

Imitating God

Ephesians 5:1-2

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FOCAL Read Responsively Ephesians 5:1-2 Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: {2} **And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor.**

I just finished reading two books, both of which are very applicable to what I'm going to say today. The first book, given to me by a dear friend, is called "*Breakout Churches*". This book - written by **Pastor Thom Rainier** - examined around 1200 of the 400,000 local Churches in America. Of those 1200 Churches Pastor Rainier found 13 Churches that were excelling and growing as God wants every Church to do. Thirteen! Another book I just finished reading is called "*UnChristian*", a report by the **Barna Group** on the Church in America - and why we aren't reaching this generation for Christ. Both of the books have a common thread running through them. America is watching the Christian and the local Church, and making a value judgment based on what it sees.

Jesus promised us that the world would not love the believer in Christ (**John 15:18-19**). Our message is exclusive - we teach that faith in Jesus Christ is the only Way unto God (**John 14:6**). We teach that those who have not embraced Christ as Savior and Lord are **condemned already (John 3:18)**, and that those who die without embracing Christ go immediately to a place of torment called "hell" (**Luke 16:23**). That isn't a very popular message, but it is the message that the Lord Jesus Christ proclaims through His Holy Scripture. Any organization that calls itself a "Church" must, if it is

honest with itself and with those around it, adhere to and preach these integral truths.

Yet in many cases the reason the local Church is not reaching America has nothing to do with the exclusivity of our message. The reason we are not reaching America is because **we are not imitating God.**

Some Churches will not **imitate God in reaching out to others.** They have stubbornly – and wrongly - refused to admit people of color into their membership. Do you not know that Jesus Christ left the glory of Heaven and, as the Bible says, **“became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14)?** God lowered Himself and was born of a Jewish mother so that He could be sacrificed for your sins and mine. The Blood shed on Calvary was Jewish blood. Jesus is the **Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).** The King of Kings and Lord of Lords became a Jew to die for you, O Man, regardless as to your race. **The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us** – whether we be red, yellow, black, or white – **from all sin (1 John 1:7).** We cannot preach the reaching love of God if we ourselves do not reach out to all people just as God our Savior does.

Some Churches will not **imitate God in purpose.** The mad Emperor Caligula would often divert his warships from the serious business of guarding Roman territory, ordering them instead to gather seashells and other trinkets coastal villages to be used in decorating his palace. The equally foolish Emperor Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Rome died because its leaders and citizens forgot their purpose. Many local Churches focus

on temporal things – the color of carpets and walls – when they should be focused on serving the Eternal God Who saved them. A hundred years from now the color of superficial structures will have changed many times, but the soul that is led to Christ will be in the presence of God forever.

Some local Churches have forgotten to **imitate God loving forgiveness. God first loved us (1 John 4:19),** though we certainly do not deserve that love. We are told in our context:

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: {32} And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

God has forgiven you – you imitate Him. God gives, so you give. God forgives, so you forgive. God for Christ's sake has forgiven us all our sins. Those of you who are saved know the joy of His loving and forgiving embrace. If God did not give to both the just and the unjust, none of you would be here today. If God did not freely offer forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord none of you would be saved. If you are Christians *forgive* all that you have been offended so that, when you kneel to pray, you can honestly say **“forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).**

Christians in a right relationship with God should have two trademark qualities – they should be *givers*

and *forgivers*.

Imitate God, dear Christian, for America watches you. If Christ be lifted up in your life and in the life of the local Church then you and your Church will become soul saving stations. If not, then neither you nor your local Church will ever have a positive impact on this generation of Americans. Someone once said that when a Church loses its desire to reach the lost, then it has also lost the right to be called a “Church”. May I say that when a local Church stops imitating God and begins to imitate the world around it it ceases being a local Church. What makes us a Church is that we imitate Him Who gave Himself for us.

1. Consider The Command: Be Ye Followers of God

FOCAL Ephesians 5:1 **Be ye therefore followers of God** as dear children

We are told “**be ye therefore followers¹ - literally imitators - of God**”. Consider that command for just a moment. When we were young we learned by mimicry – by imitation of those around us.

We learn by *watching* and by *meditation* – a focused concentration on someone who knows how to do what we want to learn.

1 G3402, μιμητής, *mimētēs*, *mim-ay-tace'*, From G3401; an *imitator*: - follower.

ILLUSTRATE As a little child we learned our alphabet – not by reinventing that alphabet – but by closing our mouths and opening our minds to what the alphabet is. We looked at the letter “A”. We were given illustrations of the letter “A”: “**A** is for **A**pple” and “**B** is for **B**oy”. Our little hands were taught how to properly form the letter “A” in both its upper and lower case. We focused on it, meditated on it, did it over and over until making the letter “A” became second nature to us.

In the same way the Christian way of life includes *meditation* and *focus*. The Scripture commands us

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, **think on these things**.

to meditate on **Biblical truth, honest, lovely, and Godly things**. Our minds are to be focused on the things of God and, if you are a Christian, turned *away* from the things of Satan. When I was on mission in Belize I often wondered how the nurses ever read the handwriting of the doctors!

There is a right way and a wrong way to make an “A”, to form the letters of our alphabet in a way in which they can be recognized. In the same manner the Christian learns by *doing what God our Teacher says* and by *rejecting what God our Teacher does not say*.

The Apostle said:

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We should dwell on the things of God, since we are God's children by faith in Christ. But this text does not just call us to meditation, but to a *doing*.

We do not forever sit at the banquet table but, once fed, we rise to go out from that room to do. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus learning of Him, as did His disciples. Having been fed they rose up to serve Him.

The word translated “**follower**” is better translated as “**imitators**”. Be imitators of God. Having meditated and focused on God's teaching, now go and do. Christianity is about *being*. When you were dead in trespasses and in sins you stayed busy *being* for the world. You did things because you imitated your friends, your parents, those who were around you. Now that you have been *born again* you are to imitate Him Who gave you life. You are to allow God to work in your life so that you can *be like God*.

So many people are confused about the word **holiness**. Some people make **holiness** a point of pride, as in “Look at me, I'm holier than you are”. Do you know what holiness truly is? It means to **be set apart for God's use**

– and to recognize that you are set apart.

“**Holiness**” means to imitate God, to mimic Him inasmuch as you are able. We are commanded to imitation of God, to *pattern our lives after Him*.

Though we live in the Age of Grace where the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, we nonetheless are called to an imitation of God. We imitate God – not like gods – but like **dear and obedient children**:

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: {15} But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; {16} Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

We who are in this Age of Grace are commanded to holiness for our own sake. Imitate God in holiness, for the Scripture truly saith “**the wages of sin is death**” (**Romans 6:23**). The Greek is even more abrupt. The Apostle wrote **wages of sin – death!** The *is* is an addition to the text to make reading it easier. Paul was emphasizing that sin *always* brings abrupt and brutal death. You who are born again by faith in Christ should flee sin and pursue holiness, for **the wage of sin - death!**

Imitation of God is not just a focused call to avoid sin, but we imitate God because we as Christian *adore God*. God has saved us, He has redeemed us who have called on the Name of Jesus. We were all destined for hell, for eternal torment, but now are lifted above all

condemnation. Rejoice, dear Christian, for:

Romans 8:1-2 There is therefore now **no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**

No condemnation. As it is written (**John 3:18**) **he that believeth on Jesus is not condemned!** Saved from eternal damnation the Christian now focuses on another purpose – to be like Him that saved us.

ILLUSTRATE Have you ever considered the words that God uses to describe the Christian. We who believe are called “**clay**” and God the “**Potter**”. We are called “**little children**” and He is the “**Father**”. We are called “**sheep**” and He, our Creator, is our “**Great Shepherd**”. Each of these words and phrases used to describe us show our dependency on God. When I preach of **imitating God** I am not speaking about some type of self help program. If you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ then the Holy Spirit of promise indwells you. You are given a great Word of God to read, study, and do. You are lifted from death and are now endowed with glorious life. I have seen animals in the zoo pace in front of a gate, hour after hour, day after day. I saw a mighty and beautiful panther reduced to pacing aimlessly up one side and down the other of a cage. Dear friends, if you are saved the cage of sin has been broken! You need no longer wander up and down aimlessly in front of that gate: Jesus has destroyed the destroyer. Spend your days

adoring God, imitating God, submitting as clay to the Potter – and God will richly bless your lives.

The prince of preachers **C.H. Spurgeon** said:

“**To love is to adore; to obey is to praise; to act is to worship. If ye are imitators of God as dear children your adoration will be proved to be sincere. Worship unattended by imitation is feigned; true adoration dwelleth not in words only, but as it comes from the heart so it affects the entire nature and shows itself in the daily behavior.**”

2. Imitate God – As Dear Children

FOCAL **Ephesians 5:1** **Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children**

“**As dear children**”. We who have called upon the Name of the Lord Jesus, and have been saved - “**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**” (**Romans 10:13**) – are not called to *invent anything*. We are called to imitate what God has clearly placed before us.

God has never shown you racism. When He came to this earth He came as a Jew. **He came unto His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11)**. He shed Jewish Blood for you and for me. **But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name (John 1:12)**. Though you who are Gentiles – that is, not Jewish – were **strangers from the covenant of Promise**,

having no hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), Jesus nonetheless offered salvation and fellowship to you. Reject racism, if you are His. God has never been racist, and neither should you be. **We are all of one Blood, and saved by one Blood** (Acts 17:26; 20:28).

FOCAL Ephesians 5:1-2 Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: {2} And **walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us**, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

Walk in love. I remember as a child going to the coasts of North Carolina with my parents and walking the surf. It's hard to walk in the surf, for each time the waves go out they draw you with them. You can walk against the surf, but it is a struggle. Better to walk when the surf comes in.

In the same way, **walk in love.** God Who is love indwells the Christian. You are to **walk in love.** What does that mean? Look at the text: **as Christ also hath loved us.** Only the most arrogant of people would believe that they *deserved* the Love of God. We who are Christians know that we have neither earned nor deserved the salvation that we now possess in Jesus. Jesus Christ offers salvation to *whosoever will* – not based on *deserve* but based on His great love for all people. We are to **walk in love as Christ has loved us.** That means we love – not just in word, but in deed – even those who are unlovable. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:44-47 But I say unto you, **Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; {45} That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. {46} For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? {47} And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?**

God loves the unlovable and the unlovely – this is why you and I are saved! His *common Grace* is bestowed on all of creation. His rain and sun falls on the evil and on the good because He loves. Jesus went to the Cross for all *because He loves.*

As Christ has shown love to you and I, so should we who are true Christians show love – even to those who hate us. If we would stop arguing with the unbeliever who is yet dead in trespasses and in sin and instead *show the love of Christ in us* then others would come.

Love is the great attractor. True love from God is the magnet that will draw every soul to the bleeding side of Jesus.

Look further at our text:

FOCAL Ephesians 5:1-2 Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: {2} And walk in love, **as**

Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor.

Why should we **love as Christ loved**? Because it pleases God. It **glorifies God** when you love like Jesus has taught you to love.

Just as the American Indian put paint on his face prior to fighting, the Christian should paint love on his face prior to going out into the world. Our love *must* be visible if we are going to win this world for Christ!

Christ is in you, dear Christian, which is why the exhortation:

Ephesians 4:29-32 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. {30} And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. {31} Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: {32} And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. You who are His children are called to imitate God in forgiveness one to another, in love, in kindness, in tenderheartedness, in rejection of anger, fighting, and backbiting. The world is watching you, dear believer. If we are going to win

America for Christ, we *must* let America see Christ in us.

To live a victorious life you cannot rest on yesterday's hurt. You must live in the love of Christ. **Walk in love, and you walk in victory, for God walks with you!**

May God touch your hearts with His Word.