

## **Imitation**

### **Ephesians 5:1-20**

#### **DT- Do you look like Him?**

Good morning. We have a few more weeks left in our Ephesians series. Today we will look at about half of Ephesians 5. In my quiet time since I got back from Romania I've been reading certain Psalms and then journaling about them. Sometimes I write questions, sometimes I make observations, sometimes I rewrite them as my own prayers. This section of Ephesians, especially the passage we are looking at today, reminds me of a Psalm. Like the Psalms I feel like we could stop at each verse in this passage and preach a sermon, or at least there's enough substance in each verse that it could be its own point in a sermon.

However, instead of spending the rest of the month on these 20 verses, I'll try to give you what seems to be Paul's dominant thought in this section. This is a good reminder that what we do here on a Sunday morning when we preach from the word is not enough of his word for the week to come. This should not be all the word you get for the week. If you don't already have something that you're doing in your quiet times with God, use this text this week. Dive a little deeper into it.

Let's pray and then get into the text.

#### **PRAY**

We've all heard the term like father like son, or like mother like daughter. Like it or not, pretty or not, children are like their parents. That fact can be awesome and encouraging when they imitate your good qualities. When a small child tries to drive from the back seat like their father or mother; or tries to cook something up in the kitchen like they've seen mom or dad do it's cute and endearing.

On the flip side of that is how embarrassing and uncomfortable it can be when they imitate your not so good qualities. That can happen with the words you say or the actions you take and it hits you, that they most definitely learned that bad behavior, that bad quality, that bad word, from you. That kind of imitation does not feel good. Children probably learn more by watching and imitating their parents than anything else.

Since we are children of God, Paul's instruction at the begin of Ephesians 5 is to imitate God. If we are really his children then we ought to act like the Father. Which means you and I need to answer the question; do you look like Him? When people see you do they see the Father? Do they see Christ in us? Our children and grandchildren can imitate the good and the bad, but with God there is only good so our directive from Paul at the very beginning of this passage is to imitate God.

What follows as I said earlier feels like a psalm or a proverb because so many verses can stand alone as things to remember and meditate on. Yet Paul does mention 3 key attributes that must be present in our Christian walk for us to truly be imitators of God. I would consider these 3 attributes or traits as an admonishment from Paul. To admonish someone means that you have enough relational capital and enough love for the person to call them to a higher level of integrity and character.

You might admonish someone to do something they are already doing, because you don't want to see them fall. In this era of social media we have seen many famous preachers fall because they had no one around them to admonish them. You might admonish someone to do something they are already doing because you know they can reach another level of integrity, or another level of kingdom production. Of course, you might admonish someone to do something because they are tangled up in sin.

You will have to decided on your own today how your Christian walk is going based on these admonishments from Paul. The first thing he admonishes us to do is walk in love, because God is love.

### **1. Walk in love, because God is love. vs. 1-2**

Both Paul and John use this term walk to describe the Christian life. Walking in love is key to the life of every follower of Christ. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1-2, "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God."

When we walk in love we are following the example that Christ set, especially his example of love on the cross. We need to remember that not only was the cross an example of Christ's unconditional love for us, but it was also a demonstration of what walking in love might sometimes look like. The early Christians lost their lives for their faith. Not everyone will be called to do that, but we need to remember what 1 Peter 2:21 says, "For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps."

To walk in love doesn't mean you will suffer, but it does mean you are willing to suffer if that's what God asks of you. Paul tells us that we ought to walk in love because we are children of God. If God is love then it's only logical that his children will walk in love. What Paul is asking should not be foreign to the Christian life. Why? Because the previous passage tells us that we have a new nature that is like God. The old nature built walls but the new nature builds bridges.

At the end of this passage Paul compares Christ's sacrifice on the cross to the OT sacrifice on the altar that was a pleasing aroma to God. God was not pleased that sin demanded death, and in the OT that meant the death of an animal as a sacrifice, but when the sacrifice was made for the right reason with the right heart God was pleased. The pleasing aroma sacrifices were burnt offerings, meal offerings, and peace offerings. The sin offering and the trespass offering were not considered a pleasing aroma kind of sacrifice because there is nothing pleasing about sin.

Christ's sacrifice was once and for all, and it embodied the 3 pleasing aroma sacrifices. The burnt offering is when the whole animal was burned on the altar, and it represented or symbolized a total commitment and surrender to God. Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a total commitment and surrender to the will of God.

The meal offering or grain offering was a gift to the Lord that honored him as the source of life but also represented your dedication and work for God. Christ's sacrifice and then resurrection certainly identifies God as the source of life since Jesus defeated death through his sacrifice and resurrection.

The peace offering or fellowship offering was given to express thanks or joy, or as a gift. Obviously Jesus sacrifice restored the peace and fellowship we have with God. Jesus sacrifice as a peace offering reconciled us back to God.

The example of Jesus and what he accomplished is incredible and we could spend hours talking about it, but what Paul wants us to see is the love there was in Jesus pleasing aroma sacrifice. The love that was demonstrated by God when he adopted us as his children. See that love and be imitators of it.

A teacher was once working on fractions with her class and she asked a boy this question: "Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you—your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?" "A sixth," replied the boy. "I'm afraid you don't know your fractions," the teacher said. "Remember, there are seven of you." "Yes, I know," said the boy, "but you don't know my mother. My mother would say she didn't want any pie."

Do you walk in love? Do you look like him? Do you look like Jesus? Are your sacrifices a pleasing aroma to God, like the sacrifice of the mother in that story? John put it like this in 1 John 4:7-8, "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Walk in love because God is love. Paul's next admonishment is to walk in the light, because God is light.

## **2. Walk in the light, because God is light. vs. 3-14**

Before Paul gets to his admonition to be people of the light he describes the darkness in specific detail. Ephesians 5:3-7 says, "Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do."

That's the darkness and Paul says don't you have anything to do with that. In fact not only should you not indulge in these things but don't even talk about them. That's really raising the bar. Don't have anything to do with sexual immorality, impurity, or greed. That has no place in the church. Then he mentions another triad of sins that involve our conversations amongst each other. No obscene language, no foolish talk, and no dirty jokes. That kind of careless use of the tongue is out of place in the church.

Just here recently I was officiating a funeral, and Brian Quisenberry and I were standing next to each other, and a man walked up and said dirty or clean. We didn't know what he meant so we said clean. He proceeded to tell us a joke. That's fine, weird at a funeral but okay. He walked up later during the visitation and didn't ask the question but just decided to tell a dirty joke. Then later at the graveside he did it again. It kind of took us off guard, it was strange in that setting especially, but Paul says that kind of talk shouldn't happen in any setting that we as Christians find ourselves in.

A dad joke is one thing, but a coarse joke Paul says is not for you. Then Paul takes this image of darkness and says that people who indulge in this kind of lifestyle and language will not inherit the kingdom of God. There is no excuse for those sins, so don't participate in those things. Then Paul describes how we should walk in the light. Ephesians 5:8-14 says, "For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things

that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Paul does not say that we were in darkness, but we were actually full of darkness, and now we have the light of the Lord. This light that we have produces only what is good, right, and true. Goodness is love in action. Righteousness has to do with your character, and both of those qualities are based in the truth of who Christ is and what he has made us to be.

Jesus had a lot to say about light and darkness during his ministry. In Matthew 5:16 (NIV) Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

In Ephesians Paul goes on to say that we need to carefully determine what pleases God. Exposing the darkness as we walk in the light is one of the things that will please God. Jesus said in John 3:20-21, "All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

To walk in the light means we live before God, hiding nothing. It's pretty easy to hide things from other people because you can't really see their heart and their thoughts. But not with God. Hebrews 4:13 says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable."

During our trip to Romania, Dan and I of course had to go through security at every airport that we stopped at. I brought a cordless impact driver which went in my checked bag, but the batteries had to be put in my carry on. Every time it went through the scan they had to open it up and see what it was, and make sure the batteries weren't too big, and when that happens you feel a little exposed. I am surrendering my luggage to some special inspection. It's a little inconvenient but the inspection could catch someone trying to bring a bomb or some other weapon onto the plane. I was never afraid to walk through the metal detectors or have my luggage inspected because I had nothing to hide.

With God there is no hiding. We are exposed whether we want to be or not. The question Paul has is whether you are walking in the light and exposing the darkness with the light that God has given to you. Paul's plea here is to stay away from the darkness of sin and instead shine the light of God into that darkness and expose it for what it really is. We must walk in the light because God is light. Lastly Paul admonishes us to walk in wisdom, because God is truth.

### **3. Walk in wisdom, because God is truth. vs. 15-20**

We need all the wisdom we can get when we try to “walk in love” with one another, and we need wisdom especially when we are “walking in the light” trying to expose the darkness because that darkness, that sin could pull us back in. Paul says in Ephesians 5:15-20, “So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In this Christian walk and life, we need to be wise about how we handle everything. The Greek word for wise carries the idea of precision and accuracy. The navy seals have a saying, “slow is smooth, smooth is fast.” It’s about moving deliberately but without hesitation. To walk in wisdom should be done in the same way. Our slogan is James 1:19 (NIV), “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

To walk in wisdom means our walk must be careful and exact. Our decisions need to be wise, and we need to always seek the will of God. I’m disgusted with the apathy that some so called Christians have today. Christians who are drifting through life and have what I would call a sleepwalking faith. They never really make the most of the opportunities they have, and they’re apathetic about serving Him or the church.

Paul says that’s a foolish way to approach life. Instead we have to recognize that life is short and we need to take every opportunity we have to walk in love, walk in the light, and walk in wisdom. Take every opportunity to tell someone about Christ and be an example for Christ. Paul says we need to understand and seek out what the Lord wants us to do.

Maybe you need to say this to the Lord; Lord this is where I am, this is where I work, this is where I live, this is the season of life that I’m in. What’s the work that you have for me to do right now? You ask him that and keep asking him that and I promise you he will show you the work he has for you to do. That’s what it looks like to walk in wisdom. Instead of floating through the seasons of your life not paying much attention to God’s will, you focus on the opportunities you have in these evil days as Paul puts it.

Paul ends this passage by telling us to give thanks to God for what he has given to us. 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) tells us that, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

Do you look like Him? You can. He has given us everything that we need for life and godliness. He has given us the greatest example of what it looks like to walk in love. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us walk in the light and expose the darkness. He has given us his word and access to himself anytime so that we can walk in wisdom. Do you look like Him?

There's a lot in this passage, and much more I could talk about, and certainly there's some personal evaluation you can do and should do as you let this text speak to your heart and your character. I'll leave you with one last thought that might help in your evaluation of your own personal walk with God. One way to evaluate your own character and the character of those around you is to pay attention to what makes someone laugh and what makes someone cry. Two indications of a person's character are what makes them laugh and what makes them weep. Someone who walks according to the ways of God, like we saw in this passage, won't laugh at the coarse jokes and obscene stories, but they will weep over the lost, and perhaps even the lost opportunities they didn't take.

That's certainly not the only way to measure the character of someone, but as we evaluate ourselves and how well we are being imitators of Christ it's a decent place to start. Praise God, he has given us everything we need for life and godliness. Because of that truth, because of that fact Paul admonishes us to walk accordingly. Do you walk like Him? Do you talk like Him? Do you look like Christ?