

Introduction: Imitate God (5:1)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

This really summarizes neatly the whole point of this passage:
be imitators of God as beloved children.

What does it mean to imitate God?

How can we who are mortal imitate the immortal?
How can we who are sinners imitate the sinless one.

The key is found in the words, “as beloved children.”

Jesus is the beloved Son who has entered into his inheritance.

We are now beloved children because we have been united to him.

Because we participate in Jesus,
therefore, we imitate him.

Imitation is always rooted in participation.

Because you are “in Christ” therefore you are to walk in him.

In chapter 4, Paul emphasized the importance of our “walk.”

This is rooted in chapter 2,
where we hear that once walked in the course of this world,
following the prince of the power of the air,
but now we have been saved by grace, through faith,
and have been recreated in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 4 then explained what this means,

as each of the two main sections of Ephesians 4 both began with a call to “walk”

4:1 – “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”

4:17 – “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do”

You cannot walk like a Gentile – you must walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

And throughout our passage here in chapter 5 Paul returns to the theme of “walking”

in verse 2, “walk in love, as Christ loved us”

in verse 8, “walk as children of light”

in verse 15, “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise.”

So let’s look at each of these:

1. Walk in Love, as Christ Loved Us (5:2-6)

*2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

We saw last time that we are to “be kind to one another,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another [or being gracious to one another]
even as God in Christ forgave you [or was gracious to you].”

Paul is saying that we need to “grace” one another as Christ has graced us.
Our imitation of Christ is rooted in our participation in Christ.

And that is why here Paul goes on to say
walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.
What it means to walk in love is to do what Messiah did for us.
He offered himself as a sacrifice to God.

You might say, “oh, but there is no way that I can offer myself as a sacrifice to God!”
But Paul says,

“walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”
This is what you have been called to do!
You have been called to offer yourself up
as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

In Romans 12 Paul urged us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
Even so, here in Ephesians 5
Paul says that we are called to give ourselves for one another.

And even more, that we should lay down our lives even for our enemies!
Because Christ did not die for his friends,
but while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!

Once again we see that what makes the Christian life distinctive
is not that we are “moral” people;
but rather that we endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

As Chrysostom put it,
“If you suffer for your enemies as a fragrant offering,
you too become an acceptable sacrifice, even if you die.
This is what it means to imitate God.”

But notice how Paul puts it:
“Walk in love.”
Your “walk” refers to your daily life –
your conduct.

The way that you conduct yourselves towards God and towards one another

should be characterized by love.

Paul then traces the boundaries of love in verses 3-6.

These are the things that contradict love:

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Notice the emphasis in these verses on propriety and proper order.

There is no place for sexual immorality in the Christian church.

Coveteousness should not even be named.

It does not belong among the saints – among the “holy ones”.

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

How you speak reflects your heart.

If you are given to coarse jests,

that shows that your heart is drawn in that direction.

And Paul says that what *should* come out of our hearts (and out of our mouths) is thanksgiving.

Jerome comments on this, showing us that not much has changed in the last 1600 years!

“The ‘silly talk’ to which Paul refers occurs

not only among those who tell dirty jokes to get a cheap laugh.

He is also referring to those who put on frivolous airs

and to those who manipulate whoever they are trying to please.

There is another kind of silly talk

that occurs among those reckoned to be the intellectuals of the age who, when disputing on matters of natural science,

imagine that they have fully comprehended the sands of the shore,

the drops of the ocean, the extent of the heavens,

and the minuteness of the earth.”

Why does Paul make such a big deal about this?

Paul is here commenting on Jesus’ words to his disciples

that it is not what goes into a man’s mouth that makes him unclean,

but what comes out of a man’s mouth. (Mark 7:14-23)

What you say reflects your heart,

and so therefore what should be coming forth from your lips

is thanksgiving!

If your heart produces “foolish talk and crude joking”

then your heart is not focused on Jesus!

*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.*

The tenth commandment is “you shall not covet.”

What Paul is saying here in verse 5 is that coveteousness is *really* idolatry.

The reason why you break the 10th commandment is because you have broken the 1st,
because coveteousness is really nothing but idolatry of the heart.

And the one who worships another god besides God
has no place in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Paul started by saying that there was no place in the Christian church
for sexual immorality and coveteousness.

But now he says that the one who chooses coveteousness and sexual immorality
will have no place (no inheritance) in the kingdom of Christ.

These are hard words,
but I dare not empty them of their power,
for Paul says:

*6 Let no one deceive you with empty words,
for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

Some would tell you that Paul is exaggerating.
A little sexual sin is okay!
We all covet – don’t worry about it!

But Paul says that it is precisely because of sexual sin and coveteousness
that God brings wrath/judgment upon the wicked.

Why are they called here the “sons of disobedience”?

Paul is reminding us of the difference between the seed of the woman
and the seed of the serpent.

The sons of disobedience in verse 6 are contrasted with the children of light in verse 8.

2. Walk as Children of Light, Discerning what is Pleasing to the Lord (5:7-14)

7 Therefore do not become partners with them;

*8 for at one time you were darkness,
but now you are light in the Lord.*

You were once darkness.

You were once just like them.
That is why Paul warns against becoming partners with them.
It is all too easy to go back to the old ways –
the partnership with the seed of the serpent.

You cannot go back to the old Gentile way of life.
You cannot return to a life of sin.
You cannot return to the darkness.

But you are now light in the Lord.
You are no longer darkness!
The light of Jesus has taken up residence in you.
As he has been raised from the dead and seated in glory,
so now you have been seated in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*

Notice that Paul does not say, “you have light.”
He does not say that you have sufficient light so that you may avoid these things.
He says you *are* light in the Lord.

You must realize what a stupendous thing that Christ has done!
It is not just that he saved you.
It is not just that he gives you light in order to walk in his ways.

But no, *you* are now light in the Lord.

After all, you have been filled with all the fullness of God –
therefore the life of God – the light of Christ –
shines through you to the nations around you.

The light that is in you shines on the wicked and illumines their darkness.

Therefore, Paul says:

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.

How do you know what is pleasing to the Lord?
Well, if you walk as a child of the light, you will find out!

Paul contrasts the “fruit of light”
with the “unfruitful works of darkness.”
In Galatians Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit
and the works of the flesh.

Here he refers to the fruit of light,
and the unfruitful works of darkness.

*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.

How do the unfruitful works of darkness becomes exposed?

By the light.

When you shine into the darkness as one who *is* light in the Lord,
then the unfruitful works of darkness are exposed for the frauds that they are.

Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,

and arise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

What does Paul mean by “it says”?

Normally this phrase introduces a quotation from the OT.

It is possible that Paul is referring back to Isaiah 60:1-2 –

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,

and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;

but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”

There are several other places in Isaiah that have similar language,

so it is possible that Paul is simply blending together the prophet’s teaching.

It is as if I told you,

“as Isaiah says, the Servant of the LORD will suffer and then enter his glory.”

It is an accurate summary of what “it says” – even though it may not be a direct quote.

But wherever Paul may have gotten this language,
the point is glorious!

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you!”

Here we discover once again how we become light.

It is only when Christ shines upon you that you become light yourself.

John the Little sat at the gate of Scetis every Saturday and Sunday around the year 400

to give counsel to the monks in the desert.
One young monk was worried that he spoke to him too often. He replied,
Go, light a lamp.
He did so.
Bring in some more lamps, and light them from the first one.
Then he asked if the first lamp had dimmed.
No.
So it is with John.
Even if all of Scetis came to see me, they would not separate me from the love of Christ.
So come to me whenever you want, without hesitating.

John understood what Paul meant by “now you are light in the Lord.”
When Christ shines upon you,
then you become light.

What do we do with this?
Paul has commanded us not to walk in our old Gentile ways.
He has urged us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling,
walking in love as Christ loved us,
walking as children of light.

But what does all this mean?

3. Walk as Wise, Understanding the Lord’s Will (5:15-21)

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.

In short, you need wisdom.
You need to make the best use of the time,
literally, “how to redeem the time” because the days are evil.
This is not just a statement of how things were in Paul’s day.

The days are *still* evil!

And you must pay attention to how you walk.
Wisdom is knowing how to live in God’s world.
You may have a lot of knowledge stuck in your head,
but without wisdom you will not know how to redeem the time.

How do you redeem time?
Be diligent in doing what God has said.
Or as one patristic commentator said,
“Do what you have to do with moderation.
This is the will of the Lord.”

And then Paul gives two commands,
one in verse 17, and one in verse 18.

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Understanding God's will is not complicated.

God has said what he demands of you.

What does God require of you but to love justice and do mercy
and walk humbly with your God?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart...

*18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,
but be filled with the Spirit,*

“Do not get drunk, but be filled.”

Paul commands you to be filled with the Spirit.

How do you propose to do that?

The command is something that you cannot accomplish!

Some people seem to think that getting drunk will make them happy.

Paul says that true happiness is found in being filled by the Spirit.

Happiness comes when you submit to God's will
and are filled by his Spirit.

But there is something you can do!

Paul says that the Spirit-filled life is characterized by four things:

*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.

John Chrysostom once asked,

“Do you wish to be happy? Do you want to know how to spend the day truly blessed?

I offer you a drink that is spiritual.

This is not a drink for drunkenness that would cut off even meaningful speech.

This does not cause us to babble. It does not disturb our vision. Here it is:

Learn to sing Psalms!

Then you will see pleasure indeed.

Those who have learned to sing with the Psalms
are easily filled with the Holy Spirit.

But if you sing only the devil's songs

you will soon find yourself filled with an unclean spirit.

It's not clear that Paul is thinking about this singing in the context of public worship.

It would seem from 1 Corinthians 14 that Paul assumed that you would sing in church.

His point here is that in your daily life –
in your daily walk –

you will be “addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”

This means that you need to know psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
well enough to use them in your daily conversation (in your walk).

Note that even while you “address” one another,
(your singing is to encourage and build each other up)
still your heart is fixed on the Lord.

And the one who is filled with the Spirit
will give thanks always and for everything to God the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Always?
For everything?

Yes.
Because when you are filled with the Spirit
you know that you are not the center of the universe.
God has put you in the place where you are for *his* purposes.
And his purpose is to bring everything under the feet of his Son, Jesus Christ,
so that Christ might indeed be all in all.

You may not understand *why* God has brought this trial into your life,
but you give thanks for it because you know that Jesus is Lord,
and he works all things together for the good for those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose.

And therefore, out of reverence for Christ
you submit to one another.

There is no place for arrogance and pride in the church of Jesus Christ.

There is no place for mock humility either!

Genuine submission to one another requires us to be genuine with each other!

Do we submit to one another?
Or do we just play nice?