

Imitate God

Ephesians 5:1 (HCSB)

"Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children."

context

Paul recaptures an pre-existing ethic: we must imitate God (to do what He commands & does)

Imitation of a role model was the common usage among Paul's contemporaries.

Greco-roman culture valued imitation... value: we want to get better, be better, live better.

But the search for God comes in...

"What greater good can there be than to imitate God?"¹ - Philo

We want to go beyond ourselves by transcending our present situation.

This line of thinking, "be imitators of God" appeals to people since Genesis 3:5: "God knows what when you eat it [the fruit] your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." It may sound similar:

We all want to be better off than we are right now.

and if I do this I will be.

conflict

The problem (in any cultural setting) is that...

1. **you can't make a role model out of someone you don't know or trust**

1. You *can* still do what someone tells you without having any respect for them.

1. The authority making commands is seen as the "bad guy" while your only motivation for doing what they say is *self-preservation*:

1. if you do what you're told, you'll get on their good side (promotion, affirmation, pay raise), and...

2. if you don't do what they say, you're doomed.

1. essentially, you've got to perform well to be well.

• THIS IS HOW MANY OF YOU APPROACH CHRISTIANITY

• And you wonder when the "good news" is supposed to come.

Bad news: wanting to be better without any power to change.

gospel

Paul addresses the problem and scratches the itch...

"Be imitators of God" (oh, yes yes!)

but then...

"...as dearly loved children." (woah...wait, what??)

Paul gives the Greco-Roman view a Christian angle: "as dearly loved children,"² not as some principle of reason, or ascent to a higher level, or anything that we have merited or attained.

MOTIVATION for imitating God is that he is our loving FATHER.³

The Law tells us to love God; the Gospel tells us that we are loved by God.

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING.

Paul shows us a family.

Illustration: my ninja dad

Harold Horton

"The redeemed of the Lord are not only saved unto everlasting life; they are the children of God. When we say we are the children of God and that God is our Father we are not merely employing terms of inspiration or endearment...When we say that God is our Father we are using terms of absolute relationship...Our divine Parentage is as real as, but infinitely more enduring than, our human parentage." (The Gifts of the Spirit, 7)⁴

HOW, God isn't a boss; **God is a Father, and Christians are called to relate to Him as such.**

But not all have good dads. And because some dads are bad, we struggle with the Bible's depiction of a "Father in heaven"...perhaps some can't help project hate towards God.

Earthly fathers are supposed to give us a glimpse of the Heavenly Father, but know that when they fail to do this...
God is not like your dad! God loves you and proved this through Jesus Christ...

1 Peter 3:18 (HCSB)

AP!

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, **that He might bring you to God.**

Romans 5:1-2 (HCSB)

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

John 17:23 (HCSB)

I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and **have loved them as You have loved Me.**

Paul: this is the identity we are to imitate God from.

In fact, the word used for love is ἀγαπητά (agapeta) which in classical times with reference to children "particularly referred to an only child to whom the parents had devoted all their love"⁵

This is a jealous and devoted love being showered upon sinners
...we're not just forgiven, but adopted.

1 John 3:1 (HCSB)

Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children.

Love motivates the hardest soul, and the most stalwart disposition.

1. a Father's love breaks religiosity because we **suddenly WANT to be like him.**

1. This is part of the sanctification process...

1 John 3:2-3 (HCSB)

Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. And **everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.**

2. a Father's love heals pain because **it changes our expectations of what a dad should be.**

resolution

How do you imitate God?

Well, how do you imitate a loving dad? You want to do everything he does because you know that everything he calls you to overflows from his heart. (sexuality, self-control, self-denial, etc)

So yes, obey and imitate!

We want to change, we want transformation, we want to be better than we used to be, and this all occurs in the sanctification of the Christian who is being conformed to the image of God.

“Better off” in the Christian worldview doesn’t mean more comfortable, more wealthy, or with less problems. It means you get to know God in a deeper way.

But especially learn who your Father is.

Because you can't be like someone you barely know.

Ultimate calling on a Christian: know God (John 17:3 “This is eternal life...”)

Hebrews 1:3 (HCSB)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The Father is seen most vividly in Jesus Christ who gave Himself up for us.

¹ Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). 645

² Barth: “the apostle tells pagan-born saints what the term ‘imitators of God’ truly means.” *Ephesians*. 592

³ Andrew Lincoln writes that it would be “incongruous to be God’s dearly loved child and not want to become like one’s loving Father” *Ephesians*. (WBC: Thomas Nelson, 1990). 310

⁴ Harold Horton. *The Gifts of the Spirit*. (Springfield, MI: Radiant Books, 1934). 7

⁵ Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians*. 645