

Mirroring the Master

Eph. 5:1-21

Series “Ephesians”

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Illus. Super-heroes – When I was little, like most young boys, I loved imitating super-heroes. One Halloween, I went as the *Incredible Hulk*. My mom painted me green. I had the torn shorts, of course already had the big muscles...it was awesome.

We also had back in my day the Christopher Reeves version of *Superman*. And I can remember watching that movie and then running around the house, I guess some imaginary friends were in distress. I would then causally walk behind this chair like I was Clark Kent, and that’s when the magic happened.

I’d safety-pin a towel around my neck, and I would come out from behind the chair, Superman - faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive and able to jump tall buildings in a single bound.

Super-heroes are fun to imitate when you are a child. When you think about it, we all grow up imitating those that are put in front of us and that have influence on us.

Think about these babies we just dedicated earlier in the service. They learn first by imitation! They learn to smile and laugh and clap imitating us parents and grandparents who look so ridiculous trying to get them to do these things!

When my girls were little, I could hear them imitating their teachers from school as they played class with their dolls and stuffed animals.

Better be careful teachers, these kids imitate you at home! And we better be careful parents, because they imitate us at school!

Imitation...some of you are in careers right now because you are imitating someone you respected or that had influence on you growing up.

To this day, I want to imitate my mom and dad’s work ethic and the character I saw in them growing up. This is what the message is about today.

Paul is going to tell us that we should imitate God, and he fills in the blanks for us on what this imitation should be like!

I’m calling the message: **Mirroring the Master**

Now, as we going today, remember (Eph. 4) started the practical portion of this letter to the church in Ephesus. The first half of the book is deeply theological. It deals with our identity and WHO we are “in Christ”.

The second half is practical and is more about WHAT we do now that we are “in Christ”. In other words, our beliefs should affect our behavior. Our position should influence our practice!

This is important to think about and consider! The famous evangelist, **D.L Moody** put this this way: **“Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.”**

Scripture should not just be about filling our minds with truth. It is meant to be walked out with our feet in daily living.

Now, up to this point, Paul has called the believers to walk in unity...to walk and strive toward maturity. Last week, the emphasis was on putting off the “old self” that led to impure living and to put on the new self that would lead us to walk in purity and righteousness.

We pick up this week in (Eph. 5), and Paul kind of sums it all up and he gets right to the point! He says, “imitate God”.

Ephesians 5:1 – “Therefore be imitators (we get our English word, “mimic” from this word here...it carries with it this idea of deliberate observation. We are to be imitators) **of God, as beloved children.”**

Now, there is a lot in this verse that I want to unpack for us that I think will help us as we move forward in this text.

Remember that Paul, as a Pharisee had a VERY high view of scripture. He would have known the first five books of the Bible backwards and forwards, which means he would have been MORE than familiar with the creation account.

Now, we know in the creation account, as God was creating the heavens and the earth and everything in them, that when it came to the creation of man, man was altogether different than anything else created. What was the difference?

Gen. 1:26-27 – “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

The difference between man and all other creation is that man is made in the image of God. It’s what theologians term the “imago dei”.

Get this, now...this means – take it back to creation! We were originally created to be like God and to represent God. Only humans were given authority and dominion over all the earth...that’s a BIG deal!

From creation, we were made to mirror the master! To show the world, God!

And this is EXACTLY why the serpent wanted to corrupt man. Man was God's prized creation and was given the unique privilege of being created in his image and likeness.

Distort man, and distort who God was to the world! And, Satan...he accomplished his purposes! Once sin entered into the world, while man was still created in the "image of God" – meaning man had intrinsic value and worth and purpose – sin messed up man's ability to rightly relate to God AND to one another! And very quickly...in the first family:

- Jealousy enters the world...
- Hate enters the world...
- Murder enters the world...

Sin and the fallen nature now corrupt man's thinking...man's emotions...man's actions - and in all of this, we who were supposed to mirror the master...represent him to the world, rather than it being a legitimate representation of who God is, it's more like looking at the mirrors in a carnival or a funhouse...the image is distorted!

And this is the power of the gospel. Christ, who scripture refers to as the "second Adam" comes to earth. And where the "first Adam" disobeyed in a garden and it led to the distortion of his image and representation in the world, the "second Adam", Jesus obeyed in the Garden, and said, "Not my will, but yours be done: and goes to the cross.

And Jesus, in going to the cross and dying as a sacrifice for our sins, and rising from the dead on the third day – he...as the "second Adam" restored what the "first Adam" had lost.

And once we are "in Christ" – when we have put the "new self" on which is (Eph. 4:24) "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" – then and only then can we do what Paul is commanding here – to "imitate God".

Essentially, what Paul is writing here is that because of the finished work of Christ, we can now get back to doing what we were originally created to do and that is to represent God!

We can now, rightly mirror the master – Christ death and resurrection allows for this! So, what will imitating God look like? Paul outlines it for us pretty simply here. Three times he's going to use the word, "walk" to describe how our life can "mirror the master".

The first way is we are to: **Walk in love**

Eph. 5:2 – "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Now, some could ask, "How do you mimic God...imitate God when you have never seen him?! After all, God is Spirit."

Well, this is the beauty of the life of Christ – he is God in the flesh, and if you ever want to know what God is like...if you ever have questioned what would God think about this situation or what he would do in that situation, all you have to do is look at Jesus to determine your answer.

Col. 1:15a – “He is the image of the invisible God...”

Heb. 1:3a – “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...”

To imitate God is to study the life of Christ. And this first way we are told to imitate God is by walking in love and Paul does just this – he points us to the selfless sacrifice of Christ.

He writes, Jesus “gave himself up for us”. This whole idea of Jesus “giving himself up” must have captured Paul’s heart. We’ll read it again from Paul next week when we talk about the relationship between a husband and a wife.

Ephesians 5:25 – “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her.”

“Gave himself up” – this speaks of Jesus voluntarily laying his life down. Let’s think about this phrasing for a second. He “gave himself up”.

- It means he didn’t have to be coerced to do it...
- It means he didn’t have to be convinced to do it...

He, being God knew this was the plan from eternity past and willingly came to earth taking on flesh to identify with and save us. Jesus taught his disciples this:

John 10:14-15, 17-18a – “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord...”

3x Jesus said, “I am laying my life down...willingly giving it up!” This is love!

How different is this from so much of what we see in the world today! It seems as if more people are screaming today about:

- “My rights” being respected...
- “My needs” being met...
- “My wants” being catered to...

And in the midst of all this, God is saying, “how about you imitate me and walk in love?” And when you walk in love, the whole “me-monster” has to disappear...it has to go away! We “give ourselves up” on behalf of others - THIS is the way of Christ!

To love means we prefer others before we prefer ourselves. It means we voluntarily give up what may be good for us, in order to help meet the needs or promote the desires of someone else.

Paul mentions this imagery of a “fragrant offering” which points back to the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The aroma of the sacrifice would fill the air, and it would be pleasing to God.

If we are to imitate God, the aroma of how we love others...and give of ourselves should fill the air!

? – Are you walking in love?

? – At home, are you giving yourself up?

? – Are you voluntarily putting the needs of others before your own?

Illus. The Bible - I love God’s word. I really do. And I have so much confidence in the scripture. I’ve said this before and really believe it. I believe I could get up here from the pulpit and just read the word of God over you for 30 minutes and people would get saved...people’s lives would be changed.

Because the power is here in the word of God. When it comes to loving others...imitating Christ and showing selfless, love, allow me to just read a few passages of scripture over you today and let’s let the Holy Spirit of God measure how much we are walking in love.

John 15:12-13 – “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (How has he loved them?)¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 – “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 John 4:7-8, 11-12 – “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love... ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

THIS is the way of Christ, and THIS is what Paul is calling us to imitate. He’s calling us to a humble, selfless, preferring others, life-giving kind of love. THIS is how we should be walking!

Secondly, if we are to imitate God, we need to: **Walk in light**

Eph. 5:3-14 – “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Now, what you see here in (v. 3-14) is the exact opposite of being love and light. The sins that are mentioned here are rooted in selfishness and self-indulgence, and model a life that is dark to the core!

We are to represent God! What’s spoke of here does NOT represent God at all!

- “Sexual immorality” – this is where we get our word in the English, “pornography” from. It describes any illicit sexual activity outside the confines of biblical marriage!
- “Impurity” – some of your bibles translate this as the word, “uncleanness”. It’s a graphic word...it’s a word used to describe the puss that surrounds an infested wound – pretty disgusting, right?
- “Covetousness” (Paul includes in this) – this is greed. And in this context, it has to do with the “lusts of the flesh”. Again, it’s a feeding of self and the passions of the flesh. We crave what is not ours or what we don’t have.

This isn’t love...this isn’t light, and I like how the NIV translates (v. 3), it says, there shouldn’t be a hint of this in a believer’s life...it must not be named among you!

Illus. Men’s Steak Night – we talked a bit about this! We should be holy as God is holy! Don’t give the Enemy an inch!

See, as God’s representatives, we are to be different than the world around us. This darkness is who we once were (v. 8), but that’s not who we are anymore!

Notice, the darkness was not situational...we once WERE darkness. There has been an identity change – we go from darkness to light and then because of this, we don’t live like the world around us!

This is Ephesus for crying out loud! The “Vanity Fair of the Ancient World”. There was Temple prostitution taking place in the Temple of Artemis or Diana. She was a fertility goddess and as Stott outlines in his commentary sexual activity was a regular part of the worship that took place in her honor.

These believers get saved, and they are called out of that lifestyle. They are no longer to walk in darkness and be associated with depraved behavior – they are to look different than the world!

It’s darkness to light! And **2 Cor. 6:14b** (reminds us) – “...**what fellowship has light with darkness?**”

Christian, do you hear this? You and me...we are to look different than the world!

- Our scroll history on our phones and computers should be different than those who don’t know Christ...
- If we are single, our dating life should look different from those who don’t know Christ...

Paul will take it a step further and say not only is our private life different, but also how we talk – that should be different from the world around us!

If we are truly walking in the light, Paul says there will be (v. 4) “no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking” – these things (look at it!) “are out of place” for the believer!

illus. Out of place – it’s like ham at a Jewish picnic! It’s like a clown at a funeral – its doesn’t fit! It’s out of place!

Dirty jokes...making fun of people...using course language...and cussing – it’s out of place (it’s not “fitting”) for a follower of Jesus...for a son or daughter of the light.

Now, I feel like I need to slow down and clearly address (v. 5). Do you see it there?

Eph. 5:5 – “**For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**”

This is similar to what Paul wrote in:

1 Cor. 6:9-11 – “**Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**”

These passages are warning passages of scripture here! God's judgment is going to come to those who live in darkness.

Paul is not speaking of a believer here that is struggling with sin. He is speaking of someone who hasn't been changed by Jesus. This describes someone who has never been transformed and transferred into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13).

This is someone whose nature hasn't changed. The apostle John describes this person as one who continues to "practice sinning".

Lengthy passage, but let's look at it together:

1 John 3:4-10 – “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

Look...let's get real here today...this is where the rubber meets the road. We need to ask ourselves, “Has there been a legit nature change in our life?”

Are we truly “in Christ”? Because if we are, Paul and John both say, we won't walk in darkness...we won't make it a practice of sin!

Sure, as Christians, there may be some backsliding. We may lapse into a season of sin, but we won't wallow in it! Someone who is changed by Jesus...truly changed by Jesus – that person won't consistently walk in the things that will ultimately bring God's wrath.

And this is why Paul says, (v. 6) “don't let anyone deceive you.” Judgment is coming...and those who live in unrepentant, habitual sin will experience it!

We, as children of light are not to have anything to do with darkness NOR those that are walking in darkness (v. 7-8) - that's who we WERE!

But now, we are children of light, and the fruit of our lives shouldn't be immorality and impurity – that's bad fruit...spoiled fruit...instead (v. 9) – the fruit of light is that which is “good and right and true”.

In fact, as children of light, we don't just avoid and reject darkness and those associated with it, we expose the darkness just by walking in the room!

That's what light does...it exposes and expels the darkness!

As God's representatives on earth, we as Jesus said, "Are the light of the world." (Matt. 5:14) And as we share the hope of Christ, it's his light that awakens and resurrects people out of darkness!

That's what this last part of (v. 14) is about. Most believe it was an early Christian hymn that spoke of resurrection power of Christ! His light awakens the dead and restores to us the ability to rightly represent him to the world.

If we are to imitate God...we, do it by walking in love. Walking in light. And then third and finally we are to imitate God and: **Walk in wisdom**

Eph. 5:15-21 – “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Let me sum up these verses for you. If we want to imitate God, we must walk in wisdom. Wisdom is being focused and being filled!

To be focused that means we are careful...we are intentional...we are thoughtful about how we spend our time and how we live our lives. We work and give ourselves to understanding and discerning the will of God.

To walk in wisdom means we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Want to know if you are filled with the Spirit? Answer these questions right from (v. 19-21).

Here's some closing application!

1. **Am I speaking words of life and encouragement to others?** (v. 19a – addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...is God's word in our heart, so we can speak it over others when need – this goes back to “speaking the truth in love – c/f Eph. 4:15)
2. **Am I singing songs of praise from within?** (v. 19b – making melody to the Lord with your heart – someone filled with the Spirit has joy in their heart...not constantly negative and cynical)
3. **Am I living in a state of thanksgiving toward God?** (v. 20 – “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – 2x

“thanksgiving is mentioned here – (v. 4 and v. 20) – it seems that thanksgiving...gratitude is the answer to leading a life of love, light and wisdom, and that makes sense because when we’re thankful, we’re not leaning out on God thinking he has forgot us, neglected us or holding out on us!)

4. **Am I humbly submitting to others?** (v. 21 – “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ - selflessness – putting others first – we’ll talk more about this next week.)

Illus. “Make Me Like Joe”

The story was of a man named Joe who was a drunk. He was miraculously saved in a street outreach mission. Before his conversion he had the reputation as just a hopeless, anger-filled bum.

But following his conversion to Christ, everything changed. People who knew Joe said he became the most caring person at the mission. He spent his days there, doing whatever needed to be done. There was never anything he was asked to do that he considered beneath him.

Whether it was cleaning up vomit left by some sick alcoholic, or scrubbing toilets after men had left them filthy, Joe did it all, seemingly with a heart of gratitude.

He could be counted on to feed any man who wandered in off the streets, undress and tuck him into bed, when he was too out-of-it to take care of himself.

The mission held church meetings each evening and one evening, after the mission director delivered his message to the usual crowd of men with drooped heads, one of them looked up, came down to the altar and knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him change.

The repentant drunk kept shouting, "Oh God, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!" The director leaned over and said, "Son, wouldn't it be better if you prayed 'make me like Jesus?'"

After thinking about it for a few moments, the man looked up with an inquisitive expression and asked, "Is He like Joe?"

Let’s be imitators of God...people who walk in love, walk in light, and walk in wisdom. In doing so, we’ll “mirror our Master” and show the world exactly who our God is and what he is like.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.