

## **Ephesians 4:30-5:2**

<sup>30</sup>Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice. <sup>32</sup>Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

<sup>5:1</sup>Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **Be Imitators**

### **I.**

“Be Imitators.” That’s what our title slide says. A well-worn phrase from the early 1800's is: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” There is a ring of truth to that, isn’t there?

It can take a lot of work to flatter by imitation. YouTube is a repository filled with examples of imitation. Watch this 9-year-old girl nail the part of a musical legend as she plays his song note-perfect. Watch this 10-year-old boy destroy the drums as he plays exactly the same as a drum legend. Watch this young kid imitate the moves of a sports superstar.

Some people make a career out of imitating others. Comedian Frank Caliendo is one of my personal favorites. So much do I enjoy his voices of various actors and sports figures that when they speak, I hear Frank’s impersonation of them in my head.

Whether we do it formally or not, every human being seeks a role model—someone to imitate. Perhaps we have more than one. Athletes study other athletes who have excelled at their sport. Musicians study the technique others have used who have come before them. Teachers learn from other teachers as they constantly hone their methods of teaching. Students sometimes find themselves attracted to a particular career because they were inspired by the way a teacher taught that one class that really connected with their interests.

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” When someone’s genius really impresses us, we try hard to imitate it.

Of course, the imitation can strike both ways. Sometimes we find ourselves imitating something we’re not so proud of. [play video] The Progressive commercials are so humorous I find myself rewinding to watch them again. Grown children often find themselves doing the very same things their parents did—for better, or for worse.

### **II.**

The Progressive adds illustrate harmless little quirks adults find they have adopted from their parents. Each human being, however, has issues that aren’t so harmless. Paul says: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God... <sup>31</sup>Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice” (Ephesians 4:30-31, EHV).

Easier said than done, Paul. Do you snap at the little irritations of life? The list would be seemingly endless if we tried to itemize them. I might very well miss those that trigger you personally because my list would be different from yours. Think of a few of your own for a moment. I’ll wait.

If you are like I am, you can come up with quite a list. I’m not going to share all of mine

with you; you probably don't want to share yours, either. Perhaps you witnessed some in your parents. They are far less innocuous than the little quirks Progressive ads poke fun at. They are embarrassing. Whether they can be traced to your parents or not, all of them are part of you because sin lives in each one of us.

Some people are better able than others to control the outward reactions to these irritations. Controlling your outbursts is admirable, of course, but does that mean you have done what Paul said? Have you *really* gotten rid of all these things?

The first on Paul's list is bitterness. Perhaps that one is at the top of his list because often there is—at first—no outward reaction to the little irritations of life. Inside, however, bitterness festers and grows like a cancer. As the bitterness boils, it turns into rage. Anger and quarreling result when the bitterness and rage erupt to the surface of life.

No doubt you have heard the quarrels. More than likely you have participated in your fair share. At times the quarrels can become malicious—each party wants nothing less than to bring as much grief as possible to the other.

Paul lists just a tiny sliver of God's Law when he says we are to get rid of these things. This little sliver doesn't leave any of us out of the "guilty" category, however. Paul's words to the Romans once again come to mind: "For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15, EHV). The bitterness and anger Paul tells us to get rid of in today's reading keep coming up again and again, despite the fact that our New Self hates to have those emotions continuously swirling inside.

### III.

Paul doesn't really spend much time or ink on the law. Enough reflection came back at us to get his point across with just that little bit. What Paul concentrates on in these five verses is God's love for us in Christ.

He tells us: "You were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30, EHV) with the Holy Spirit of God. Right away we think of some kind of mark. Livestock are often marked with a brand or an ear tag so it is easy to know who the owner is. Products you buy in the store have the logo of the company emblazoned on them. Just by wearing or using the product, you end up being an advertisement to others about that particular brand. As for you—your brand, or mark, is baptism. You have been identified by the Holy Spirit as God's own dear child. God wants you. You have been sealed for salvation on the day of redemption.

"God in Christ has forgiven us" (Ephesians 4:32, EHV). Here is the heart of the gospel. God knew about all your bitterness and rage and every other little sin that is bubbling and boiling inside you. He knew about the things you would do to "Grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30, EHV), as Paul said when he opened this reading. He knew about those things long before you were born.

Parents don't stop loving their children when they are disobedient. Even when the child is spiteful and hateful, parents still love them. How much more perfect is God's love. Paul calls us God's "Dearly loved children" (Ephesians 5:1, EHV).

From the time of the first sin God knew that people would never be worthy to be called his children. Yet he still loved us. He made his plans from the very beginning. Throughout time he did not leave people without hope as they realized and recognized the problems of their sin.

God sent Jesus. "Christ loved us and gave himself for us" (Ephesians 5:2, EHV). What fuller expression of God's love for us, his children, could there be than that? "For God so

loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, EHV). Jesus, whom the Bible calls God’s only-begotten Son, came and sacrificed himself for us so that we could be called the dearly loved children Paul says that we are.

#### IV.

All that Paul has emphasized about God’s love for us in spite of the fact that we were—and are—sinners, gives us reason to “Be imitators of God as his dearly loved children” (Ephesians 5:1, EHV).

God’s love for us, expressed in the most poignant way imaginable by Jesus sacrificing himself on the cross to bring us the forgiveness we needed, empowers us to live for Jesus. We want to be imitators of God. We want to be, as Luther would say, “Little Christs.”

So “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us” (Ephesians 4:32, EHV). Think about others and their needs as much as you think about yourself. Be willing to offer and give forgiveness to others. Remember to give forgiveness the way Jesus has given *you* forgiveness: even when you didn’t deserve it.

“Walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2, EHV). Imitation is doing. Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself for us. Imitating Jesus by walking in love means being ready and willing to make sacrifices to express your love for others in Christ.

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” The young, budding musicians that populate those YouTube videos spend hours and hours practicing so they can imitate their heroes. Comedians spend hours watching video and learning the quirks that will make their impressions memorable for their target audience. Students who became interested in a career because of an inspiring teacher still have to work hard to achieve success.

Where do you learn what God is all about so you can be an imitator? Start with his Word. Soak it up. Is one hour of worship on Sunday sufficient to be an imitator? Have you absorbed and remembered everything you ever learned from the Bible? Every time I read through a section, I find something new, or something that hits me a little different way than it did the last time. Repetition is the mother of learning. Read and study over and over so that you will continue to grow in your efforts to be imitators. Amen.