

Learning to Be Like God
Ephesians 4:32-5:5
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INTRODUCTION

1. I would like to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to Ephesians chapter 5.
2. We are embarking on a new chapter as we return to our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
3. Read Ephesians 5:1-5.
4. We have just completed chapter 4 where Paul instructs the Ephesians on living the new life.
5. He said they were to change:
 - a) from lying to speaking truth (v.25)
 - b) from unrighteous anger to righteous anger (vv.26-27)
 - c) from stealing to sharing (v.28)
 - d) from unwholesome words to edifying words (vv.29-30)
 - e) from fleshly behavior to supernatural virtues (vv.31-32)
6. As we look at chapter 5, he continues his thought from verse 32 of chapter 4 by stating that they are to ***imitate God***.

I. Imitate God (4:32-5:1)

Paul begins chapter 5 with the word “Therefore” (oun) which refers us back to the last part of chapter 4, particularly verse 32.

He tells the Ephesians to “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Then in verse 1 of chapter 5, he says to “be” or “become imitators of God, as beloved Children.”

The word “imitators” is the Greek word *mimetai* where we get our English word *mimic*. It refers to “someone who copies specific characteristics of another person” (John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 194).

We are to mimic God. Jesus stated it this way in Matthew 5:48, “Therefore you are to be perfect, *as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”

Peter also said, “But like the Holy One who called you, *be holy yourselves also* in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’ (1 Peter 1:15-16).

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he urged them in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

When he wrote to the Thessalonians, he said that they “also became imitators of us and of the Lord...so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thess.1:6-7).

Since we are “children of God,” we are to imitate Him. John said in 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that

when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

“The more you know God the more you’ll know what He wants you to be, so the primary pursuit of any believer is to know God (Phil.3:10). That can be achieved only when we study God’s character as it is revealed in Scripture.

Please note that imitating God isn’t just a New Testament principle. As far back as Leviticus 11:45 God said, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.

Imitating God may be easy to discuss, but it’s difficult to do. In fact, you can’t do it in your own strength” (John MacArthur, Sermon Transcript, Walking in Love, Pt.1, 2).

What characteristics does Paul want his readers to follow? Kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and love.

First we are to imitate God:

A. In Kindness (4:32a)

1. God is kind

a) It is His nature

- (1) Ps.106:7 says He is “abundant in kindness.”
- (2) Ps.145:17 says He is “kind in all His deeds.”
- (3) Rom.2:4 speaks of the “riches of His kindness” that unbelievers depise.

- b) It is the motive by which He saves sinners
 - (1) Paul continues his thought in Romans 2 by stating in verse 4 that “the kindness of God leads you to repentance.”
 - (2) He told Titus that we were saved in His kindness

Titus 3:4-5 says, “But when *the kindness of God our Savior* and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

- 2. God is kind to everyone (even those who refuse His kindness)

Jesus said in Luke 6:35, ““But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; *for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.*”

- 3. We are to be kind
 - a) Eph.4:32 begins by exhorting “Be kind to one another.”
 - b) We are not just to be kind to those whom we love but also to those who hate us (Rom.12:17-21)
 - c) We are to put on “kindness” according to

Col.3:12

- d) That will occur when we are filled with the Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is “kindness.”
- e) Even the Pastor is exhorted to be “kind to all,” which would include those who are unruly

2 Tim.2:24-26 says, “ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but ***be kind to all***, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

B. In Compassion (4:32b)

1. Compassion is also God’s nature

- a) He is “full of compassion” (Jas.5:11)
- b) Ps.25:6 says, “Remember, O Lord, Your ***compassion*** and Your lovingkindnesses, For they have been from of old.”
- c) David appealed to God’s compassion when he confessed his sin with Bethsheeba in Ps.51:1

He said, “Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your ***compassion*** blot out my transgressions.”

- d) After receiving God's compassion, David told his soul not to forget it in Ps.103:1-4

“Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, ***Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.***”

The NASB reads, “Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion.”

- e) Verse 13 says that God has compassion on those who fear Him

Ps.103:13 says, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has ***compassion*** on those who fear Him.”

- f) God's compassion is seen when we confess and turn from our sin

(1) God said to Israel in Zech.10:6, “I will strengthen the house of Judah, And I will save the house of Joseph, And I will bring them back, Because I have had ***compassion*** on them; And they will be as though I had not rejected them, For I am the Lord their God and I will answer them.”

(2) Prov.28:13 says, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will

find *compassion*.”

- g) Compassion is related to kindness and forgiveness

When God sent Jonah to preach to the Ninevites about God’s judgment on them because of their sin, the people of Nineveh took notice and repented. God told Jonah later in 4:11, “Should I not have *compassion* on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

2. We are to imitate God in His compassion

- a) Eph.4:32 says we are to be “tender-hearted.” That’s referring to compassion.
- b) Col.3:12 includes “compassion” in the list of things we are to put on.

C. In Forgiveness (4:32c)

The phrase in 4:32, “forgiving each other,” is “a readiness to pardon offenses, to overlook personal wrongs against oneself, and to harbor no desire for retaliation” (MacDonald).

“The key to walking in love is forgiveness...[it is] the greatest measuring rod of love in the life of a Christian” (John MacArthur, Sermon transcript, Walking in Love, Pt.1, 3).

If I truly love you, not only will it be manifested by my

kindness and compassion but also by my forgiveness.

1. According to 4:32 “God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

This verse refers to Ephesians back to the cross of Christ.

Through Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf, God has pardoned their sins.

2. God is a God of forgiveness

Someone phrase it like this: He is a God of second chances!

That’s what He has done for all of us. He gave us a second chance.

- a) When Moses wanted to see God’s glory (Ex.33:18), God told him that He could not see His face, “for no man can see Me and live” (v.20), so God placed him in the clef of a rock and caused His glory to pass by so that he could see “My back but My face shall not be seen” (v.23).

Ex.34:6-7 says, “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, *compassionate* and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in *lovingkindness* and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who *forgives* iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the

grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.””

- b) Ps.86:5 says, “For You, Lord, are good, and **ready to forgive**, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.”
- c) Ps.130:3-4 says, “ If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But **there is forgiveness with You**, That You may be feared.

3. We are to imitate God in forgiveness

Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

- a) Eph.4:32 says we are to be “forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
- b) Col.3:13 says that we are to bear “with one another, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

Paul concludes verse 1 by saying that we are to become “imitators of God, as beloved children.”

John MacArthur said, “The Christian has no greater calling or purpose than that of imitating his Lord (see notes on 3:16, 19). That is the very purpose of sanctification, growing in likeness to the Lord while serving Him on earth (cf. Matt. 5:48). The Christian life is designed to reproduce godliness as modeled by the Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose image believers have been recreated through the new birth (cf. Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). As God's dear

children, believers are to become more and more like their heavenly Father (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16)” (The MacArthur Study Bible: Ephesians 5:1).

II. Imitate Christ (5:2)

“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.”

A. By Walking Worthy

We have already seen the word “walk” (peripateo) which occurs 7 times in Ephesians.

Chapter 4 began by Paul begging the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

“The first three chapters of Ephesians deal with doctrine, and the last three with the practical ramifications of that doctrine” (MacArthur).

The practical section begins as Paul says in 4:1, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

“The Christian walk or lifestyle is the emphasis of the last three chapters. It is to be a worthy walk.

What does the worthy walk involve? Walking in humility (4:1-3), unity (4:4-16), newness (4:17-32), love (5:1-7), light (5:8-14), wisdom (5:15-17), the Spirit (5:18; 6:9), and spiritual warfare (6:10-24).

At the heart of the discussion comes the phrase, 'be imitators of God' (5:1). That ties all the elements together.

Since God humbled Himself in Christ, we are to be humble. Since the Trinity is three yet one, be one with other believers. Since God is different--set apart from this evil world--be different. Since God is love, be love. Since God is light, be light. Since God is wise, be wise. Since God is spiritual, be directed by spiritual principles. And since God is the victor over Satan, we are to have victory over him as well" (John MacArthur, Sermon transcript, Walking in Love, Pt.1, 2).

B. By Walking in Sacrificial Love (v.2)

The love that Paul refers to here is agape love. This is "self-sacrificial love."

1. This is the kind of love we are to have toward our neighbors (Who are our neighbors? Lk.10:30ff)

Rom.13:8-10 says, "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."

2. This is the kind of love that we are to have toward one another

2 John 5 says, "Now I ask you, lady, not as though I

were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.”

3. Jesus is our example or model

Paul says to the Ephesians, “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 Lord is the supreme example in His self-sacrificing love for lost sinners (4:32; Rom. 5:8-10). He took human sin upon Himself and gave up His very life that men might be redeemed from their sin, receive a new and holy nature, and inherit eternal life” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*: Ephesians 5:2).

F. B. Meyer said, “In love so measureless, so reckless of cost, for those who were naturally so unworthy of it, there was a spectacle which filled heaven with fragrance and God's heart with joy” (Quoted by William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*: Ephesians 5:2).

- a) Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- b) John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

4. We are to follow His example

1 Pet.2:21-24 says, “For you have been called for

this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, *leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps*, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

III. Reject Sin (vv.3-4)

Paul interjects a conjunction “but” to give them a contrast that they are not to follow.

He says, “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.”

In verses 3-5, Paul gives 6 vices that are to be rejected.

The first is:

A. Immorality” (v.3a)

This is translated “fornication” in the AV.

It is the Greek word *porneia* which refers to “illicit sexual activity” (Fritz Rienecker, *The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*).

1. Paul told the Thessalonians that “the will of God” was “your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess.4:3-4).
2. He told the Corinthians to “flee immorality” (1 Cor.6:18).
3. As believers we are to “consider the members of [our] earthly body as dead to immorality” Colossians 3:5 says.

B. Impurity (v.3b)

This is translated “uncleanness” in the AV.

It refers to “anything that is unclean and filthy. Jesus used the word to describe the rottenness of decaying bodies in a tomb (Mat.23:27). The other 10 times the word is used in the NT it is associated with sexual sin.

It refers to immoral thoughts, passions, ideas, fantasies, and every other form of sexual corruption” (John MacArthur, Ephesians, 200).

1. Paul said in Romans 6:19 that “just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.”
2. Going back to 1 Thess.4, in regards to sexual sin, he told them in verse 7 that “God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”

C. Greed (v.3c) or “covetousness” (AV)

This word (pleonexia) refers to a “greedy desire to have more” (Wuest). It is “always used in a bad sense” (Vine) and is translated “covetousness” or “idolatry.”

1. Proverbs 15:27 says, “He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.”
2. Paul included “greed” in Colossians 3:5 as one of those members that we are to put to death.

He says, “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

He says that “immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

William MacDonald says, “It goes without saying that they should never have to be named as having been committed by believers. They should not even be discussed in any way that might lessen their sinful and shameful character. There is always the greatest danger in speaking lightly of them, making excuses for them, or even discussing them familiarly and continually. Paul accents his exhortation with the phrase, as is fitting for saints. Believers have been separated from the corruption that is in the world; now they should live in practical separation from dark passion, both in deed and word” (Believers Bible Commentary: Ephesians 5:3).

They are “not to speak of doing such a thing, let it not be even so much as mentioned among you” (Kenneth Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek NT, 121).

Paul gives the remaining 3 vices in verse 4:

D. Filthiness (v.4a)

Gr.aischrotes, refers to “obscenity, shameless, immoral conduct” (Wuest). This is “all that is contrary to purity” (Vine). It can also refer to “any talk that is degrading or disgraceful” (MacArthur).

1. Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 7:1 to “cleanse [yourselves] from all *filthiness* of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (NKJV).
2. James called for his readers to put “aside all *filthiness* and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (Jas.1:21).

E. Silly Talk (v.4b) or “foolish talking” (AV)

This is the Greek word morologia, “foolish talk” (Rienecker). It comes from moros, which means, “dull or stupid” and lego, “to speak.”

“It is stupid talk, talk only befitting someone who is intellectually deficient. It is sometimes referred to as low obscenity, foolish talk that comes from the drunk or the gutter mouth. It has no point except to give an air of dirty worldliness” (MacArthur, Ephesians, 201).

This word only occurs here in the NT.

F. Coarse Jesting (v.4c)

Gr.eutrapelia, “carries the idea of quickly turning

something that is said or done—no matter how innocent—into that which is obscene or suggestive” (MacArthur).

“Instead of being involved in immorality or filthy speaking, the believer’s mouth should be involved in giving of thanks” (MacArthur, Ephesians, 201).

IV. Heed the Warning (v.5)

Paul concludes with a warning to those whose “walk” or lifestyle is that which he has mentioned in verses 3-4.

He says, “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.”

If verses 3-4 describe your life, you have “no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

In other words, you’re not saved.

He says, “For this you know” to indicate that they have heard they are to repent of these things and never have them named among them now that they are saved.

Albert Barnes says, “Be assured of this. The object here is to deter from indulgence in those vices by the solemn assurance that no one who committed them could possibly be saved” (Barnes Notes).

William MacDonald says, “There is no room for doubt as to God’s attitude toward immoral persons: they have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. This verdict is in sharp contrast to the world’s current attitude that sex offenders are sick and need psychiatric treatment. Men say

immorality is a sickness; God calls it sin. Men condone it; God condemns it. Men say the answer is psychoanalysis; God says the answer is regeneration” (Believer’s Bible Comm.).

Paul used similar words in 1 Cor.6:9-10 and Gal.5:19-21.

CONCLUSION

1. So you are to be an *imitator of God and Christ*.
2. You are to *reject sin* and *heed the warning*.
3. Pattern your life according to God’s character. Hate what He hates and love what He loves. Constantly pursue His character in your life.
4. Let’s pray.