

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

What's Involved in Actually Imitating God?

Ephesians 5:1-14

1 What's involved in actually imitating God? 2 The word "imitate" in the original language ¹ means to copy. We get our English word "mimeograph" from this word. So, we are to use God as a model for our personal conduct.

The story is told of John Philip Sousa listening to an organ grinder playing his march, "The Stars and Stripes Forever"; but it was being played too slow. So Mr. Sousa came up to the organ, grasped the handle and began cranking it much faster. "That's the way this march is supposed to be played", he remarked as he continued down the street. The organ grinder bowed politely and smiled. The next day there was a sign displayed on his cart, "Pupil of John Philip Sousa"! Many of us think that way when we think about imitating God don't we? Read and obey a Bible passage or put into practice something a Christian says we should do and make that suffice.

¹ μιμέομαι.

Let's look at some of the other scriptures where this word "imitate" is used. ³ In I Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 16, ² Paul urges us to imitate him. ⁴ In I Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 1, ³ we are to imitate the Apostle Paul as he imitates Christ. ⁵ In I Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 6, ⁴ we are to imitate the apostles and the Lord. ⁶ In I Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 14, ⁵ our church is to imitate God's churches in Judea. ⁷ In Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 12, ⁶ rather than be lazy, we are to imitate the faith and patience of those who will inherit God's promises. ⁸

What are the implications of imitating God? ⁹ In Matthew, chapter 16, verse 24 ⁷ and Luke, chapter 9, verse 23, ⁸ Lord Jesus said to those who would come

² I Corinthians 4:16 - Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

³ I Corinthians 11:1 - Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

⁴ I Thessalonians 1:6 - You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . .

⁵ I Thessalonians 2:14 - For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus.

⁶ Hebrews 6:12 - We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

⁷ Matthew 16:24 - If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

⁸ Luke 9:23 - If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

after Him that they would have to deny themselves, take up a cross and follow (imitate) Him. Unless you do, Jesus said, ¹⁰ you can't be a disciple ⁹ or even ¹¹ be worthy of the Lord ¹⁰.

I remember a television commercial some years ago. A man and his young son are sitting on their couch. The dad crosses his legs. The son sees his dad do that and crosses his legs the same way. The dad leans back and rests his head against the couch. The son does the same thing. The camera pans in on the couple as the son looks like a small carbon copy of his dad as they sit there together. Then the dad pulls out a cigarette and lights up as the son looks on. The inference in this anti-smoking commercial is that when the boy comes of age, he will get into the same habit! It's natural to imitate your dad if you respect him.

⁹ Luke 14:27 - And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

¹⁰ Matthew 10:38 - . . . and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

God wants you to imitate Him! So ¹² what are we to imitate and how?

Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 1 through 14, tell us how. ¹³ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ¹¹ ¹⁴

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those

¹¹ v1-2.

who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. ¹² ₁₅

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹³

This passage of scripture answers the question "What's involved in actually imitating God?" very nicely. It describes what you should stay away from and what you should imitate. ¹⁶

¹² v3-7.

¹³ v8-14.

I. Stay Away from Imitating the World - the Sons of Disobedience

The first answer is to stay away from imitating the world; the sons of disobedience. ¹⁷ So, what are some of the attitudes of the world we should stay away from? ¹⁸ Verse 3, **But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.** ¹⁹

Sexual immorality ¹⁴, means improper sexual intercourse. We get our English word "fornication" from this word. Adultery is fornication among married people. The attitude here is ²⁰ "I want pleasure no matter who it hurts". ²¹

The next word is impurity ¹⁵. It means uncleanness. This is the catch all word for corruption of your body and loose morals in general. This is the word used in the Jewish religious system for unclean animals. As

¹⁴ πορνεία.

¹⁵ ἀκαθαρσία.

these animals were not accepted for sacrifice, so unclean thoughts, talk and conduct have no place in God's presence. ²² The attitude here is "I don't care about the condition of my physical body or mind even if they were created in God's image to be used as His temple". ²³

The next word is greed ¹⁶. This word means covetousness, the desire to always have more. ²⁴ The attitude here is "I'll be satisfied only when I get to the top!" The problem here is what's the top? To be a billionaire? How about the beggar who longed to eat the scraps that fell for the dogs from the rich man's table ¹⁷. Both he and the rich man died. The rich man was in torment forever watching the beggar enjoy the companionship of Father Abraham. In this instance the lowliest beggar who has the Lord could be "on top!" ²⁵

¹⁶ πλεονεξία.

¹⁷ Luke 16:20-25.

Verse 4 shows us how these attitudes can be developed. **Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.** ²⁶

The first practice you should avoid is obscenity ¹⁸. This is literally filthy talk. Try to keep from being exposed to this as much as possible. In the military Linda and I were exposed to this so much. It's hard to keep from having a filthy mind when you listen to filthy talk all the time. ²⁷

The next practice should be not to engage in foolish talking ¹⁹. In the original language this is a compound word. The first four letters is where we get our English word "moron". The second part of the word is the common term for speech as the expression of an idea. This is literally "moron talk". This is what you allow yourself to say.

¹⁸ αἰσχρότης.

¹⁹ μωρολογία.

I've noticed that lately commentators on television are beginning to expand their vocabulary with swear words. Have you noticed what's going on in some television commercials lately? It's starting to get bad!

I routinely run the track at the Navy Base field house and listen to the conversations of servicemen in the locker room. Some of the younger ones, particularly, have such foul mouths that their conversations don't make much sense. There are so many expletives thrown into a sentence that you can't understand what they are really trying to say. Although they may believe they are exhibiting manhood, they certainly are not making a positive impression on anyone within listening distance. It's truly "moron speech". It's becoming more commonly accepted in our culture. As a Christian, avoid this kind of talk! ²⁸

The last bad attitude developer in this list is course joking ²⁰. These are jokes that are aimed at getting people to laugh at immorality or showing humor at

²⁰ εὐτραπέλια.

someone else' expense. They are really not funny. Notice the sitcom "comedies" lately? ²⁹

What does God think about you exhibiting these attitudes and behaviors? Notice verse 5, **For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** ³⁰ This verse says you become an idolater. That's a person who chooses to worship idols rather than God! Notice the next phrase ³¹, you can't inherit the kingdom. ³²

How can you stay away from these attitudes and behaviors? ³³ Verse 3 says that **there must not be even a hint** of this kind of attitude and behavior. In fact the King James Version translation of this phrase says **it ought to not even once be named among you!** Don't even talk like that! ³⁴ Verse 6 tells us not to be deceived **with empty words** that those in the world talk with. ³⁵ Verse 7 warns not even to **be partners with them.** In others words, don't imitate that behavior!

So - that's what you should not do. What should we do, then? ³⁶

II. Focus on Imitating the Lord - the Son of God

Focus on imitating the Lord, the Son of God! This passage shows you two ways. ³⁷

You can imitate the Lord by demonstrating His love. Verse 2, . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³⁸ He loved you enough to live a sinless life ²¹. ³⁹ He also loved you enough to volunteer to go to the cross for you. When you follow His example of expressing love to others, you become like Him! ⁴⁰

You can also imitate the Lord by demonstrating His light. Verse 8, For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. ⁴¹

²¹ Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

This light produces good fruit. Notice verses 9 and 10, . . . for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth and find out what pleases the Lord. Being a Christian is not just knowing what is good, it's doing it! ⁴² James, chapter 2, verses 15 through 17 puts it this way, Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ⁴³

This light proves what is acceptable to the Lord ²². When a commercial buyer buys clothing material, he holds it up to the light to see the flaws. You need to continually hold your life up to Jesus to see where the flaws are. ⁴⁴ Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve

²² v9-10 - . . . for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth and find out what pleases the Lord.

what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. ²³ ₄₅

And finally, this light exposes what is evil. This is seen in verses 11 through 14, Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” ⁴⁶ The Lord put it this way, This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. ²⁴

²³ Romans 12:2.

²⁴ John 3:19-21.

When Linda and I lived in El Paso, Texas, we visited Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. After touring the famous caves, we also adventured out to a newly discovered cavern. Escorted in by a team of forest rangers we came to an area that was completely dark. After a few minutes one of the rangers struck a match. That little flame nearly blinded us! Our eyes had become so accustomed to the dark that when that event occurred it took several seconds for us to get our sight back. That flame in that environment gave me an unforgettable experience!

When a pure lifestyle is turned on in the presence of corrupt ones, it tends to influence the corrupt ones to become purer! To get evil out of a person, you expose him to the Holy Spirit in you. Dwight L. Moody once said, "How do you get the air out of a bottle? Pour water in it!"

When you are in the process of actually imitating God, neat things happen. So let's get with it like verse 14

**promises ⁴⁷, Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you!**

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