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BEHAVING IN LOVE

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma,” (Ephesians 5:1-2). You can’t go wrong as a Christian when you are looking up to your heavenly Father, and imitating His love just as an obedient faithful child would look up to their earthly father and imitate the love they see and feel from them. To those who criticize the approach of emphasizing love “too much,” I point their attention to the theme of love running throughout Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The theme and focus of “love” just in the book of Ephesians, let alone the entirety of the New Testament, is enough to force our attention upwards to the heavens to focus upon the divine love expressed by our Father so we may think it, speak it, roll around in it, hope in it and as Paul writes “walk in it.” From the very moment you begin reading the letter to the Ephesians, Paul is going to express a lengthy

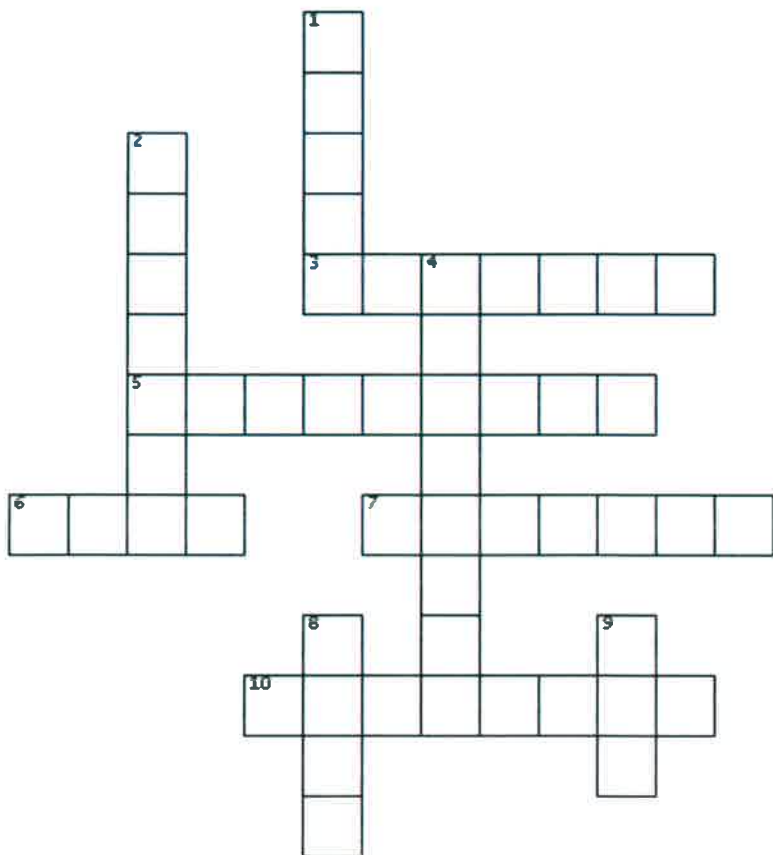
description of the amazing gifts God has provided and given to us “in love.” “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved,” (Ephesians 1:3-6). “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),” (Ephesians 2:4-5). When you get to chapter 3, you are going to hear Paul share his amazement of the extension of God’s love not only to His own rebellious people in the Jewish nation, but even to the most

undeserving of vile, wicked, rebellious, idolatrous and heathenistic of the Gentiles. "The Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel," (Ephesians 3:6). To emphasize just how gracious and amazing this extension of love from a holy sinless God is, Paul is sure to emphasize the hopeless condition all Gentiles found themselves in being excluded from God in their sinful rebellious ways, and yet finding grace through the love of God in His Son in the gospel. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God," (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). How amazing is God's love that instead of exercising His justice and wrath and bringing such sinners to immediate judgment and condemnation, He instead called them out of their sin by drawing their attention to the love of Christ and washing away their transgressions in His very blood through their faith and obedience to the gospel! Paul goes on in Ephesians 3 to challenge us to let our own hearts and minds be so

filled with that extreme level of love that we would be held together by it in the way we treat and support one another in love. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God... Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," (Ephesians 3:17-19; 4:1-3). Paul even goes on to finish his point on this stating our ultimate goal in supporting one another through the love of Christ and speaking His truth in love to one another in the spirit of Christ is to build up the entire body "in love," (Ephesians 4:14-16). As Paul narrows down and closely shows the personal application of what this "love" actually looks like in our lives, dedicating our lives in love giving ourselves to God's goodness and righteous purity in speech and conduct, he breaks it down so minutely even to the point of dissecting how His love is meant to impact families from the marital relationship between husbands and wives to the parental relationship between mothers and fathers and children and even to the extent of

how Christ's love totally changes the relationship between slaves and masters (Ephesians 5:25-6:9). And just in case you may have missed it, Paul ensures we keep in mind the focal point of the entire letter is indeed being filled with the love of God to the point it spills out in every aspect of our Christian living by the way he ends the letter. "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love," (Ephesians 6:23-24). Paul is not alone in this, as Peter chimes in with his reminder of what the very purpose of our redemption in Christ is, to love one another. "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God," (1 Peter 1:22-23). "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins," (1 Peter 4:8). John emphatically claims that to fail to emphasize the importance of love in our lives is like not even knowing who God is, since so much of what He gives, teaches and directs us is in love. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love," (1 John 4:7-8). The 4th century

disciple, Jerome, tells a story about the Apostle John. When John was old and frail and unable to walk, his disciples would carry him into the assembly of the saints. Begging for some word of teaching from him, he would always say the same thing, "Little children, love one another." When they began pressing him as to why he always said the same thing, it's reported that John said, "It is enough." Is it any wonder he would emphasize as much when He heard Jesus Himself implore them that love itself would be the very distinguishable trait allowing all to know we belong to Him? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another," (John 13:34-35). "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law," (Romans 13:8-10). "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,'" (Galatians 5:14). – Daniel Ruegg



ACROSS

3. Mary called Jesus this Hebrew word meaning "Teacher" (Jn. 20:16)
5. Mary _____ came to the empty tomb seeking Jesus (Jn. 20:1)
6. Jesus helped the disciples catch 153 _____ (Jn. 21:11)
7. Jesus asked Mary, "Why are you _____?" (Jn. 20:15)
10. Mary thought Jesus was the _____ (Jn. 20:15)

DOWN

1. John beat _____ in a foot race to the empty tomb (Jn. 20:4)
2. Thomas was also called _____ (Jn. 20:24)
4. When John looked into the empty tomb he _____ (Jn. 20:8)
8. Nathanael was from the town of Jesus' first miracle (Jn. 21:2)
9. Thomas would not believe unless he could _____ (Jn. 20:25)