

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Additional reading: Matthew 5:43-6:15

## Imitating God

### Introduction

In this section Paul presents the highest motive to live in a particular way. The subject now is even more personal and intimate about the Christian character, and is especially concerned with inner disposition and emotions. He gives us six things to put off, then several things to cultivate. And in doing so we are to imitate God Himself as He has revealed Himself in the death of Christ.

### Things to get rid of

And how close to home they all come. **Get rid of all**, put all these away – “all” is the key word, nothing is more comprehensive. No exemptions, no exceptions.

- (a) Bitterness  $\pi\kappa\rho\iota\alpha$ . Here is the person with the tongue as sharp as an arrow and keen as a razor, always ready with a reply that bites or stings. He has a sour disposition, never sees anything good, can always find a defect. This kind of person exists in Christian circles, quick to highlight the preacher’s slip of the tongue, or to condemn out of all proportion someone’s misguided action. No one is infallible. It is right to be corrected. People may have genuine grievances. But problems arise when bitterness comes in. When grievances are allowed to fester, become a mental cancer, become an obsession, and sour the whole outlook, then become cynical, and pour cold water on everything. The saddest people are bitter people – they are miserable themselves and make everyone else so.
- (b) Rage and anger. The word for rage, or wrath,  $\sigma\omicron\rho\eta$  means excited mentally, anger with the lid taken off. Boiling over in fury. Violent outburst. The same as potential murder, according to Jesus (Matthew 5:21-22). The other Greek word used here is  $\theta\upsilon\mu\omicron\varsigma$  meaning settled, sullen indignation, like a roaring furnace, but not the same white heat as wrath.
- (c) Brawling,  $\kappa\rho\alpha\upsilon\gamma\eta$ , meaning violent shouting, raising of voices, angry words, out of control.
- (d) Evil speaking or slander  $\beta\lambda\alpha\delta\phi\eta\mu\iota\alpha$ , abusive speech against God and man. Cool deliberate saying of harmful things. Enjoying abusing others. Purpose to do harm.
- (e) Every form of malice  $\kappa\alpha\kappa\iota\alpha\varsigma$  is a summary of the whole attitude. Malice is determined to hate and harm, gloats over those they hate. Malicious gossip and wickedness. Plotting evil.

Never any place for any of these things in the life of the believer. Plenty in the world. But they must be dealt with once and for all in the life of the believer, otherwise our lives deny that we are new men and women. How these things would grieve the Holy Spirit.

### Things to be cultivated

Now need to be positive. Just as the new shoots on a tree push off the dead leaves to make way for themselves, so new qualities develop in the Christian life and therefore the others have no room. **Be kind and compassionate to one another** (Ephesians 4:32). *χρηστοι* This is the very opposite of malice, boiling anger and bitterness. It means being helpful and useful to others, instead of revealing, exposing failures of others and gloating over them.

Love suffers long and is kind (1 Corinthians 13:4). *χρηστευεται* is the word used here. Life can be hard and difficult and trying. We should help bear others' burdens, help them in their difficulties, be considerate and tender-hearted. In 1 Peter 3:8 the word used is *ευσπλαγχνοι*, to be warm, compassionate, pitiful, sympathetic, feeling for one another.

Some Christians can be very correct, moral, honest, but be hard, inconsiderate, rude, thoughtless, discourteous. Some are afraid of appearing to be effeminate. Instead they are forbidding and unattractive. C.f. child's prayer: "make all bad people good, and all good people nice"!

**Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** Not holding things against others. This does not mean being unrealistic. We must face wrongs and sins, not pretend they are not there. Then forgive them. Realize to the full all the wrong, and then forgive. **If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him** (Luke 17:3). **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors** (Matthew 6:12).

The man who is aware of his own weakness and of how great God's forgiveness to him has been, he must forgive others. **Live a life of love** (Ephesians 5:2) sums up this whole attitude – walking in love, kind, tender-hearted and forgiving.

### Two lessons for our behaviour

What God has shown us, and what Christ has done for us. **Be imitators of God** (Ephesians 5:1). Be followers of God. "Imitate" is *μιμηται* from which we get our word mimic. **As dearly loved children** those whom God loves so much, who have been welcomed into His family. The hairs of our head are numbered. He takes personal interest in us as a father does his children. Delighted to see us living like Him.

Imitate God. Be like your Father. He is kind. He is *χρηστος* to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35). He sends the sun on the evil and the good, and rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He is tender-hearted. **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for he knows how we are formed, he remembers we are dust** (Psalm 103:11, 13-14).

As for forgiveness – He has freely, fully and spontaneously forgiven us the sins of a lifetime. He has forgiven us so many things far more serious and horrendous than any

wrong done to us. He is totally perfect and pure and sinless – yet consider what He has had to forgive and put up with in us. He has done it, not because of any good we have ever done or are likely to do. We are just defiant rebels in His sight. He owed us nothing. Forgiveness is a free gift to us, but so costly to Him. It cost Him His Son and His death on the Cross. In the light of that, how dare we as sinners say to fellow sinners “I can’t forgive you”. He sets the standard of kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness.

This is the family standard. As children, we are to copy the Father. To be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). The honour of the family is in our hands. The family is judged by what people see in us. No greater privilege than to represent God and His character before men, and to have the honour of following the character of the Holy and righteous God of heaven and earth, the true and living God.

But not only His character which He has shown us, but what He has done for us in Christ. The characteristics mentioned can be summed up in “love”, which we are to imitate. Jesus Christ made clear what love is in unmistakable and astonishing way. **Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God** (Ephesians 5:2).

Our sins, guilt, curse, burden, penalty, transferred to Him. He met demands of God’s justice. Separated from God c.f.” My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” as He bore the punishment and penalty in our place.

He did not need to die. He did not need to have suffered in body, soul and mind. He did not need to have come to earth and take human nature. His death was purely voluntary. He was not a victim. **No man takes my life from me. I lay it down of myself** (John 10:18).

The offering and sacrifice Christ made is described as a sweet smelling aroma. Old Testament sacrifices in Leviticus – animal sacrifices which were types and pictures of the perfect sacrifice Christ was going to make on the Cross. The animal had to be free from blemish. The High Priest laid his hands on the head of the animal, symbolically transferring the sins of the people onto the animal. The animal was slain, symbolically receiving the punishment due to the people.

Sweet smelling aroma is another Old Testament phrase, indicating that a sacrifice was pleasing to God, satisfied God, gave Him joy (Leviticus 1:9,13,17; 2:9; c.f. Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18,25,41). So Christ’s death satisfied God. Christ had met the demands of God’s Law. The price was paid, the debt was discharged, the work was done. Man can now be forgiven and reconciled and accepted.

Why did all this take place? Were we worth it? Did we deserve it? Was it because we were good? On the contrary, we had empty minds, dark understanding, alienated from God, ignorant, hard-hearted, given over to sin, uncleanness and greediness (Ephesians 4:18-19). Godless, ungodly, enemies of God (Romans 5). And what was He like? Lovely, perfect, spotless, sinless. Were we worth it? Did He owe it to us? We deserve nothing. Only one explanation – He loved us. The only reason why He took our sins and the penalty and the wrath of God. No other answer. How kind, tender-hearted, forgiving and loving to us.

Can we, dare we, refuse to be anything else to a fellow sinner? If we know the truth about ourselves, if we have grasped the Christian doctrine of sin, if we know we deserved God's condemnation and banishment – then we will be overwhelmed that we are loved by Him, astonished that He died for us, miracle of miracles. **The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me** (Galatians 2:20). **God not sparing His Son but delivering Him up for us all** (Romans 8:32). Then there is no doubt that we should be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving and loving to others. **Let this mind be in us that was also in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 2:5). Our main concern should not be our own feelings, rights, comfort, standing, ease – but should be being like Him, following Him, reflecting His character, living for Him.

### Conclusion

First effect of this passage is to make us realize who we are, what Christ has done for us, our debt, and what a Christian is. Then these great truths will have an effect on our conduct in this world and relationship to others. When we meet people with nothing to commend them, we need to deal with them and treat them as Christ treated us. Walk in love. Pray for them. Feel sorry for them, and have burning desire for them to be delivered. It is the privilege of the Christian to live as Christ lived.