

**Imitating God – Ephesians 5:1-6**  
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I. INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to be talking about imitating God and I'd like to start our message today with a few brief thoughts from a book called, *We Become What We Worship*, by G. K. Beale. His thoughts on the topic of imitation will introduce what Paul is about to share with us today as we enter Ephesians chapter 5. Mr. Beale in his book says:

“When my two daughters, Hannah and Nancy, were about two- or three-years-old, I noticed how they imitated and reflected my wife and me. They cooked, fed, and disciplined their play animals and dolls just the way my wife cooked, fed, and disciplined them. They gave play medicine to their dolls just the way we fed them medicine. Our daughters also prayed with their stuffed animals and dolls the way we prayed with them. They talked on their toy telephone with the same kind of Texas accent that my wife uses when she talks on the phone.

Most people, I am sure, have seen this with children. But children only begin what we continue to do as adults. We imitate .... Most people can think back to junior high, high school, or even college when they were in a group, and to one degree or another, whether consciously or unconsciously, they reflected and resembled that peer group... All of us, even adults, reflect what we are around. We reflect things in our culture and society...

The principle is this: What we revere, we resemble, either for ruin or restoration. To commit ourselves to some part of the creation more than the Creator is idolatry. And when we worship something in creation, we become like it, as spiritually lifeless and insensitive to God as a piece of wood, rock, or stone.”

And I would add, as we begin to study Ephesians chapter 5: when we imitate the ways of the world and allow ourselves to follow its dead ways of dealing with life and circumstances, we inherit the fruit of that choice: frustration, strife, emptiness and shallow relationships with God and others.

Let's begin our study by reading today's passage in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 1 to 6:

***5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an 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.***

## II. BE IMITATORS OF GOD

Paul begins our passage today with the keyword, “therefore,” connecting what he's about to say with the thought he just finished in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 32. He opens Ephesians chapter 5 by telling us that since God has been kind, tender hearted and forgiving to us, we should imitate him and do the same to others. ***Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children...***

I want you to think a little more about how children imitate their parents for a moment. As we talked about already in our opening thoughts, it's a well-established fact of life that children learn how to live their lives by watching their parents. And sadly they tend to pick up our bad habits even more easily than our good ones. We wish they would learn from what we say they should do and ignore our mistakes and bad habits, but somehow they seem to learn much more effectively from what we do rather than what we say. A man by the name of James Baldwin once said, “Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

I have a friend who told me about the time when he was driving with his kids in bad traffic and he heard his four-year-old son say from the backseat, "Come on people!" It didn't take too much thinking to figure out where his son had learned that expression. It's possible that my own kids may have used that one a couple times as well. Wherever could they have learned it?

But I'd like you to think a little further on this concept in your own life. Try to get in your mind a person that you really admire. It could be one or both of your parents or maybe another person who has had a really big influence in your life. Usually these people are the ones who have taken the time to truly love us in both words and actions. So as you picture in your mind a person who has done this for you, isn't it true that you have made it your goal to try to be like them in many ways? These are the people that we strive to pattern our lives after.

Well just as children who are deeply loved by either their parents or someone else in their lives tend to imitate them and try to be like them, Paul is calling us here to imitate. However, he's not calling us here to imitate people, but rather God himself. And the great thing about God is that he has no bad habits, he makes no mistakes, and he understands completely the best and most effective ways to live our lives and deal with whatever circumstances we face. He truly is the only One in the universe that provides the perfect example to imitate. We are his very own deeply loved children and he has taught us so much about himself in his word and through the human life of Jesus Christ. And he continues to teach us what we need to know for every moment as we draw near to him and learn to follow his example by the power of the Holy Spirit. We're each so very good at imitating others. But Paul is calling us here to learn to imitate the only One who's truly worth imitating in every part of his life and actions.

***Be imitators of God, as beloved children.***

### III. WALK IN LOVE

As we move on to verse 2 of Ephesians chapter 5, Paul tells us that as we imitate God we will learn to walk in love...a lifestyle that is characterized by being kind, tender-hearted and forgiving to each other, sharing with others the same things we have received from our God.

Verse 2 says: ***and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.***

The most perfect example of walking in love that we have to imitate is laid out before us ever so clearly in the life and actions of our Savior Jesus Christ...a life that was characterized by a constant giving up of himself for others.

In order to understand better what it is to walk in love, I want to do a little activity together today. I want you to think a person in your life other than Christ whom you would consider a great example of Christ-like love in the way they've treated you over time. Now if you have that person in your mind, I want some of you to share a sentence or phrase that describes what it was about that person and how they treated you that showed you this kind of love.

WRITE RESPONSES ON A WHITE BOARD

Now I want you to think about Jesus Christ. What are some of the ways that he demonstrated his love for us and for the people that he was surrounded with?

WRITE RESPONSES ON A WHITE BOARD

Well one statement I think we can use to summarize how Jesus showed his love is that he gave himself up in everything he did. And as we think about the people that have loved us and have impacted our own lives, it's the people who have cared enough to give up their time, their convenience, their money, their comfort, their rights, or maybe even their dreams and goals in order to invest in us and spend time with us. To walk in love is to give ourselves up for other people. In order to imitate God and love as Christ loved, we are called to take ourselves out of the center of our life and replace it with God and other people.

And isn't that what it takes to live a life of unrelenting forgiveness and kindness toward other people. To forgive we have to set ourselves and our rights and our feelings aside and make a decision to release another person from the penalty they may deserve, remembering that the same thing has been done for us by God. God has every right to punish us and send us to an eternity in hell for the things we've done and the way we've lived our lives, but instead he chose to give himself up in order to save us from that fate and bring us into relationship with

him. Now he calls us to do the same by giving up ourselves and our rights for the sake of others, showing them the love of Christ and pointing them to the only source of true everlasting life.

And when we do this and learn to walk in love, imitating our Savior Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that we become a fragrant aroma that draws others to the life that only Jesus can offer. Just as Jesus Christ giving himself up as an offering and a sacrifice to God was a fragrant aroma to God, when we give ourselves up for others we also become a fragrant aroma that draws others into life everlasting.

This concept is so clearly outlined for us in 2nd Corinthians 2, verses 14 to 16:

***14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.***

Paul is calling us to learn how to give ourselves up for others, ***and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*** When we live our lives this way we will be so very different from the world around us and God will use us to draw many into his kingdom.

#### IV. HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IMMORALITY, IMPURITY OR GREED

This brings us to verse 3 in our passage today we're Paul introduces a contrast to a lifestyle of walking in love. This lifestyle that is the complete opposite of walking in love is any lifestyle that involves immorality, impurity or greed. Paul says, ***“But do not let immorality, or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints...”***

So what's immediately clear here in verse three is that there should not even be a hint of immorality, impurity or greed in our lives as God's saints. None of these things should even be named among us. Each of these activities or attitudes are completely inconsistent with our new self and our new identity as God's very own beloved children.

Now immorality, according to the biblical definition of the Greek word, *porneia*, is illicit sexual intercourse. Immorality basically covers any sex that occurs outside of a biblical marriage between one man and one woman. Sex is a beautiful and God ordained expression of love and oneness within marriage. However, all other acts of sexual intercourse are considered immorality, including sex before marriage, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, sex with animals, or sex with close relatives. God's saints should never be involved in immorality and if they are it must stop and be followed by true heart repentance. God calls us as his saints out of sin and we can't have a healthy relationship with him as long as we're living in it.

Impurity on the other hand is defined as uncleanness in Scripture and can be used to describe both physical uncleanness and moral uncleanness. In the moral sense it indicates lustful, luxurious, wasteful or extravagant living and can also apply to impure motives, such as selfish ambition. I get a picture in my mind a lifestyle that's lived for material things or selfish wants...a lifestyle that's really built on the worship of anything other than God. A life impurity is a life lived by finding our joy and fulfillment in what the world offers rather than in God. It's the life of the old self.

Now based on that definition of impurity, greed is closely related. Greed is something we're all quite familiar with and is basically an insatiable, selfish desire for more and more and more and often involves longing for or coveting things that other people have. And when it all boils down, covetousness is idolatry, as we'll see shortly in verse 5. To covet is to worship something other than God, and when we worship dead and powerless things we walk into the only things they can provide: emptiness and hopelessness and death.

And as we think about what immorality, impurity and greed have in common, we realize that they all flow out of putting ourselves and our wants and desires at the center of our life. They all bring harm to the people around us and are the exact opposite of what God has shown us is right and good through his word and his example. To participate in these things is to remain in our old self and live just like the world around us who don't know Christ.

You see God is turning our lives as his children upside down, which is really right side up. The world and Satan teaches us to live with ourselves at the center. God teaches us to put him at the center and other people above us. This is loving God and other people: giving ourselves up for them and thinking not only of ourselves, but of God's glory and the needs of other people above our own. This is why Paul says to us in Romans 13, verses 8 to 10:

***8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.***

Immorality, impurity and greed are the complete opposite of loving our neighbor, and as God's beloved children we should have absolutely nothing to do with anything that harms other people or our own relationship with our God.

#### V. REPLACE FILTHY AND FOOLISH CONVERSATION WITH THANKSGIVING

This brings us to verse 4 of our passage: ***And there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.***

Now when I used to read this verse I wondered if we weren't allowed to have fun anymore. It sounded like all silliness and joking were out.

Does anyone here like to laugh? Have you ever laughed so hard that it started hurting? There's something refreshing about really getting a good laugh that is so funny it eventually starts hurting.

Well we know that God created laughter and that he has a sense of humor. Verse 4 is not telling us that we can't have fun anymore and life is all seriousness now. It's not telling us that we can't tell jokes or get a kick out of something. What it is telling us is that we shouldn't find our humor in things that God calls sin. Do you watch many non-Christian comedians? What would you say is usually the most popular theme for their jokes? Doesn't it always seem to be some type of sexual humor? The taboo topics always seem to be the funniest don't they?

Well there are three words or phrases used by Paul in verse 4 to describe what we should stay away from in our words and conversation and humor. The first word is filthiness. This word means obscenity and applies to words that are shameful or disgraceful. It can mean cursing, profanity, or talking inappropriately about sexual topics.

Silly talk literally means foolish talking and is from the Greek word, *moros*, meaning foolish, dull or stupid. *Vines* dictionary says that it speaks of more than just idle talk. Instead it is “the ‘talk of fools’ which is foolishness and sin together.” Paul is speaking here of empty and foolish talking about things which we know are wrong and sinful.

And finally, coarse jesting speaks of joking about sexual matters in an amusingly rude or irreverent way. The modern day secular comedian would be the perfect example of this kind of talk.

So as we think about Paul’s guidance here in relation to filthiness, silly talk and coarse jesting, we see that talking inappropriately about sinful activities and finding our humor in them is not fitting for God’s saints. Why would we allow ourselves to make of light of and joke about ungodly things that arouse God’s wrath, as we’ll find out in verse 6?

God has given us enough things in the world to laugh and talk about without having to resort to sexual humor or discussing immoral things that people do. Instead of participating in these types of conversation and humor, we’re called to the giving of thanks.

This phrase, “the giving of thanks,” can seem like a strange choice of words for Paul to use here. Does it mean all of our conversation is just supposed to be filled with thanking God and other people? Is that the only acceptable topic of conversation? Are we not allowed to have humor anymore? Clearly that’s not what Paul is saying here at all. Certainly we are called to live our lives with a constant attitude of gratefulness and thanksgiving for all the blessings God has poured out on us and the new life he’s given us, but Paul is not telling us here that the fun is over and now all we can do is just say thank you over and over again for the rest of our lives.



What Paul is telling us in verses 3 and 4 is that now that God has rescued us from a life of immorality and impurity and selfishness, we should have no part in celebrating or encouraging or even laughing about the sinful things we were rescued from. Immorality, impurity and covetousness are not laughing matters, but rather sinful activities that bring about the very wrath of God. Instead of continuing to participate in them with the world by talking or laughing about them, we should instead separate ourselves from them completely in our actions and speech, being thankful that God has rescued us from them...that we're no longer under the wrath of God because of our participation in them.

#### VI. WHY SAINTS SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IMMORALITY, IMPURITY OR GREED

And this brings us to our final point for today. Why is it so important that saints have absolutely nothing to do with immorality, impurity and greed? The answer to this question is ever so clearly stated in verse 5 and 6 of Ephesians chapter 4:

***5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an 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.***

God's saints should have nothing to do with immorality, impurity and greed because they bring about the very wrath of God. Before we came to Christ, these things were our way of life...our identity. We were immoral, impure and covetous people, self-focused and worshiping everything but God, just like the rest of the world around us. And in that state we were under the wrath of God. We had no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

But now, having placed our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are new creations. Our identity is no longer an immoral, impure and covetous person. We've been called out of that forever and set apart for God and his glory. We've been taken out from under his wrath and have peace with our Creator. We are now God's saints, his beloved children, freed from slavery to sin and filled with his Holy Spirit. As such, why would we ever want to return to or participate in any way with those ways of living that previously put us under the wrath of God?

The question is: do we believe today that immorality, impurity and covetousness deserve the wrath of God? Do we believe they're serious sins that need to be dealt with in our lives and that shouldn't be where we find our humor in life?

Or do we think these are just minor issues that people sometimes struggle with and that God doesn't really care if we're a little greedy, or if we sleep around a bit, or if we enjoy telling dirty jokes, or if we really find most of our joy in the next thing we can buy rather than in him?

## VII. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

My friends, God has called us, as his very own beloved children, out of all forms of immorality, impurity and greed. And he wants us out completely! He's called us, instead, to imitate him by the power of the Holy Spirit and walk out our entire lives in love...giving ourselves up for others rather than using them up to meet our own wants and needs.

This week we're going to be celebrating Christmas and remembering the birth of our Lord, our perfect example of what it means to give ourselves up for others. This giving up of himself has been taking place since before time began, but was demonstrated in a special way for us when he humbled himself and came to earth as a baby to be our Savior. Our God who possesses all power and knowledge and wisdom and needs nothing, chose to humble himself and undergo incredible suffering to rescue us out of sin and bring us into new life and a forever relationship with him.

Let's celebrate him this week and for the rest of our lives and learn to imitate him by leaving the sinful ways of our old self behind, drawing near to him in his word, sharing the daily moments of our lives with him, and learning to consistently rely on his power. As that happens we will become the fragrant aroma of Christ to the people around us that draws them into the same joy and hope and salvation that has been so graciously given to each of us.