



Imitators of God

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 imitating other people...

1. If you've learned another language it begins with repetitious imitation.
2. If you've learned calculus it begins by imitating a formula on a screen (or blackboard) with the power rule and the chain rule.
3. I've taken up a couple of new sports lately and for each one I've watched several YouTube videos hoping to imitate the correct posture, or stroke, or timing.

C. Imitation is the focus of the passage we will be looking at today.

D. Review:

1. The first three chapters are about what happens to us when we receive Christ by faith – what we become, what we receive.
2. But now in chapters four, five, and six Paul moves on to say what it means to live the Christian life. How do we live as Christians?
3. And that is the right order - because it's not that we live in a certain way and then become eligible to become Christians, it's that we become Christians and therefore we live in a certain way.
4. If by living in a certain way we become Christians then we would be saving ourselves by what we do.
5. But if we become Christians and then, as a result, live in a certain way it because we're saved, not by what we do, but by what Christ has done.
6. So Paul has sought to help us understand what we have become and in the second three chapters he is instructing us on what we are do in accord with what we have become.

E. Please turn to Ephesians 5. We will be looking at verses 1-21.

*“Therefore be **imitators** of God, as beloved children. ² And **walk** in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an **idolater**), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the **wrath** of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, [Don’t keep trying to fight your unholy passions, get in touch w/ your Holy...]*

‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’¹

*¹⁵ Look carefully then how you **walk**, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” [pray...]*

II. BODY

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 communicating.

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)

¹ Paul seems to be paraphrasing several verses from Isaiah (26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60).

C. We will look at them one at a time:

1. **Imitators** (v. 1) – When Paul says, “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children*” it means (at least) three things:
 - a. The “*therefore*” is a clear reference to the last verse of the previous chapter (4:32): “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*” So, we imitate God through being kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving – we are to treat one another the way God has treated us.
 - b. The second thing we would do well to notice is that the word “*imitators*” is plural. We do this together. This is to be our M.O. (modus operandi) as a church. This is how we are to engage one another and this is how we are to be known around the South Bay and beyond.
 - c. And thirdly, we are to, “*Be imitators of God, as beloved children.*” Paul is saying we are to have (and pursue) a growing understanding of our status as beloved children of God. This is essential to understanding the imperatives that follow. Again, the Doctrine of Adoption comes into play here (see the blog).
 - 1) The Greek word for *imitate* is the same word we get our English would *mime* from.
 - 2) So, we imitate (or literally, mime) God because we have experienced His benevolent love and forgiveness and we see ourselves as beloved children.
 - d. Illus – My love for the ocean probably came from being held in my father’s arms in the waves on trips to the beach.
2. **Idolater** (v. 5) -- John Calvin wrote that the human heart is an “idol factory.”²
 - a. What does that mean? One way to understand our tendency to idolize is to think of idols as “functional saviors.” Author and theologian Jerry Bridges defines functional saviors in the following way:
 - b. “Sometimes we look to other things to satisfy and fulfill us—to ‘save’ us. These ‘functional saviors’ can be any object of dependence we embrace that isn’t God. They become [a] source of our identity, security, and significance because we hold an idolatrous affection for them in our

² Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*: xiv.

hearts. They preoccupy our minds and consume our time and resources...Whether we realize it or not, they [begin to] control us, and we [begin to] worship them."³ –Jerry Bridges

- 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.
 - 3) Greed and covetousness (two forms of the same Greek word: vs. 3&5) Desirous of having more, and more, and more, and more...
 - 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: It 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. (Keep in mind there were a significant number of Greeks in the Ephesian congregation.) I am continually realizing that almost anything can become an idol. The big three in western contemporary culture are money, sex, and power.
3. **Wrath** (v. 6) – There may be no theological topic more controversial in our western contemporary culture than divine wrath.
- a. While the vast majority of humanity is eager to acknowledge the existence of God, and we love to pontificate on God's traits of grace, mercy, and kindness, very few want to acknowledge God's wrath.
 - b. Yet God's wrath is a consistent theme in the Bible, it's a defining characteristic of the God that we must grasp and seek to understand. The gospel suffers when we fail to understand, engage, and communicate God's wrath.

³ Jerry Bridges & Bevington, *The Bookends of the Christian Life*: 72.

- c. We misunderstand the term “wrath” because we think of someone who is losing his temper, or who is cruel, or can’t control their emotions.
- d. The Greek word is *orgē*,⁴ similar to our English word ogre, which means monster or tyrant. (In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul uses *orgē* three times: 2:3; 4:31; 5:6.)
- e. We must keep (at least) two 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 (e.g., the choice we all make either to accept Jesus as our Savior or reject Him).
 - 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 they are without excuse.”* --Romans 1:20
 - b) *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.”* --Psalm 19:1
- f. God’s wrath is a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for.
- g. The Bible insists that God is a God both of love and wrath. Not only do love and wrath not conflict with each other, but they actually establish each other.
 - a) One without the other is meaningless. Without God’s wrath, God’s love is stripped of all meaning.
 - b) God’s active work in judgment is essential to the faith and it is essential for establishing God’s love AND for understanding the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
 - c) If we don’t believe in wrath and hell, it trivializes what God has done.
 - d) 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!

⁴ Greek: ὀργή.

- e) The gospel means that no matter who you are or what you've done, you can be legally absolved from all your sins – past, present and future because of what Jesus Christ has done.
 - f) Remember that the Doctrine of Adoption means that the righteous Judge has removed His wrathful robe and adopted you into His family – with all its rights and privileges.
- h. People push back on this -- a lot. Most people consider most people to be good people. Many would acknowledge that, yes, some people deserve God's wrath – some of the great tyrants or mass murders throughout world history for instance...
- 1) Imagine an old widow woman who has one child and raises him and teaches him to:
 - a) Always tell the truth, always work hard, and always care for the poor (honest, industry, charity).
 - b) She teaches him – “this is how I want you to live.” And he listens to her.
 - c) Then when he comes of age, being a very poor woman, 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.
 - g) He says, “Well, I'm doing what she told me to do, isn't that good enough?”
 - h) 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?”
 - 2) Now, if there is a God and you say, “Well, I'm not religious but I'm living a good life; isn't that what's important?” The answer, of course, is no, it's condemnable; it's as culpable as that young man would be.

- 3) If there is a God to whom you owe everything just to live a good life in general and not live for God and make your relationship with Him the central focus of you life because you owe Him everything – would mean you’re guilty and deserve God’s wrath, just like the “good” young man. A Christian understands that.
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. *“Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* This v. is an excellent description, even definition, of submission. It reminds me of: *“Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”* --Philippians 2:6-7
 - b. *“Walk as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)”* So, it’s fruit inspection time. Do you have a growing passion for ALL that is good (in a biblical sense) and right and true? If not, it may be time to do some business with God.
 - c. *“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... That is a better translation because what the Greek word is saying is that this corrupt world system that we live in is seeking to regularly kidnap our time and we must pay a *“ransom”* to redeem it.
 - 2) *“Understand what the will of the Lord is”* (v. 17) A very common question is, *“What is God’s will for my life? Here’s the 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 years 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 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. "They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is beloved of that almighty Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him...being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from Him always. There she is to dwell with Him, and to be ravished with his love, favor, and delight, forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her, with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it and cares not for it, and is unmindful of any pain or affliction...She loves to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her." -- Jonathon Edwards Love Letter to Sarah Pierpont (c. 1723)
- B. Living like Sarah Pierpont is possible. It's not that we intend to be "so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good" but that we have a strong and secure relationship with our Savior.
- C. The Christian life is not so much about fighting our unholy passions as it is about falling in love and obeying out of joy.