

# Imitators Of God

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

These beginning words, “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children” are so very simple, but they are also, so very profound. To even imagine that you and I could be able to imitate God, even in one small way seems “presumptuous” beyond measure. But yet, we are all commanded to do it.

Some years ago, in another study that I was doing regarding this command to be “imitators of God”, I confess that I struggled a lot, even to comprehend the concept of “imitating God”, because my understanding of the meaning of “imitation” is one that seems always to fall short of what I know that God must intend with these words.

Much like an artist who tries to draw or paint a picture of what God really looks like falls short, or as an actor who might try to act out the part of God will always fall short of the real thing, so would my every attempt to imitate Him fall short.

In speaking to a friend about this command, my friend suggested that I pursue my understanding from the context of “participation” rather than simple “imitation”, that before any real imitation of God could really take place, my efforts would need to always be filled with the intimate presence of God’s Holy Spirit intertwined within them.

And though at that time I already knew that I always needed to have the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in me, this word “participation” gave me a fuller understanding of God’s intention.

And to further confirm the understanding of the word “participation”, the Greek word that God has used here for “imitator” also means “follower”, or “to follow after the ways of God”. You find that translation in the King James Version.

And this manner of “following after His ways” is not one of a “general following after”, it is a far more specific and very demanding manner of following, much like an example I gave a few weeks back of a training video I observed of a police dog going through a training session. In that video, the dog walked between the trainer’s legs, literally in “lock-step” with the trainer, with his full attention firmly fixed upon his trainer as they went step by step through the exercise.

That is the sense that God gives to us here as He commands us to be “imitators” of Him. Here, God is saying that He wants you and me to “walk” step by step through all the matters of our day, and not just in the bigger matters, but especially in the very common and ordinary matters of our day, with ordinary people.

Why do I say that? It is because this command is coming right on the heels of all of His other instructions about “putting off the old self” within us and replacing that old self with a whole “new self”, one that is actually Holy and righteous. Recall those words there in chapter 4,

22 put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

This “likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” is the “imitation” that we are being commanded to do.

Again, why does God give us this command; and why do we need God’s ever-present Holy Spirit to be so intimately involved in every ordinary activity and circumstance of our day? After all, does not the vast majority of the people on this earth go about their ordinary activities without even a thought about God? And that is true, but the real truth is, though most of the people of this world do conduct themselves as if God did not exist, He really does exist. And He has a divine plan that is at work every moment within every life and within every circumstance. And His plan is being worked out whether all those people acknowledge Him or not.

Folks, God is God and He has divinely ordained that every person, every activity and every circumstance be “intimately connected”, with Himself, often with you and me, and with other people. And further, that while we most often don’t realize it is taking place, each event within our personal lives is also inter-connected with so many, many other people, having impact and meaning and opportunities and making provisions that we don’t know is taking place.

What do I mean with what I am saying? May I give us some very practical examples? In recent weeks, I have become aware that I need some important electrical repair work done in my house. The common, the ordinary thing for me to do is to seek out at least three bids from reputable repair men. Then the usual path to take is to simply accept the lowest priced bid. And that is often a good plan. But is it the plan of God? Is simply accepting the lowest bid on a project the absolute indicator of God’s Will?

What about other factors? What if God does not want that lowest bidder to do the work? Perhaps that man is not as skilled as he should be to do our job well. Or, perhaps God has another, more important plan for that man and for his time and his circumstances. And God would rather that man work somewhere else?

But if that be so, what about the extra money it will take to hire one of the higher priced repairmen? Perhaps God wants you and me to understand that He (God) is the ultimate provider for all our needs and circumstances, and that He will provide the extra money we will need to hire the other man.

Another question, why doesn't God simply lead the repairman of His choice directly to me? Sometimes, God does exactly that! But in those times when He does not, we must trust that He is simply working out other dynamics within our lives, and the lives of those other people, especially the elements of "faith" and "trust".

In my situation, the lowest bidder did not show up to look over the project and firm up the contract as he had promised. I asked the Lord for His guidance and was led in my thoughts to give the first man three days to show up. If he did not, I would accept the bid of another (higher priced) repairman.

Do my actions assure me that I am "following" God's will, thinking like He thinks, "imitating" Him, as these scriptures here command? I truly believe that such considerations are at least a step in the right direction, to trust and to accept that God has His personal hand at work in each situation! God knows my heart and He knows that I really do want to do exactly as He wants me to do, to do as verse 2 commands,  
2 . . . walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

How is this manner of my behavior "walking in love"? It is that I genuinely am concerned that I choose the right repairman, not just so as to get a right price and a good job, but to also fulfill God's plan for those other men. God has one man and only one man that He wants to do that work. Perhaps the second man needs the work and the money more than the first man. Perhaps the Lord wants me to spend some special time with that second man. I really don't know all of those things, but if I am able to rightly discern God's will and follow the right path, then a far better result will surely take place.

May I make a similar application to some of the other ordinary matters of our daily life? Perhaps you are working in a place that is not comfortable to you, or perhaps does not pay well. Is that an indicator of God's Will about where you should be working? It might

be! But it might not be. Just because your boss or your co-workers make your life uncomfortable does not mean you should leave. God may have you positioned there as a witness of Him and as a beacon of His grace.

And just because you can make more money somewhere else does not define God's Will. Perhaps the next place, though it pays better will be a far more "uncomfortable" place to work, with even more difficult bosses and difficult working conditions. If we are diligent to seek the Will of God in our decision about where we work, He will direct our paths. And though it might take several years to realize that you made the right decision, He will eventually confirm that to you.

May I testify that God has done similar things for me and my family all throughout our lives, our coming to work at French Camp, our provisions for family needs, our purchase of our house, our ministering here at this church. Folks, God is intimately involved in each and every decision that each of us makes. And everything we do is intimately "connected" to someone or to something else.

And God wants you and me to be aware of His plans and His purposes for the people that show up along our path. We must never think for a minute that their involvement with us is merely co-incidental. There really is no such thing as a "random coincidence". Here at the end of chapter 4, after telling us about several ways we can "put off our old self", God immediately reminds us of what we have been speaking about here. He tells us in verse 32

32 . . . be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Just because that first contractor I called did not show up or even call, I should not be angry at him. I should instead look for God's hand in the matter. Again, I should

32 . . . be kind . . . tenderhearted . . . forgiving, just as God in Christ forgave . . . (Ephesians 4:32)

And then here in verses 1 and 2, we are reminded to

1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

May I say again that probably the most important understanding that is to be gained from these words is that all of the people and all of the circumstances of our daily life are intricately "connected" with one another! That which we do and say in one situation

will have meaningful impact in the lives of others, many of which we might never know about.

Those seemingly ordinary conversations that we involve ourselves within each day carry influence and consequences. And the same is true for all of the ordinary conversations that we don't involve ourselves in, those conversations that we should have had, but didn't.

If you and I truly obey this command and become "imitators of God", then surely our perspective has to get so much "bigger" than it has ever been; where we once only considered the small circle of concern that we had for our self, now we must expand that concern on out to include each person and each circumstance that takes place.

Unfortunately, that "bigger" perspective will too often boggle the mind of most people, even some of the most dedicated of believers. It truly is more comfortable to "think small", to only deal with the immediate people and matters in front of us. But such "smallness of mind" will surely leave us far short of God's plan for us! He is "big" and His plan is "big", and to try to simply ignore His bigger plan in favor of our smaller, more comfortable plan will not reach to the level of this command, "be imitators of God". We need to be willing to "stretch" and to become an "imitator", a "participator" in the circumstances and with the people that God will place along our path.

But how must we begin? Fortunately for us, in most ways, our "participation", our "imitation", our "following" of God in His plan of grace is simple. We must first earnestly and intentionally invite him to be involved in each of the steps of our daily life, from the smallest to the biggest, and in each step we must acknowledge and trust Him to "direct our path". (Proverbs 3:5-6)

And please know that from the first moment that we were saved, God has already done His part. He has thoroughly equipped us with everything we need to carry forward with our part. His Holy Spirit brought with Him all the character qualities that go into our "imitation", our "participation", our "following of His ways".

His Spiritual Gifts and the ever-present fruits of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control are the character qualities of God Himself. And they are everything that we could possibly need to "imitate" God.

Our part, our “participation” in the “imitation” of God is simply to commit ourselves to an intentional effort as we allow God’s character to flow out from us into all of the many situations of daily life.

A last question before we close our time for today . . . what are we to do when we have been obedient to this command and have diligently given ourselves over to seeking and following God’s Will, but the circumstances still go awry and our ministry to some of the people seems to fall short; because that does happen, and probably often. We have seen it take place over and over again in these scriptures, from Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Jesus Himself, where too often the “free Will” of the people got in the way and caused the plan to seemingly fail.

But we must ask ourselves, “What is the true measurement of success or failure”? Is it in the outward results, or is success and failure measured at another level altogether? When Isaiah was called to go and give God’s message to the people of Israel, they completely rejected both him and God. But God counseled Isaiah to not be discouraged. His purpose was simply to be the messenger, nothing more and nothing less.

Sometimes, that is God’s plan for you and me, simply to be God’s messenger, and to leave the responses and the handling of those responses to God.

Our part remains the same, to humbly and diligently step forward to do our part, to “imitate” God in all his gracious attributes, to “participate” in the plan that He has already put into place, and then simply to trust that God has all the rest of the plan completely under His control.

Listen, as we close . . .

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