

Imitators of God || Eph 5:1–7

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“Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children.”

~ Ephesians 5:1

“**Imitator**”: someone who copy or mimic the manors or behaviors of someone else.

- One of the clearest examples of this in our daily lives is little children. They love to copy or mimic the behaviors of those around them.

Asher (5 years old): pointing his finger at me (*as a form of greeting – just as I do*) and saying, “Thanks Dad”.

- When he get’s excited, he clenches his teeth and says, “Yes!” exactly how his dad does.

How does he learn these mannerisms of mine? He’s with me. He spends time with me. He’s paying attention to me. He’s watching me. He’s listening to me.

Paul says, you *are* children of God, and so you should *do* what children do. Children imitate their parents; you should be imitating your heavenly Father.

Q. What does it take to do a good imitation of somebody else?

A. Time. Attention.

Asher pays attention to his dad. He spends time with his dad. He watches. He listens. He contemplates. He memorizes. I’m not a religion to Asher. I’m his dad. We are spending time together all week long, and it shows by all the ways that he mimics me & his mom & his brothers.

Do I give that same kind of focused attention to my heavenly Father, or am I so preoccupied with the things of this world that I don’t really know what my Father is like.

- Spend time in His Word.
- Spend time talking with Him in prayer.
- Spend time looking at the world He made.
- Surround yourself with other people who know Him and who love to talk about Him.¹

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us...”

~ Ephesians 5:2

If we are imitating God, we will be people who walk in love... because that’s the way our Father walks. In **John 14:9**, Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” Jesus was the fullness of God incarnate (**Col 2:9**). Jesus reveals the Father to us, and so when we see how Jesus walked in love toward those around Him, we know that this is the way our Father walks. If we are imitating God, we will be walking in love. Last week we talked a little bit about what makes God angry and when it is appropriate for us to feel anger, but nowhere in the Bible does it talk about God walking in anger. He gets angry (and so should we), but that isn’t the normative description of His character. Nowhere does the Bible say, “*God is anger*”, but it does say, “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:7–8**). If we are imitating God, we will be a people who are characterized by our love for one another (**John 13:35**).

¹ For example: listen to music that draws your heart into the presence of God. Everything in life needs a healthy percentage: *diet*; *movies* (e.g., a percentage of entertainment value and a percentage of inspirational/motivational value); *activities* (indoor, outdoor; passive, active), *music* (fun/entertaining, soul-inspiring & heart-edifying). What percentage of your daily mental intake is devoted to drawing your heart closer to God?

Q. Who has Christ loved (5:2)?

A. Us.

Q. Who is us?

A. The church (5:25).

Paul is not talking about the way that He loves the whole world; He's talking about the way He loves His people – the church. And Paul has already described the radical nature of Christ's love in that He loved us while we were still sinners (2:1, 5). Even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, He loved us. We there was nothing lovely in us, Christ loved anyway.

And in His love, He **gave** Himself for us!

In His incarnation, in His life, in His death... He gave Himself for His church.

This past week, I was talking with an old friend from my school days who is struggling to find a church family because every church he visits seems to have some serious issues that they need to deal with. On one level, my heart grieves his experience. I wish he could walk into a local church that is healthy and strong in all the areas that are particularly important to him, but the reality is that every church he visits is just a local group of people who are just as human and just as broken and just as sinful as he is.

This is what makes the love of God for us so radical. Instead of leaving the church because of our weakness, brokenness, and our sinful struggles, He **gave** Himself for it. He purchased it with His blood. He didn't come looking for how the church could serve Him; rather, He came to serve us, in all of our brokenness (**Matt 20:28**).

And His sacrifice was a beautiful thing to God.

“...**an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**”

~ *Ephesians 5:2*

Q. What was the result of Christ giving Himself for His church?

A. It was a sweet-smelling aroma in the presence of God the Father.

I would bet that every single one of us can think of **an aroma that makes us happy**.

- Clean laundry. Mowed grass. Old books. The ocean. Springtime. Right after it rains. Coffee. Oils.
- One of my favorite aromas is the smell of lilacs in my backyard.
- One of my *least favorite aromas* is the closet where my boys store their shoes. 😞

But we all know what a beautiful thing it is to **see** something beautiful or to **hear** something beautiful or to **smell** something beautiful.

Q. Why would Jesus give Himself for such a broken people as us?

A. Because it was pleasing to God the Father – as a sweet-smelling aroma.²

Q. Why should you and I give our lives to a church that has so many flaws and so much brokenness?

A. Because it brings joy to our Father in Heaven.

- He loves this church...with all its flaws, brokenness, failures, mistakes, weaknesses, sin.
 - And it brings Him joy when we give ourselves to the local church.
 - When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He said that He was giving us an example that we should continue to follow (**John 13:15–17; 1 Pet 2:21**).

² John 6:38; 17:4; Luke 22:42; Heb 10:5–10; cf. Psa 40:7–8.

In this “*walk of love*”, Paul continues to remind us of the kind of life that we once lived that is no longer “*fitting*” for us now that we are children of God.

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you as is *fitting* for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not *fitting*, but rather giving of thanks.”
~ *Ephesians 5:3–4*

These things don’t fit you anymore. So, what do you do with **clothes** that don’t fit? You **throw them out**. What do you do with **food** that doesn’t smell good (e.g., milk). You **throw it out**. You get rid of it.

These things don’t look good on you, and they don’t smell good to God.

Instead of giving yourselves to these things, cultivate a heart of thankfulness to God for the things He has given you and what He has done in your life. This is so important.

- Sexual sin is the result of a heart that is *not satisfied* in God...
- Covetousness comes from a heart that is *not thankful* for what God has given to you.

One of the things we practice a lot in **the Knoop house** is giving thanks because I think a heart of **thankfulness** is the antidote to so many of life’s problems and temptations. *It’s the way we pray. It’s our bedtime routine.*

- And when your mouth has been trained to speak about what you are thankful for, it’s harder to use your mouth for things like foolish talking or coarse jesting (dirty jokes). It doesn’t feel right on your tongue. It doesn’t sound right in your ears.

SIDE NOTE: what I love about this verse is that Paul is clarifying that there is a kind of humor (joking) that is inappropriate for the child of God. Meaning what? Meaning, there is a kind of humor that is appropriate for the children of God. There is a place for humor and laughter and joking. *Proverbs 17:22* says “*Laughter does good like a medicine*”, and we all know that’s true. It’s good for the soul. It’s good for relationships. It’s good for learning. And it’s good for leadership.

C.S. Lewis describes a good leader as the one who is “*First in, last out, laughing loudest.*”

As Christians (*who know the Creator of this world and who know how the story ends and who are secure in our identity in Christ*) we have more to be happy about, we have more to laugh about, and we have a bigger vocabulary than anyone else in the universe.³

You don’t need the lures or the language of the world; it’s all just emptiness anyway (**5:6**).

Not only is it empty; **not only** does it no longer fit you; **not only** does it not smell good...**but** it has no place in the kingdom of God.

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who **is** an idolater, has any **inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God.
Let no one deceive you with *empty words*,
for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
Therefore do not be partakers with them.
~ *Ephesians 5:5–7*

³ We’ve got our own 4-letter words: like love, hope, life, good. And then we’ve got a whole bunch of amazing 5-letter words: grace, peace, truth, mercy, faith, Jesus.

These verses can be really scary at first glance, because you read that and think, “*I’ve done those things.*” If you have ever engaged in pornography, you have committed **fornication** (*sexual sin*). If you have ever yearned for something that belonged to someone else, that’s called **coveting**. If something has ever taken priority over God in your heart, you have committed **idolatry**. And Paul says that these people have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. So...what do we do? **Answer:** you keep reading.

For you **were** once darkness, but now you **are** light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light.

~ *Ephesians 5:8*

These sins that you’ve committed... they don’t define you anymore. They aren’t who you are. These sins may have defined you once upon a time, but not anymore.

Paul writes something very similar in his letter to the church in Corinth...

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 **homosexuals**, nor **sodomites**, nor **thieves**, nor **covetous**, nor **drunkards**, nor **revilers**, nor **extortioners** will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

~ *1 Corinthians 6:9–11*

These sins used to be your identity, but Christ changed that. He washed you. He sanctified you. He justified you. And so, these labels no longer fit you. You may still stumble into these sins (**James 3:2**), but they aren’t who you are. They don’t define you. They are not your identity.

You cannot be called a “*son of disobedience*” (**5:6**) because, in Christ, you are called a “*child of God*” (**5:1**), and you cannot be both.

This is why it is so dangerous for people to describe themselves with a label of sin, like “**Homosexual Christian**.” That’s become an increasingly common label over that past few years. Using Paul’s logic, there is no such thing as a “homosexual Christian”. They are two different identities. It would be like saying that I’m going to the pet store to get a “*Cat Dog*” – they’re two different creatures. Paul says, “*In Christ, [you are] a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (**2 Cor 5:17**). Homosexuality is a sin (*it’s clear in the OT, it’s clear in the NT*), but if you are in Christ, though you may struggle with homosexual tendencies, it is a false identification to say that you are “homosexual Christian” because they are two different creatures. **You are not the sin you struggle with.**

Yes, you are in this world with all its struggles, but you are **not of this world** (**John 15:19–20; 17:16; 1 John 2:15–17**). Though you may go running into the darkness, you are **not of the darkness** (**Eph 5:8**), you are a child of light (**5:8**). Though you may disobey, you are not a son of disobedience (**5:7**), you are a child of God (**5:1**).

A dog can act like a cat, but that doesn’t make it a cat. We don’t call it a cat ... or a dog cat ... or a catty dog. It is a dog regardless of how it may act.

There is no such thing as a Christian homosexual, or a homosexual Christian, or a lying Christian, or a fornicating Christian, or an anxious Christian, or a Christian thief – *or a Christian sinner of any kind*. Can Christians struggle with these things? Absolutely. Daily. Hourly. Moment-by-moment in fact. But “struggle” is the operative word. You may struggle with a particular sin, but that sin is not who you are. In Christ, you are a child of God, and as a child of God, your inheritance is secure. Fornicators do not inherit the kingdom of God, but that is not who you are in Christ – even if you struggle with sexual sin.

You have been “*sealed with the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance*” (Eph 1:13–14). Does this mean it’s okay for us to keep on sinning since our inheritance is secure? Paul anticipated that question in his letter to the church in Rome.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

~ *Romans 6:1–2*

That life is dead to you. Why would you go back to it?

Paul closes this section by saying, “*Don’t be partakers with them,*” because that’s not who you are anymore.

That doesn’t mean that you don’t spend time with people who aren’t saved. Some of my best friends in the world have not given their lives to Christ – **yet**, and I love spending time with them.

It means, as you spend time out in the world, instead of joining people in the emptiness that this world has to offer, live your life in a way that inspires them to join you in the everlasting joy and satisfaction that you have found in Christ.

Walk in love ... toward your local church.

Walk in love ... toward your friends and family that don’t know Jesus yet.

Why?

- Because it’s fitting for a child of God who is seeking to imitate God.
- And because it’s something beautiful in the presence of God.

PRAY