



Imitators of God Ephesians 5:1-21

I. INTRO

A. I have a couple of questions for you:

1. What are you good at? Think about that for a moment...
2. How did you get good at whatever you're good at?

B. Much of what we are **good at today** is the result of imitating other people...

1. If you've learned another language it begins with repetitious imitation (including verb tenses).
2. I've taken up a couple of new sports over the last few years and for each one I continue to watch YouTube videos hoping to imitate the correct posture, or stroke, or timing.

C. *Imitation is the focus of the passage we are looking at today.

D. Review:

1. The two major themes of Eph are UNION (with Christ) and the UNITY of the saints accomplished by the finished work of Jesus on the cross...
2. The first three chapters are about what happens to us when we receive Christ by faith—as well as what we **become** *“in Christ.”*
3. Paul employs **three metaphors** at the conclusion of chap 2: *“fellow citizens”* [of the KOG¹] (v.19), *“God’s household”* (v.19), and then if we combine 2:21-22, Paul speaks about us being a building that is becoming *“a holy temple”* (v.21).
4. But now in chapters four, five, and six Paul moves on to tell us what it means to live the Christian life. How do we **live now** that we are followers of Jesus?

II. BODY

¹ Which takes us back to The Sermon on the Mount, the manifesto of the KOG.

- A. Today, I would like for us to look at **four words** in the text (and context) that will help us to further understand what Paul is teaching about how we are to live in the light of gospel grace...
- B. The four words that will help us to understand and apply this passage are:
1. Imitators (v. 1)
 2. Idolater (v. 5)
 3. Wrath (v. 6)
 4. Walk (vs. 2, 8, & 15)
- C. We will look at them one at a time:
1. **Imitators** (v. 1) – It’s interesting that The Greek word for *imitate* is the same word we get our English word *mime* from. So, when Paul says, *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children”* it means (at least) three things:
 - a. First, the *“therefore”* in v. 1 is a reference to **all** that has been previously said, but it is also a clear reference to the imperatives listed beginning at 4:25-32.
 - 1) What Paul is saying is that the way to be successful in living the Christian life is to imitate God. **How do we imitate God?**
 - 2) We quietly watch, we read-up—and we practice. Think of it as learning how to ski, or surf, or ride a bike; we’re just not going to be very good at it at first—but as Heb 12:2 says, we are to *“fix our eyes on Jesus founder and perfecter of our faith.”*
 - 3) It’s not our willpower that *perfects* our faith. It’s the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit that does IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do on our own.
 - b. The second thing we notice about becoming *“imitators”* is that it’s **plural**. We are called to do this together. That’s why church services, Community and Care Groups are so important. These are times when we look to God and His Word together.
 - c. And thirdly, regarding imitating God, we are to, imitate *“God, as beloved children.”* Paul is saying we are to have (and pursue) a **growing understanding of our newfound status as beloved children** of God. We are now part of God’s household. This is essential to

understanding the imperatives of chapters 4-6. The Doctrine of Adoption comes into play here...

2. **Idolater** (v. 5) -- John Calvin wrote that the human heart is an “idol factory.”² So, it’s pretty scary when Paul says in v. 5 that, “*no immoral or impure person or covetous [person], who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*” Uh-oh...
 - a. The best way to get past being **condemned as an idolater** is to admit that we ARE idolaters.
 - 1) It’s like admitting that we have a drinking problem or an anger problem. And to address a current cultural issue, I think the same need for admission applies to racism. If we are honest, every culture has its own racist tendencies. That is part of what Paul is talking about in this letter—how multiple ethnicities CAN become one local church.
 - 2) Wouldn’t you like to hear a (white) politician say, “I am a racist, I grew-up unaware of my white privilege and unaware of institutional racism—and I have come to see and hate my lack of awareness—and hate my racist tendencies.” We must admit our idolatry in order to begin to get past them.
 - b. In contemporary North American idols are everywhere. We have music idols, sports idols, fashion idols, culture idols—we even have a television show to make our own “American Idol.” Within the depravity of the human heart there is a need, a hunger to idolize. Idolatry quietly and subtly slips into our lives when we allow **good things** to become **ultimate things**. (money, sex, and power)
 - c. Here is a list of the idols Paul is referring to in Ephesians 5:3-5:
 - 1) Immorality (Used twice: vs. 3&5) *porneia*
 - 2) Impurity (used twice: vs. 3&5) Refers to a lustful, wasteful, reckless life, seeking to “get” (what’s in it for me?) not “give.” This is the opposite of the gospel love.
 - 3) Greed and covetousness (two forms of the same Greek word: vs. 3&5) Desirous of having more, and more, and more, and more...

² Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*: xiv.

- 4) Filthiness (v. 4) Obscenity, indecency, baseness, dishonor.
 - 5) Foolish talk (v. 4) Same Greek word that we get “moron” from.
 - 6) Crude joking (v. 4) This word has a very interesting background and Paul is probably speaking mostly to the Greeks here. The word comes from the Greek word for “wittiness,” referring to pleasantness in conversation. This was one of Aristotle's virtues, who spoke of the "golden mean" between boorishness and buffoonery. Later on, it came to signify jokes that were obscene and coarse.
- d. It's been said that all sin is idolatry because in that moment we're choosing to worship something other than God. So, **the best way to get past our tendency toward idolatry is honesty, confession, and repentance.**
3. **Wrath** (v. 6) – There may be no theological topic more controversial in our western contemporary culture than **divine wrath**.
- a. Humanity is, for the most part, eager to acknowledge the existence of God, yet we struggle to acknowledge God's wrath.
 - b. God's wrath, though, is a consistent theme throughout the Bible, and a **defining characteristic** of God and the gospel suffers when we fail to engage and communicate God's wrath.
 - c. We misunderstand the term “wrath” because we think of someone who is losing their temper, or who is cruel, or can't control their emotions—right?
 - d. The Greek word is *orgē*,³ similar to our English word ogre, which means monster or tyrant. (In this letter, Paul uses *orgē* three times: 2:3; 4:31; 5:6.)
 - e. We must keep (at least) three things in mind regarding God's wrath:
 - 1) God's wrath is always judicial (i.e., legal and supremely sensible).
 - 2) God's wrath in the Bible is something that people choose for themselves.

³ Greek: ὀργή.

- a) *“For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, [we] are without excuse.”* --Romans 1:20
 - b) *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.”* --Psalm 19:1
- 3) There is an element of longing in God’s wrath. God’s longing for us to make better choices, or to come and sit quietly before Him. Think of when your kid (or spouse) does something dumb—there may be some wrath, but there’s also longing too.
- f. God’s wrath is a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry when anger is called for.
 - g. The Bible insists that God is a God of both **love and wrath**. Not only do love and wrath not conflict with each other, but they actually **establish** each other.
 - a) If we don’t see and believe in wrath and hell, it **trivializes** what God has done.
 - b) ******When we begin to see and understand God’s wrath and then see Jesus interacting and eating with (some exceedingly vile) sinners, then the gospel becomes truly amazing!
 - h. People push back on this -- a lot. Most people consider most people to be good people. (I get it.) Most would acknowledge that, yes, **some people** deserve God’s wrath – some of the great tyrants or mass murders throughout world history for instance...
 - 1) (Illus-) Imagine a widow who has only one child and she raises him and teaches him to:
 - a) Always tell the truth, always work hard, and always care for the poor (honest, industrious, and charitable).
 - b) And he listens to her.
 - c) Then when he comes of age, she scrapes together her meager savings and what income she can, and she puts him through college. And he graduates.

- d) Then consider this, after he graduates, he never speaks to her again. He might send her a Christmas card, but he doesn't answer her phone calls, he doesn't answer her letters—he doesn't talk to her at all.
 - e) But he's "good." He always tells the truth, he always works hard, and he always cares for the poor.
 - c) He says, "Well, I'm doing what she told me to do, isn't that good enough?"
 - d) **What would you say to him?** You would say, "No way, that's not good enough! To live a good life and to ignore the one person to whom you owe everything?" That's not good!
- 2) Now, the average "good" person in our culture would probably say something like, "Well, I'm not particularly religious but I try to live a good life; isn't that what's important?" The answer, of course, is **no**, it's certainly condemnable; yet it doesn't honor the one Person to whom we owe everything.
4. **Walk** (vs. 1, 8, 15) As I hope you've noticed, throughout these 21 verses the word *walk* is used three times and provides for us some fairly straightforward imperatives. We are to:
- a. **V. 1:** "*Walk in [Christ's] love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*" This v. invites us to continually love others in the same way Christ has loved us. It's also an indication that it's not always very easy, but a sacrifice.
 - b. **V. 8:** "*Walk as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)*" When I think of light, I think of two things:
 - 1) We're more like the moon than we are the sun. We don't HAVE light, we REFLECT light...
 - 2) To be children of light means that we are honest and transparent and we are committed to what is real and true.
 - c. **V. 15:** "*Walk as wise [people]*" The text gives us three ways to walk in wisdom:
 - 1) "*Making the best use of the time*" (v. 16) Another translation uses the word "*redeeming*" the time...the Greek word indicates a *ransom*. This corrupt world system that we live in is seeking

to regularly kidnap our time and Paul is instructing us we are to pay a “ransom” to redeem it.

- 2) *“Understand what the will of the Lord is”* (v. 17) This is a very common question isn’t it? “What is God’s will for my life?” Here’s the simple and straight forward answer: God’s will for you is to: 1) Walk in God’s **love**, 2) Walk in God’s **light**, and 3) Walk in God’s **wisdom**.
- 3) A final imperative is: *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit”* (v. 18) The way I heard this year’s ago still makes sense to me... To be drunk with wine **means to give control of ourselves over to an outside agent** (alcohol). This is the same idea of being *“filled with the Spirit”* – giving **control of ourselves over to an outside Agent—the Holy Spirit**. It’s also interesting to note that the verb occurs in the **present continuous tense** which indicates that the command is for believers to be filled, not just once, but continuously. [Why? Because we leak.]

III. CONCLUSION

- A. To sum-up the sermon, we imitate God in that, in that we love others in the same ways that God has loved us and been merciful to us.
- B. If you are watching or listening today, I hope you’ve heard that the Christian life is NOT just about living a good life, it’s about honoring the one Person to whom we owe everything, and His name is Jesus. If you have not trusted in the free gift of salvation that Jesus is offering I would implore you to do that today...
- C. As we move into a time of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, I’d like us to consider that Jesus actually became sin for us...
- D. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:20-21: *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”*
- E. The only person who has NEVER sinned actually BECAME sin so that we might be able to draw close to God. THAT is worth celebrating. I will pray over the elements and then we will partake together...

Community Group Questions

1. What are you good at? And how did you get good at whatever you're good at?
2. If God has loved you even when you were at your worst, would it be asking too much to for us to imitate God by loving others when they are at their worst?
3. Are there people in your life right now that are difficult to love? If yes, perhaps you can ask God to give you His love for that person/people?
4. Idolatry can be a touchy subject. Are you willing to share about an area where you tend to trust someone or something other than Christ?
5. The wrath of God is real, and the love of God is real. In that light, consider this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. How does that make you feel?
6. Many believers struggle to know and understand God's will. Could it be this simple... To walk in God's **love**, to walk in God's **light**, and to walk in God's **wisdom**?? Is there anything missing here?