

Theme: Imitators of God

Text: Ephesians 4:30-5:2 (EHV)

³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice. ³² Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us. 5:1 Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. ² And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I had a friend in high school who was great at doing impressions. He could imitate people that were on TV and in movies, he could do impressions of some famous singers, he could even do spot on impressions of some of our classmates and teachers. As you can imagine it was endless entertainment having this classmate around. He was constantly making us laugh with his impressions and we were constantly asking him to do them. It wasn't just hilarious to see and hear him do these impressions, it was really impressive! He would not only imitate other people's voices but he could get their cadence down pat and imitate their mannerisms, their facial expressions, and even the way they walked. He really had quite the talent!

I remember listening to an interview with a comedian, who is renowned for doing a number of impressions of famous people, and he talked about just how challenging the process was of doing impressions of people on a professional level. Doing it for a comedy sketch or in a stand-up routine takes talent, yes, but it also takes hours and hours of painstakingly getting their voice, mannerisms, cadence, movements, and facial expressions down. I remember this comedian also talking about how some people are easier to imitate than others. For example, people who have a very distinct type of voice or way of talking are easier to imitate than those who don't.

In our text for today, Paul writes about "imitating" someone who is very difficult to imitate—in fact, because of our sinful nature He is impossible to imitate! Paul writes in verse one of chapter five from our text, **"Therefore, be imitators of God."** That's certainly easier said than done! No amount of talent, or keen observation, or hours of practice, or painstaking attention to detail could ever result in us being able to imitate God perfectly. And yet, these are God's Words to us. He wants us to be imitators of Him in the way we think, in what we say, and in what we do.

Why? It's certainly not for the purpose of making other people laugh! No, that very same verse goes on to tell us the answer, **"Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children" (5:1).** We are God's **"dearly loved children"** whom He has bought at the incredible price of His Son Jesus' own sacrifice on the cross, and made His own through the gift of faith that He has placed in the hearts of each one of us by His Holy Spirit. As His **"dearly loved children"** we don't want to bring shame on our Father's name or **"grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30)** by what we say, think, or do.

On top of not wanting to bring shame upon God and His name, Paul's words in this text also remind us of another very important "why" we should want to be imitators of God: Think of the impact it has on our relationship with others and our Christian witness among those who do not know God, or His Son, our Savior Jesus. In our text he reminds us that our attitudes toward each other should not be filled with **"bitterness," "anger,"** or **"malice," (4:31)** but rather with **"kindness"** and **"compassion" (4:32).** Think of how much better life is in every way when we are not bitter, or hateful, or angry toward the people around us, but rather are kind and compassionate! More importantly, think of how those types of attitudes affect our spiritual health and our Christian witness among other people. If we allow **"bitterness, rage, anger...and malice [hatred]" (4:31)** to dwell in our hearts and fester and boil in our minds, we will be bitter, angry, hateful and unforgiving towards others in our words and actions.

The unbelieving outside world is observing our attitudes, watching our actions and listening carefully to our words whether we like it or not. Many times we are the only experience some of the people in the outside world will ever have with Christ and His Word. The way we live our lives and use our mouths can either re-reflect or de-flect Christ's light. If they don't see us living and speaking in ways that show we live for a greater purpose and serve a loving Savior with our love, how will that influence their thinking about Christ Himself?

Instead, Paul points to two attributes of God in particular that we are to imitate: forgiveness and love. **"Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us" (4:32). "And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:2).** How much forgiveness and how much love does God call us to "imitate" in Him? **"Just as God in Christ has forgiven us," (4:32) and "just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us" (5:2)!**

Wow. How can we possibly imitate that forgiveness and love? We can't. Not perfectly, at least. But take heart, there is good news!

Let's remember that you and I did not become one of God's "**dearly loved children**" (5:1) because our thoughts, words, and actions were so pure that we earned this title for ourselves. No, the complete opposite is true: despite our sinful words, thoughts, and actions God made us His "**dearly loved children**" by His grace through His Son Jesus Christ. Listen again to these words from our text, **"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us. 5:1 Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. ² And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).** Jesus' blood on the cross washed all of our thoughts, words, and acts of darkness away, so that now what we say think and do is seen by God as a "sweet-smelling perfume" because of Christ's "**offering and sacrifice to God**" (5:2). So then, when Paul tells us to "**be imitators of God as his dearly loved children**" he is telling us to be what we already are! We want our words and actions to be fitting for God's "**dearly loved children**" because God, in His grace, made us such through His Son Jesus Christ.

You've probably heard the expression, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Well, as we have been reminded by the Apostle Paul, to "**be imitators of God**" is the sincerest form of forgiving love! As "**His dearly loved children**" let's "imitate" our Father and share that forgiving love of Christ with each other and the world! Amen.