. God views us and treats us as His dearly loved children. And I want to notice, and I want you to notice, two truths that this tender description of Christians reveals. First of all, that we are loved by our Father. That is maybe the most obvious one.

But secondly, that we are loved as the Son. And that second truth is perhaps not so immediately obvious, but both of them, I think, are present, and I want us to think about. As dearly loved children, we are loved by our Father, we are loved by our Father, and we are loved as the Son. First of all, loved by our Father. God is our Father. He is our Heavenly Father, and His love towards us is a fatherly love. Now, while the word that Paul uses there, children, does not in itself identify us as sons and daughters, it's a broader term than sons and daughters, the context in which the word is used definitively confirms that Paul is using the word in that sense, that we are indeed sons and daughters of God. We are His own children. We are His own children, and indeed that's the whole force of the exhortation to be imitators of God, as a child imitates his Father. Now, that's something we'll return to as we think about how we are to love deeply, but the whole force of that exhortation would be lost were we to question whether the word children implies that we are sons and daughters. It most definitively does.

God is our Father, and we are loved by God as our Father. You as a believer, you if you are a Christian, if you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then this is true of you. You are loved. You are deeply loved, loved by God, loved by your Father. Now, as I say, that's maybe more evident and jumps out at us by the very description of us as dearly loved children. But the second aspect of this that I think is also present, or that we can certainly legitimately draw from what Paul says, is that we are loved as the Son.

In a way, this is a more startling truth hinted at by Paul in the language that he employs. You see, he not only calls us children, but he calls us dearly loved children. Now, why is that so amazing?

[19:11] Well, it's more beautiful language. It's more tender language. That in itself is good. But why is it so amazing? Well, let me draw your mind and remind you of the occasion of Jesus'

baptism. You remember that as Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Him, and in a tender moment of Trinitarian intimacy, the Father spoke from heaven. There was a voice from heaven. And what did the Father say as He directed words to His Son? Well, this is what He said, This is my dearly loved Son, or as it's often translated, This is my beloved Son. With Him I am well pleased. And the language that the Father employed on that occasion is the same language that Paul employs here, describing us as believers. We are dearly loved children. As the Father addresses His

Son, and He says, You are my dearly loved Son. This is my beloved Son. So, we too are granted the high honor and privilege of being described in like manner. We are loved by the Father as He loves His Son.

But might we be in an unwarranted manner, drawing too much from a simple coincidence of vocabulary? Well, Jesus Himself gives us reason to think not. Listen to Jesus as He prays to His Father in His great high priestly prayer recorded for us in John chapter 17. And let's just remind ourselves of one thing that Jesus says in that prayer. Speaking of His disciples, He prays, May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You, my Father, sent Me, and have loved them even as You have loved Me. Very especially what Jesus says there, and have loved them, My disciples. You have loved them even as You have loved Me.

We are loved by our Father. That is glorious enough. But even more amazing is that we are loved as the Son. Dearly loved children. So, this deep love that we are blessed by, that God bears towards us, is illustrated, is presented in what Paul says here, first of all, in that we are forgiven, secondly, that we are dearly loved children, but thirdly, that we are loved. And we move on to verse 2. Live a life of love, or walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Now, what is there to add in the matter of being loved?

We've already just noted that we are dearly loved children, that we are loved by our Father, that we are loved as the Son. What more could we say? Well, the expression that we've just thought about, just considered there in verse 1, that we are dearly loved children, places the focus on the Father's love for us. We are dearly loved children. Our Father loves us with a fatherly love. But as we move into verse 2, the focus shifts towards the Son's love for us, very explicitly. Live a life of love, walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. What can we say of Christ's love for us as it is described or presented to us in our text?

[23 : 21] Well, there are two things that I want you to notice. First of all, that it is a love that is self-giving, but then also that it is a love that is pleasing to the Father. These two elements.

First of all, Christ's love for us is a love that is self-giving. Paul says that Jesus gave Himself for us, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. Now, in what sense did Jesus give Himself up for us? Well, we know in what sense He did so. He gave Himself up to death. He gave Himself up to Calvary. He gave Himself up to being made sin and a curse for us. Listen to the benediction that we find in Paul's letter to the Galatians in chapter 1 from verse 3, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

And notice that in using this language, in Paul using this language of Jesus as being the one who gave Himself for us, gave Himself for us, gave Himself for us, gave Himself for us. He gave Himself up. Jesus was not the unwilling victim of His enemies. He was not the one who was surprised by what happened to Him. No, He set His face to Jerusalem. He willingly and deliberately walked into death.

He gave Himself for us. This love of Christ for us is a love that is self-giving, and that is a truth that is never better captured than by the Apostle John in his first letter in chapter 3 and in verse 16.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And notice, before we move on, that as has been made very clear in the benediction that we read from Galatians, notice how the Father and the Son act in harmonious unison in the matter of Jesus being given up to death, or giving Himself up to death. You see, Paul can speak of Jesus giving Himself up, as He does so here in verse 2 of chapter 5 in our passage. But He can equally speak of the Father giving Jesus up for us.

[26 : 13] As we noticed, if you remember, He uses that language in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32. And these are not contradictory, but rather they're an expression of how the Father and the Son act in this harmonious unison in this matter of self-giving. Jesus gives Himself up for us. This is the nature, this is one aspect of the love of Christ for us. It is self-giving. But I said that Paul here in

verse 2 also presents what Jesus does in giving Himself up as a love that is pleasing to the Father. Live a life of love, walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. And then notice what He says, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The cross and Christ's atoning work on the cross is first and foremost Godward. It is for us, to use the very language of our text, but it is to God. Notice those two aspects, for us, but to God. He gave Himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The death of Jesus is a sacrifice directed to God, not directed to us. We are the beneficiaries of it, but it's not directed to us. It's directed to God. The purpose of the sacrifice of Jesus, of Him giving Himself up, of Him being given up by the Father, the purpose is to satisfy God's justice and secure God's favor. And consequently, to enable our forgiveness that we've already spoken of, and indeed this truth we've already alluded to in the language of God in Christ forgiving us. Now, the language of a fragrant offering, the language that Paul uses here, is language that takes us back to the Old Testament.

We read in Leviticus chapter 1, and there in Leviticus, and indeed in the following chapters, these sacrifices instituted by God are described by God Himself as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. We notice that expression, how it repeated itself on three occasions there in Leviticus chapter 1. The sacrifices that God had instituted were an aroma pleasing to the Lord when they were presented in the manner that God had determined. And of the many sacrifices that are laid out for us in the whole sacrificial system, three of the sacrifices are described in this way, as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The burnt offering of which we read in Leviticus chapter 1, the grain offering that follows in the subsequent chapter, and the peace or fellowship offering. Both words are used to describe it interchangeably, peace or fellowship offering. Now, time does not allow us to develop the theme or the significance of this description of Jesus' sacrifice in the language of the offerings, the language here that Paul deliberately uses. But we can just briefly comment on how the burnt offering and the peace or fellowship offering point to and explain something of Christ's offering that fulfills the whole of the sacrificial system. We won't mention the grain offering because it would seem that its purpose was more to accompany one or other of these more significant, if we can use that language, offerings of the burnt offering and the peace offering. The burnt offering, as we've read, required that the animal be without defect, but perhaps very particularly we would stress that the whole animal be consumed by fire. None of the animal was to remain. And so, as Paul employs this language of a fragrant offering, he is reminding us that in our Savior, in Jesus, we have the one who offered himself up holy as our sacrifice for sin. Jesus held nothing back in his self-giving for us. He drank the cup to its final bitter drop.

And this holy, self-giving love was an aroma pleasing to the Lord, an aroma pleasing to the Father, a fragrant offering to God.

[31 : 10] The peace or fellowship offering had as its purpose, as the name suggests, to make peace with God and so open up the way for fellowship and friendship. And Christ is our fellowship offering, who has secured by his death, peace with God for sinners such as we are.

And Christ's offering of himself as a peace offering, as a fellowship offering, was an aroma pleasing to the Lord, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

If we return to Bishop Mool from Durham just one more time, in language that is old-fashioned but no less eloquent, he states the matter in this way, The sweet fragrance must ascend to the throne of violated holiness before the rainbow shower of infinitely willing forgiveness can come down from the throne upon our guilty heads.

The love of Christ is a love that is pleasing to the Father. His sacrifice is directed to the Father that we might enjoy that rainbow shower of forgiveness upon our guilty heads.

We are loved by Christ, a love that is self-giving and a love that is pleasing and acceptable to God the Father. Christian friend, you are deeply loved. And this love of God is a love that is freely offered to all who would come to Him in repentance, seeking His forgiveness. While it is true, as we have stressed this morning, that there is nothing that you can do to deserve forgiveness, for it is grounded in God's grace. What you can do and what you must do is ask God to forgive you.

[33 : 18] And as you ask God to forgive you in Christ, believing that He will readily and graciously do so, then that is precisely what He will do, willingly and graciously and ready, freely, fully, and finally.

He will forgive you. Let us all come to Him confessing our sins and seeking and receiving His forgiveness. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come and we stand in awe at the depth of Your love

for us.

And we know that in our efforts to understand Your Word, we but scratch the surface. But even in scratching the surface, we discover a love that is so beyond anything that we are able to offer in response or indeed to one another.

We do thank You that as Your people we are deeply loved. We thank You for the forgiveness that we enjoy, that You have indeed forgiven us in Christ.

We thank You that You have adopted us into Your family, that we are Your beloved children, Your dearly loved children. We thank You for Your Son, Jesus, and for the love that He bears towards us, that He loved us and gave Himself up for us, and that His sacrifice that He made for us was indeed an aroma pleasing to You, a fragrant offering and sacrifice in Your presence.

[34 : 48] And for all of these great and deep truths, we give You thanks and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.