

## **Be Imitators of God** **Ephesians 4:30-5:2**

*<sup>30</sup> Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice. <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Imitating is such an important part of growing. As children we learned to talk and act by mimicking our parents and older siblings. That is a sobering thought for us parents. Every parent wants to be a positive role model for their children. If parents are hard workers, it's likely the child will reflect that in school. Yes, there are always exceptions, but that still doesn't change the fact that much of a child's development comes from imitating.

The Apostle Paul wanted Ephesian believers to know that imitating is what children of God are to do. Though most of us have left behind our childhood, God-willing we will always remain children of God. In order to ensure that, Paul gave some simple instructions that even a child can understand. Paul tells us in this Scripture to be imitators of God. We imitate God by not grieving the Holy Spirit. Instead, we imitate him by living like Christ with a life of love.

Paul urges us to be imitators of God. He first of all tells us how to treat the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."* The day of redemption is none other than the Last Day or Judgment Day. On that day our Lord Jesus will return visibly to this earth. His first order of business is to raise all the dead. Then he will separate believers from unbelievers. Believers he will take with him to heaven. Unbelievers will be condemned to the eternal dungeon the Bible calls hell. Jesus will be able to recognize us believers from the unbelievers. You and I and all believers have a mark or seal that sets us apart from the unbelieving world. That mark or seal is none other than the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter of this letter, Paul told the Ephesians, *"In (Christ), when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised"* (1:13-14). When you make a deposit on an automobile or a house, you are guaranteeing the seller that they will receive the full amount eventually. By depositing the Holy Spirit in you, God has guaranteed that you will receive all the blessings of heaven that come to his children. Can you see how important it is to have the Holy Spirit in your life? If you show up on Judgment Day without his mark, you're not getting into heaven. You can see why we never want to grieve the Holy Spirit.

How does one sadden the Holy Spirit? Paul mentions in our text, *"Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice."* If you

want the Holy Spirit to remain in you, then you have to get rid of all the riffraff. The writer to the Hebrews said it this way: *“Take care so that no one falls short of God’s grace and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and so defile many”* (12:15). The root of bitterness can grow into rage. If left unchecked, rage will boil up until it becomes a permanent feeling of resentment. That is what we call a grudge. Then that anger will express itself in quarrels and quarrelling will lead to slander, which damages reputations. That can leave scares that last a lifetime. If we want to keep the Holy Spirit in us, we need to get rid of all those things that can only sadden him and cause him to move out of our lives completely.

Do you have bitterness in your life? Is there someone at work who really gets under your skin. Paul tells us to get rid of those feelings because they endanger your soul. Since the Holy Spirit is the mark or seal that determines where we spend eternity, then we don’t want to do anything that would bring a tear to his eye. How long do you think the Holy Spirit will remain in us if we are constantly grieving him with bitterness, anger, and every form of evil? As imitators of God we must get rid of all evil. We don’t do that by hiding them or covering them up. We must expose them. Hold all of our sins out before our holy God and admit our guilt. We deserve punishment from him because of them. But don’t hold on to those sins for long. Leave them with your Savior. Paul tells us how *Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. In Old Testament times, God had his people bring an animal, like a lamb with them to worship. The sinner would confess his sin with his hand on the animal’s head. This symbolized a transfer of his guilt. Then he’d slaughter the animal. Later the priest would sacrifice the lamb on the altar. The sinner was declared forgiven. But it wasn’t the slaughter of a harmless lamb that brought God’s forgiveness. It pointed ahead to the innocent Lamb of God who was slaughtered on the altar of a cross. Christ won forgiveness for a whole world of sin. Christ has removed the guilt of our *bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice*. Because Christ has removed all the riffraff, the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell within us.

And what can we do to keep him happy? Paul shows us in this Scripture: *Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us*. Keeping the Holy Spirit happy comes from imitating God. Paul says, *“Be kind.”* Just like God, show yourself to be willing to do anything to help others. Paul says, *“Be compassionate.”* Don’t be callous or indifferent when others are hurting. Imitate God and feel for them doing all we can to relieve them.

Another important way to imitate God is shown us by Paul’s next words: *“Forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.”* Jesus taught an important lesson in forgiveness when he told the story about an unmerciful servant. A king decided to settle accounts with his servants. One servant owed the king an amount he could never repay. So the king demanded that the servant’s wife and children be sold as slaves to cover the

debt. But the servant begged the king for mercy. And that's exactly what the king did. He canceled the entire debt of his servant. But then the servant went and found a man who owed him some money. But instead of showing leniency the way the king did for him, he demanded that the man repay him immediately. And when the man could not, the servant threw the man in jail. The amount this man owed was nothing compared to the debt the servant owed the king. And when the king found out about the unmerciful servant, he made sure the servant got the punishment he deserved.

God gives us every reason to forgive others who wrong us. Psalm 103 reminds us, *"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He does not repay us according to our guilty deeds."* (8,10). If God is willing to forgive us for everything we have done against him, how can we honestly find a reason to hold a grudge against another person? Our Lord reminds us in Matthew 6, *"Indeed if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (14,15). Can it be worth it to jeopardize our eternal inheritance simply because we stubbornly held something against another person. Remember how our Lord taught us to pray, *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* When we forgive others who do us wrong, then we are acting like children of God. Then we are imitating our God who forgives us for Jesus' sake.

In the final verse of our text, Paul give the proper motivation and direction to be imitators of God. He writes, *"And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us."* If you want to know how to imitate God then look at God's Son. When was there a time in Jesus' life on earth when he thought of himself first? I can't think of any. Even while he was suffering the bitter agony of hell for us on the cross, he took time to make sure his mother was cared for. How many days he spent serving others. He healed their diseases. He taught them his saving truth. He spent countless hours in prayer. When he gathered with his disciples in the upper room to enjoy one last supper with them, he did the job of a servant and washed everyone's feet. Then he told them, *"I have given you an example so that you also would do just as I have done for you"* (John 13:15).

Being imitators of God is an essential part of life for a Christian. As God's children we imitate him by ridding ourselves of all evil. We turn to our Lord with repentance and faith. We imitate God by replacing all bitterness with kindness and compassion. We imitate God by forgiving each other the way God forgives us. We imitate God with a life of love the way that Christ loved us and gave his life to ransom us from sin. When we imitate God that way, we won't grieve the Holy Spirit. He'll gladly find a place in us where he is happy to dwell. And he'll stay with us right up to the day we enter heaven or our Lord return, whichever comes first. When our Lord does return, he'll see us marked with the Holy Spirit. He will gladly take us home with him to heaven. God grant this for Jesus' sake.