

BECOMING AN IMITATOR OF GOD

Ephesians 5:1-21

Introduction:

→ Illust. A little girl was following her father through a wet garden one day. He looked back to see how she was doing and noticed that she was stepping carefully and precisely in the footsteps that he was leaving behind. She looked up at him and said, "Daddy, if you don't get mud on your feet, I won't get any mud on mine."

Someone has said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. It is amazing how children try to imitate their parents or older children that they look up to. Even as we get older, we tend to try to imitate those we admire. However, there is only one person who is really and truly worthy of our imitation in every way, and that is God. (read v. 1) Eph 5:1 (KJV) – "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;"

Several times in his letters Paul exhorted his readers to follow or imitate him in a particular attitude or way of life, but he clearly indicated that they should follow him only to the extent that he was following or imitating God and His Son Jesus Christ.

*****We are called to be imitators of God*****

But how do we do that? Certainly it involves love, as the apostle expresses in v. 2 – Go through v. 2 – the example of Christ's sacrificial love for us.

But most of us will never be called upon to sacrifice our lives for someone else or even for Christ Himself. So Paul gives us some other important elements to a life that imitates God. If we are to be imitators of God, there are certain qualities which must characterize our lives.

To imitate God, we must live pure lives (vv. 3-7)

One of most obvious characteristics which comes to mind when we talk about God is His holiness or purity. Over and over in the Scriptures we are told that He is holy and therefore we must be holy. Here we are told ... (read vv. 3-4) In the NIV it says of these things – "...there must not even be a hint..."

Sexual immorality, any kind of impurity (uncleanness), greed (covetousness) – these are improper (unfitting) for God's holy people – there should be no hint of these things in our lives if we are imitators of God.

But the next verse even goes so far as to talk about our speech. If we are to imitate God, we must live pure lives and that includes our speech. Obscenity (filthiness), foolish talking, coarse joking – again these are unfitting, out of place, improper for the child of God. Sometimes, because of our workplace, or other situations, we cannot always avoid the coarse and crude jesting of others, but I ask you, do you take part in that kind of improper speech?

There are places where we can avoid it – the television set has an off switch, and sometimes we just have to use it.

The imitator of God must live a pure life, and that means purity in our actions, our attitudes, and our words. Why? Because such things have no place in the kingdom of Christ.

Verse 5 is somewhat troubling. *Read it.* Covetous → idolatry – setting up your neighbor's stuff as an idol in your life. So, does this verse mean that anyone who falls into the sin of immorality or covetousness can never enter heaven? John Calvin in his ageless commentary on this passage says:

"Some might think it harsh, or inconsistent with the Divine goodness, that all who have incurred the guilt of fornication or covetousness are excluded from the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. But the answer is easy. Paul does not say that those who have fallen into those sins, and recovered from them, are not pardoned, but pronounces sentence on the sins themselves."

No, Paul himself speaks of the forgiveness of God regarding this when he wrote to the Corinthian church. *Read 1 Cor. 6:9-11.* Calvin goes on to say:

"When men have repented, and thus give evidence that they are reconciled to God, they are no longer the same persons that they formerly were. But let all fornicators, or unclean or covetous persons, so long as they continue such, be assured that they have no friendship with God, and are deprived of all hope of salvation."

Note vv. 6-7 – Not only must we avoid doing these things in our own lives, but we must be careful to avoid being influenced by those who do. Don't be deceived by them, or be partners with them. The key to this is

an understanding of the wrath of God that comes upon those who are disobedient. When we really understand the wrath of God toward sin and disobedience, it will change our whole attitude toward sin and evil.

Now, we cannot avoid the world – we live in the world. In fact, it is our mandate to reach the world and influence the world for Christ. But we must be careful about allowing the world and its attitudes to influence us.

→ Illust. – The ship is safe in the ocean, as long as the ocean is not in the ship. The Christian is safe in the world as long as the world is not in the Christian.

We must maintain our purity if we are to be imitators of God. Imitating God means living pure lives, untainted by the evil of the world.

To imitate God, we must live transparent lives (vv. 8-14)

We are called upon to live as children of light. *Read v. 8-14* – the quote in v. 14 appears to be a reference to Isa. 60:1. It is not a direct quote, but the verse in Isaiah says, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”

We are to live our lives, Paul says, under the constant light of God’s truth which exposes everything.

→ Illust. [From Illy]... LIVING LIGHTS

In one of his books, Sir Walter Scott tells of a tribal chieftain from the Highlands who was a guest in the home of an English friend. As they were seated at dinner, the conversation turned to the six solid silver candlesticks adorning the table. The host rather rudely began to taunt the chief, saying, “I’m sure you do not have such magnificent candlesticks.” The Highlander replied, “I not only have more, but better ones.” The host didn’t believe him and said that the next time he came to the chief’s castle he wanted to see them.

Well, the day arrived when the Englishman did visit the chief. While he and his friends were being ushered into the banquet hall, he wondered what kind of candlesticks could be more beautiful than his own. Just as he thought—there in the room was one tin holder. But his attention was immediately diverted to another sight. Behind every seat stood a big strong Highlander, holding in his right hand a drawn sword, and in his left a blazing torch. The chief’s son turned to the visitors and said, “Behold the chandeliers of my father’s command. Would you dare to compare them to the richest ore that was ever dug out of the mine?” Immediately the friend realized what the chief had meant. Living candlesticks, men of sterling character, were of more value to him than the finest silver.

That is what we are to be – living candlesticks, shining forth the light of Christ, which exposes everything, including our own deeds and the deeds of others.

It is not easy to live transparent exposed lives before the world. There are probably very few people who have nothing that they would like to hide. Yet we must realize that God’s light is designed to expose everything.

Not only that, but it will not be popular to live lives that reflect God’s light upon those around us.

John 3:19 – “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”

People do not want their evil deeds exposed by the light, yet we are called upon by God to do just that by our righteous living – v. 11

If we are to imitate God we must live transparent lives, lives exposed by the light of Jesus Christ.

To imitate God, we must live Spirit-filled lives (vv. 15-20)

This could be, and probably should be, a whole message in itself, but briefly let us consider what that means. V. 18- “...be filled with the spirit...” V. 15 challenges us to “Be very careful, then, how you live.” I would like to suggest a few thoughts which come out of these verses, which lend structure to the idea of a careful life, filled with the Spirit.

1. Wisdom – not as unwise, but as wise – Lord, how we need wisdom. Do you ask the Lord for wisdom? I do—every day. Remember Solomon, who was offered anything he asked for, and asked God only for wisdom to do what was right. That’s what we all need—wisdom to do what is right. We need to walk, “...not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” This means making the most of every opportunity God gives us – opportunities to serve God, to help others, to teach our families and others about God, opportunities to share our faith. We need to walk in wisdom.
2. An understanding of the times – realizing the wickedness of our time and the evil in our society. *Read v. 17.* Back in the OT, in 1 Chr. 12, we have a listing of the men of war who came to support David

as he was establishing his kingdom in Hebron. In v. 32 it says, "Of Is-sachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Is-rael ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their com-mand." That is what we need today; that is what we are called to be—people who understand our times, the evil of our day, but yet also have an understanding of the will of the Lord.

3. Not under the influence of wine or strong drink but under the influ-ence of the Spirit. What God wants of us more than anything is for us to be continually directed and guided by His Holy Spirit. *Discuss the divergent ideas regarding the idea of being filled with the Spirit.*
4. A life full of praise and thanksgiving – vv. 19-20 – always giving thanks – a Spirit-filled life is a thankful and praising life.

Conclusion

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What does that mean? It means, according Paul, and the Word of God that:

1. We must live pure lives – holy, upright lives, understanding the wrath of God which comes on those who are disobedient.
2. We must live transparent lives – lives exposed by the light of Christ, understanding that when Christ's light shines through our lives, it will expose everything, including our sin and wickedness as well as that of others.
3. We must live Spirit-filled lives – lives led daily, hour by hour, minute by minute, by the Spirit of God. As we understand the evil of our day, we recognize more and more the need for submission to the Spirit of God in our lives.

Are you an imitator of God? When others look at you do they see the characteristics of your heavenly Father shining through your life? Or are there things that are hiding the light, making it dim, making your testimony unreadable by those around?

I would encourage you to take some time each day during this com-ing week to sit down and read through these 21 verses from Ephesians 5. Let the Word of God speak to your heart. Then spend a few moments to talk to the Lord and ask Him to show you anything that is getting in the way of your relationship with Him.