

Imitate God

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 5, this is the reading of God's word. verses 1 to 21. Let there be thanksgiving.

In the Lord.

And Christ will shine on you. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Submitting to one another. Out of reverence for Christ. This is God's holy word. We are working our way. This month. The next month through the back half of Ephesians.

So in the first half of the book of Ephesians. Paul is answering the question. How do you become a Christian? And what does it mean to be a Christian? Saved by grace he says. In the second half of Ephesians.

[2 : 25] Ephesians 4 to 6. He's talking about how you respond to that. So what does the church do? What does a Christian do? What does the Christian life look like? So that's the back half. You got to get that order correct.

So if you flip those around. You lose Christianity. If you start with. What must I do? To be saved. You lose it. But instead Paul says. By grace you've been saved.

Now go and live like this. And so that's what we've been looking at. A different answer to that question every week. The biggest answer we've given so far. That Paul has given us is.

What does a Christian do? What does the church do? We grow. We seek spiritual maturity. We don't stay baby Christians. We seek to change. To have deep transformative change.

From the inside out. This week. One new answer. Same arena. An outrageous answer. Really that he gives us. Chapter 5 verse 1.

[3 : 20] He says. What does the church do? What does a Christian do? Imitate God. Seems outrageous at first. Imitate God. That's what he says. Is the job of the church. The job of God's people.

And so we have this enormous calling here. We are called to be imitators. Of the living God. In this world. And so that means. To put it really briefly. It's just to say. If you're a believer today.

Your calling. Is to be a living reflection. Of the character of God. In the city. Wherever God has put you. And in a city like ours.

That very well may mean. That you might be. The only. Grace transformed. Reflection. Of the character of God. That a person in our city. Might meet at any time in their life.

And so the calling is enormous. And you can. Think back to Genesis chapter 1. Where. God. Makes us. And says. Now you're made. In my image. And so. Paul's not saying anything too crazy.

[4 : 17] Because he's picking up. On the Old Testament. And he's saying. You were made in the image of God. Now go into the world. And image God. Or be an imitator of God. It's the same idea here. So let's think about it. What a big calling.

Let's first think about. The nature of imitation. What does it mean? And then. I'll just give you. Two ways. There's many more than two. But just two today. Ways that Paul calls us. To imitate very practically.

So first. What is the nature of imitation? What does imitation of God really mean? All right. So he says it in Ephesians 5. Verse 1. Be an imitator of God. That's the call.

The Greek word there is mimesis. We know this word in English. Because it's the background to the English word mimic. So to mimic. Or to follow a copy or a model of something. So he's saying literally.

Model your life after God's character. Model your life after God. Mimesis. Now we all need models in our lives. We all have models in our lives that we follow. And I wonder.

[5 : 14] I've asked this question here before. I wonder who the biggest models. Or another Greek word is icon for image. The icons of Western history are.

If you think about. If you were to write a list of the icons. The great models of what it means to be. Do life well. In the modern Western history. Who would they be? Here's the list I thought of. Elvis Presley.

Princess Diana. Michael Jordan. Lionel Messi. Taylor Swift. Maybe Ronaldo. Depending on the debate. Right. So in other words.

If you want to have an icon. Or a model. Or an image. A memetic icon. Somebody to copy. And you're trying to be a great footballer. Go and copy Messi. Right.

Try. Try. God. But if you're. If you just want to be human. If you want to be a human being. The way God made you to be. Paul says. Memetic.

[6 : 08] Modeling. How to follow. Is to imitate the living God. That's the. That's the way to be human. To follow God. To imitate God. And. What does he mean by that?

Boy. You think about that. And you say. God is. Infinite. Eternal. Unchangeable. And is being wisdom. Goodness. Power. Say. He's infinite. Eternal. How in the world am I to imitate him? And that's why he gives us the next couple of lines. In verse one. So right after that in verse one. He says. Imitate God. How? As a beloved child. As beloved children. And so he immediately qualifies it.

And says. Follow and imitate God. Like a child. Imitates their dad. A great dad. Or a great mom. And so. We think of. Who are the most important models.

In human life. They are parents. Parents to children. Are by far the most important models. And when you think about. How it works. When you're a child. And you're living with your parents. You are with them 24-7.

[7 : 04] Basically. You're living in the same house. You're dwelling together. And so he qualifies it. He says. Of course. You are not infinite. Eternal. And unchangeable. And you're being. Wisdom. Goodness. And power. But.

Follow God. Like you follow a great father. And part of that is. Is abiding. And dwelling. With God. Like you dwell. With your parents. In the same home.

And so one way to say this. Is what he means. Is that. Imitating God. Starts with. A never ending relationship. Of being in God's presence. So another way to talk about imitation.

Is to say this. You're a Christian. You are. You are standing. Quorum Deo. All the time. What is that? That Latin word. Before the face of the living God. At all moments. At all times. You're in God's presence.

And. When you relate to God. As a father. As a father. As a child. To a father. You're in his loving presence. All the time. And that's. The arena. When you can start to become more like him.

[7 : 59] When transformation becomes possible. For the first time. Now he qualifies it again. Verse two. You say. Okay. I need a little more than that. And Paul comes. To the rescue.

In verse two. Because in verse two. He comes. And says. Walk in love. So that's just a parallel. Imitate God. Slash. Parallel concept. Walk in love. How?

As Christ loved the church. As Christ loved you. By giving himself up for you. As a fragrant offering.

So where does he take us? He says. What is the imitation of God? It is. To look. At the moment.

Christ gave himself up. As a. Fragrant offering to God. He's talking about the cross. And so here. Here. For two thousand years. The church has been talking about this concept.

We don't talk about. About it very much. In our day. But here. He transfers the idea of. Imitate God. Means. The imitation of Christ. So the church used to write.

[8 : 53] Tons of books. People in the church. About the imitation of Christ. It's a concept. We don't hold on to. As closely anymore. But we need to recover it. And here it is. What does it mean to imitate God? It means to imitate Jesus Christ.

And what does Paul say? He says. That means take up a cruciform life. So he takes us directly to the cross. And says. Your life should be modeled. After the cross itself. And you say.

Rightly. I am not the redeemer of the world. If I go to the cross. I cannot save anybody's sins. No. What does he mean? I think. What he means is. The next book of the Bible.

Over Philippians 1. And he says. Take on the mind of Christ. That when he. When he went to the cross. When he set his eyes on Jerusalem. He. Counted others more significant than himself.

So in other words. He's talking here about humility. And he's saying. To imitate Jesus Christ. Is to imitate God. And to imitate Jesus. Is to abide in his presence. All the time. Until you become as humble as Jesus is.

[9 : 53] So that's the imitation of Christ. It's the never ending mindset. That you're standing in God's presence. Right now. Right now. And at all times in your life.

Never compartmentalizing your life. Until you become as humble as Jesus is. Now we know that that will not take place. Until glorification. But he's calling us.

As the ethic. The longing for our lives. Imitate Christ. Till the end of your days. It's an enormous calling. It's a giant calling. He says. Let the light of Christ shine through you.

Into the city that you've been put in. You are. Every Christian in this room. Is literally called to refract. And reflect. The light of Jesus Christ's humility. Into the city. Wherever God has placed you. It's a big calling. Now. I mentioned that for the past 2,000 years. People have been talking about the imitation of Christ. And if you were to go read the literature about it. One of the things you'll find.

[10 : 49] Is that quite often. The church. Different cultures. Different traditions. Different nations. Have thought of the imitation of Christ. In a one-sided way. Not as multifaceted.

As it really needs to be. And so. Some theologians will talk about. How sometimes we've taken this command. Imitate Christ. And we've talked only. About being a martyr.

A monk. A mystic. Or a modernist. All right. So. Four ways to imitate Christ. People have tried in the past. First. A martyr. A martyr. They said. Look. What's a martyr? A martyr is somebody who risks it all.

Who goes radical. Who becomes. Quote. A fool for Christ. And takes big risks. You know. The missionary that goes to North Korea. And so. Some have said. Look. If you're not.

If you're not. Literally risking your physical life for Jesus. Regularly. Are you really imitating Christ? Because that's what he did. Right. He gave his life away. That's the martyr. Thought.

[11 : 45] Of imitation. But then others have talked about. The monk. So Jesus sometimes separated himself. And he went out into the desert. And he prayed. Right. And he needed that rejuvenative experience.

Of solitude. And some have said. Look. Am I really imitating Christ? If I'm still living as part of the city. And engaging in the city. In Babylon. As the Bible puts it.

Could I really be imitating Christ? In that environment. And others have said. No. The right way to imitate Christ. Is as a mystic. And so you should live the Christian life. Like Jesus did. In deep communion.

John 17. Deep communion with the father. Searching for spiritual experience. After spiritual experience. After spiritual experience. Trying to refill. Through these great mountaintop moments. Of spiritual experiences. Are you really imitating. If you don't have that right now. In your life. And then the modernist. Comes in the 19th century. And says. All that's thrown out.

[12 : 38] Because supernaturalism is fake. And the only thing we can do with Jesus. Is look at him as a great example. So he's a great moral teacher. So the real imitation of Christ.

Is just to be like him morally. And nothing else. Now look. I don't have time today. To work through all those again. And why they're one sided. But let me just say this. Jesus Christ. Life.

Person. And work. Is too rich. Too deep. Too profound. Too wide. Too far. Too much breadth. Too much depth. To ever capture. The imitation of Christ.

In one single concept. Too multifaceted. He's a diamond. And that means. The imitation of Christ. Actually comes down. To something very important.

That sometimes. We've missed in the past. If we miss this. All of these are in danger. If they miss one big point. The Bible says. Jesus Christ. Can only be your model.

[13 : 32] You can only imitate him. If he is first. Your savior. Jesus Christ. Can only be your model. Of life. If he has first become your redeemer.

Your savior. Your messiah. And you can't get those in reverse. He has to be your redeemer. In order for you to image him. Into the world. And we can't get it backwards.

It says that he gave himself up for us. As a fragrant offering. And then go. And imitate Christ. The gospel precedes transformation. And we can't get it backwards.

Put it like this. Give me an illustration. Imitation. Modeling. The call here. The call here. Is to grow into a mirror. You are a mirror.

Think about it like that. You are a mirror. And if you take a mirror. And you put a mirror. In front of anything. That mirror reflects. Whatever it's standing in front of. Right? So you're a mirror.

[14:27] And whatever you're standing in front of. It's what you're reflecting. And that means that. Whatever you're thinking about. All the time. Whatever your imagination runs to.

Wherever in the quiet moments of life. When you can resist. Picking up that phone. And doom scrolling. In those moments. Where does your mind go? Where does your heart go? Where do your desires go? Where does your imagination go?

And that's how you know. What it is that you're probably modeling the most. In other words. Others will talk about it as attunement. Whatever you're looking at all the time. And thinking about all the time. You're attuning yourself to.

And attunement is just another way. Of talking about worship. See whatever you stare at. Whatever you think about. Whatever you put your mind on. Your heart on. You're actually worshipping. And you're becoming like that thing all the time.

Like that object. Like that desire. And so he's calling us here to say. Look at the light himself. Jesus Christ. And reflect him as a mirror. Because if you're worshipping anything else in your life.

[15:26] You're becoming like that thing more than you're becoming like Jesus. Ralph Waldo Emerson. The great poet. He put it like this. A person will always worship something. We may think our tribute is paid in secret.

But it will come out. That which dominates our imagination. Our thoughts. Will determine our love. And our character. Therefore it requires us to be careful what we worship.

For what we worship. Is what we are becoming. Imitation of Christ. To become like him. You have to worship him. The real key.

The real key is not a list of rules of obedience. No. The real key is to worship. Every day. To worship him. To stand in front of him. And reflect him. Because you're bowing down before him. He's got to be your savior.

If he's ever going to be your model. And so let the light shine on you. Paul says. Stand in front of Jesus Christ like a mirror. Now let me. Secondly. Second point. Final point. Come to practically.

[16:26] How do you grow into imitation of Christ? Let me just give you two ways. We have to do a flyover today. Because of all the wonderful sacraments we're celebrating. Two quick ways.

I'll have to leave verses 18 to 21 aside for today. We'll hopefully come back to that. Do you remember. Let me frame it like this. Do you remember the. What would Jesus do bracelets? So I used to have a whole row of.

What would Jesus do bracelets on my arm. Back when I was 11. And what would Jesus do? Some people here know about that. But it was a worldwide sensation. It started at Calvary Reform Church in Holland.

Little bitty Holland, Michigan. Where one youth group leader came to the youth ministry. And made these WWJD bracelets for the youth group. 10, 12 people. And somehow it exploded through the 90s and early 2000s.

It was a fad. It had the right instinct. But I want to come in today and say it was the wrong question. The right question. The right question. And I don't know exactly what the right question is.

[17:29] But the right question is not. Exactly what would Jesus do? So how do you imitate Christ? You don't ask the question. What would Jesus do? Not really. Instead it would be something more like.

How do I imitate Jesus today. In my context. You don't ask what would Jesus do. Why? Because you are not a first century Jewish man. And you are not a carpenter.

Well maybe some of you. You are not the redeemer. You are not the Messiah. You cannot ask what would Jesus do. I'm just going to imitate him. Let me put it like this. Imagine you were riding in a boat.

Out on the Firth of Forth. The bay out here. And a great storm comes upon your boat. And you say. You know I've got my what would Jesus do bracelet. And you say. What would Jesus do?

Well what would Jesus do? Jesus would look up at the storm. And he would say. Be quiet. Sit still. I made you. Right? And that's not you.

[18:26] That's not me. We can't do that. The right question is. How do I imitate Christ. With wisdom. In my context. According to my calling in life. According to this modern moment.

So it has to be adapted. And today. At the end of the service. Lewis will be over here. At the connect desk. Where you can come ask questions. Get connected to our local church. Receive our weekly newsletter.

Anything like that. And Lewis is taking orders. For not WWJD bracelets. But HDIJT bracelets. How do I imitate Jesus today?

And any color. We can do it all. So just come by. Let me tell you the two ways. Very briefly. Number one. Paul tells us in this passage. Obedience. Is the first way to imitate Christ.

You can see the rest of the passage. Is him working through a list. Of sins. That we struggle with as human beings. And in verse three. He says. Put away sexual immorality. And then the word covetousness.

[19 : 26] Which in the Greek. Is the word greed. Very literally. The word covetousness. Is used twice in this passage. In different ways. The first is greed. So he says. How do you imitate Jesus? First. If Jesus is your savior.

He says. Imitate him. By killing your sexual sin. And your greed. Now look. He gets us on both sides. Conservatives. If you're more oriented. Or conservative. Mindset.

You say. The great problem. With our contemporary world. Is sexual sin. And sexual licentiousness. Right? And Paul says. Yes. And then if. If you're oriented. On the left side. Of the spectrum.

You think. The great problem. With our world. Is greed. And power hunger. And Paul says. Yes. And so he gets us all. No matter where we are. And he goes through that.

And says. You cannot be known. For these things. Now. He uses some language here. Saying. This is not. How you follow Christ. The wrath of God. Is being revealed. For those. Who continue.

[20 : 21] In sexual immorality. And greed. And slander. And lies. And it sounds. For a moment. Like he's saying. You can be a Christian. But if you struggle. With sexual sin. Then you're not a Christian anymore.

And that's not what he's saying at all. Instead. What is he saying? He's saying to Ephesians. Who were worshiping. In the pagan temples. In all sorts of wild ways. He's saying. Look. Some of you. Have said publicly.

That you profess faith in Christ. But you're still living. In exactly the same way you were. And you're famous for it. And he's saying. That is evidencing. That you don't really yet know Jesus. So what he's saying is.

Look. Christian. Struggling with sexual sin. Struggling with greed. Struggling with slander. He turns to you. And then says. You have the light. Walk in the light. Fight. Fight. Fight.

Choose obedience. Run away. We've been talking about this. All semester. And he illustrates this. By talking about the light. You can see. In the middle of the passage. He quotes. From Isaiah 51.

[21 : 17] And Isaiah 26. And says. Awake. Oh sleeper. Arise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you. What he's doing there. Is he's saying. If you're a Christian. And you're walking in consistent patterns.

Of sexual sin. Greed. Slander. All this list of sins. But you're not fighting those sins. That's who he's talking to. He's saying. Awake. Oh sleeper. Get up.

It's. Yeah. It's 4 a.m. And the light is already shining into your. A little bit. Through the cracks. Get up and open the blackout blinds. And let the light come into your life. This is not how you learned Christ. So apply the truth of your salvation.

To your actual practices. Be who you are. We've been saying it. All semester. Be who you are. In Christ. Move on to the final thing. In other words. He's saying. Obedience.

Is not about rule following. So you can. You can read this list of sins. And say. I shall not. I should not. Commit sexual sin. I should not be greedy. Obedience.

[22 : 12] Is not really about rule following. That's what he means. In other words. He's saying. When you will look at Jesus. As a mirror. And worship him. You slowly become more like him.

Over time. And it's not about the rules anymore. You don't need a list of rules. Instead. What's happening. Is your heart is being changed. Your desires are being changed. So you actually want.

To do. What Christ's character. Calls you to do. It's about getting beyond. Rules. And commands. And getting. The heart of Christ. Down into your heart. I've illustrated it.

Like this before. But if you go back to the beginning of the passage. Boy. What's the key to this? It's continually. Continually. Continually. Coming back to Jesus. Back to the father. As a child. I've got kids.

And sometimes the kids get up in the middle of the night. They did last night. And the kids. They come to our bed. Or they cry out. And they say. I'm thirsty. Or I'm scared.

[23 : 12] And they'll come. And they'll wake us up in the bed. And say. You know. Can I get in the bed with you? Or will you get me water? And you. You know. You're very happy. To do it. You're very reluctant. But of course you say.

Yes I will. I will get you water. I will not refuse water from my child. Right? And I will not. I will not. Not comfort my child. When they're scared. My.

My children have access to me. In a way that most people in this room. Do not have access to me. And vice versa. Right? Imagine that your colleague. Your boss. Rings your doorbell at 4 a.m.

And says. You know. I had a nightmare. And. I was so scared. I just wondered if I could come in. And. I'm so thirsty. Will you get me water?

You would say. You need to go home right now. Right? This is inappropriate. Children have access. Right? When you become a Christian.

[24 : 09] You have access to the father. You can come to him. So closely. And that's how you learn. To be obedient. Not by looking at the list.

Of the ten commandments. And saying. Thou shalt. Thou shalt not. Thou shalt. Thou shalt not. You come. By getting access. And worship to God the father. Through your true and elder brother. And then you become more like him. Over time. Secondly.

Finally. Wisdom. Paul says here. In verse ten. You can see. He doesn't mention wisdom by name. But that's what he's talking about. How do you imitate Jesus? You live by obedience. You live by wisdom. Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

That's wisdom. Or verse fifteen. Look carefully how you walk. Not as unwise. But as wise. So he says. Obedience. Through looking at Jesus. And wisdom.

Those are the two big ways to imitate Christ. The category of wisdom. Wisdom is not less than obedience to God. But it is more than just obedience. Wisdom is knowing how to live.

[25 : 08] When there are no rules telling you how to live. And you have to discern the will of the Lord. In that moment. That's wisdom. Wisdom is the skill of imitating Christ. In every single moment of your life.

In all compartments of your life. When there is no rule book. Think about it like this. If you ask. Should I steal from this department store on Princess Street? The answer is no.

Thou shall not steal. If you ask. Should I commit adultery? The answer is no. Thou shall not commit adultery. If you ask. Should I murder? The answer is no. Thou shall not murder. Right? But when you ask questions like.

Who should I marry? Should I date this person? Should I take this job or that job? Should I move to this community or that community? Should I live in Edinburgh or Glasgow? That one's more clear I think.

But I'm just kidding. Um. How do I. How do I write this email well? To speak the truth in love. These are all categories of wisdom.

[26 : 06] There's no direct rule telling you what to do. You're not called to be a first century Jewish carpenter. And you're not the redeemer. It's not what would Jesus do. It's how do I live and imitate Christ. By obedience and wisdom. According to the vocation.

I've been called to. Discerning the will of the Lord. In my life. In my moment. With great wisdom. Because I have the character of Christ in me. It's variable. It's individual.

It changes for every single one of us. Now let me close with this. Paul says here. Replace sexual sin. Greed. Covetousness. Covetousness. Slander. The sins of speech. And there's one little thing I've passed over.

And we're just doing a flyover. And it's in verse 4. And verse 20. And verse 18. He says. Instead of slander. And sexual sin. And greed. And all these things.

As you're growing. Into the image of Christ. Imitation of Christ. Take on thankfulness. Gratitude. He says it twice. And then in verse 18. He says. And just be filled with the spirit.

[27 : 04] So Paul says. The opposite of these sins. Is not actually just obeying. But it's being filled with gratitude. And thanksgiving all the time. And being filled with the spirit.

Paul says. Be filled with the spirit. And you say. I want to be. But I read in the rest of the Bible. That the spirit has to fill me. What is he doing here?

He's saying. If you're a Christian. You have the Holy Spirit with you. You are living Coram Deo. Right now. Before the face of God. The spirit is in your life. He's here. With us. Personally. And he's saying.

So when he says. Be filled. He's saying. Be awake. Oh sleeper. Be aware of the spirit. Be conscious. Notice. That the spirit is with you. All the time. In every avenue of life. And I'll give the last word. To C.S. Lewis today. C.S. Lewis helps us here. He wrote an essay about bicycles. Which helps make this very clear. C.S. Lewis says that.

[28 : 00] When you are born. And you first see a bicycle. You enter stage one. In your relationship to bicycles. Stage one is. It's shiny. It's interesting. But you don't care that much.

Because you're a baby. But then you enter stage two. In your relationship to a bicycle. And that's childhood. And when you. Are a child. With a bike. That is the entrance. Into the enchanted world. Of freedom. Right. So you can ride. Around the meadows. As my kids do. And some of your kids. All over the city. And you enter into this enchantment. Wow. This thing can give me wheels. I can get places.

How does it work? But most of us. We all. Then pass into phase three. As teenagers. And adults. And the bike. The bicycle. Becomes a utility tool. Right.

There's no enchantment. For most of us. It is hard. Our legs hurt. It's commuting. It's going up hills. Especially in our city. Now. C.S. Lewis says. Most of us never.

[28 : 55] Leave stage three in life. We go from enchantment. As a child. With this world. The bicycle is a metaphor. For everything. The world. To disenchantment. With our lives.

To disenchantment. With the world. To disenchantment. With relationships. To disenchantment. With work. And he's saying. Only sometimes. And even as Christians. This can happen. Till we enter stage four. Where some of us.

Re-enchant. Our relationship. With a bicycle. And we realize. This thing can take me. All over Scotland. On these beautiful rides. And I love it. It's full of wonder. It's amazing. The wind in my hair. Most.

Most of us struggle. With moving from stage three. To stage four. And so we walk around. Even as Christians. Asleep. Not awake. Disenchanted. Not enchanted. Not with wisdom.

Not with wonder. At all that God is doing. Not with amazement. At the theater of God's glory. But just kind of. Everything is blah. B-L-A-H. Right? Blah. I'm bored with church.

[29 : 51] I'm bored with my job. I'm bored with my relationships. I'm bored with life. The video games were okay for a while. But now I'm bored with them. And this passage says. The imitation of Christ.

Is the life of re-enchantment. It's to say. Awake O sleeper. Arise from the dead. The Holy Spirit is with you. You've got an enormous calling. Imitate God. Image God into the world. Be the light of Christ.

To the city. Be amazed with wonder. At all that God has done. All that God is doing. And all that God has made. Go and image Jesus. Go and learn. The imitation of Christ this week. Let us pray. Father we thank you for this word. And we pray now. That you would teach us to imitate you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.