

THE BELIEVER IS TO WALK IMITATING GOD EPHESIANS 05:01–07

Introduction

The challenge of this passage is one of the greatest challenges in all the Word of God. Just imagine — the great Pattern for the believer is God Himself. The believer is to follow the Person of God. The believer is to walk through life imitating God.

- I. By becoming an imitator of God (v. 1).
- II. By loving as Christ loved (v. 2).
- III. By being clean-bodied, that is, morally pure (v. 3).
- IV. By being clean-mouthed (v. 4).
- V. By knowing God's solemn warning (vv. 5-6).
- VI. By separating oneself from the unclean (v. 7).

I. Ephesians 05:01 Become an Imitator of God

The believer imitates God, first, by *becoming* a follower of God. Note the word *be* (ginomai). It means *to become* an imitator, a follower of God. The idea is that of commitment, attachment, devotion, allegiance, attention. Before a person can be a follower of God, he must commit and attach himself to God. He must surrender and devote his life to God and then begin to follow after God.

The word *imitators* (mimetai) means to follow. Some prefer the translation that we are to become followers of God. Note the phrase “as dearly loved children.” Just as children learn by imitating their parents, so we are to learn by imitating God. The very idea that we are to *be followers and imitators* of God is a bold idea. Just imagine. Scripture boldly proclaims that we are to become *like God!*

=> Christ said: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

=> God demanded: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

=> Paul declared: “And we... Are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...” (2 Cor. 3:18).

=> Peter charged: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16)

=> The early church saint, Clement of Alexandria said: “The Christian practices being God” (Quoted by William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 190).

II. *Ephesians 05:02 Love as Jesus Christ Loved*

The believer imitates God, second, by loving as Christ loved. Two things about the death of Christ should be noted here.

1. The phrase “gave Himself up for us” is a simple phrase with profound meaning. It does not mean that Christ died only as an example for us, showing us how we should be willing to die for the truth or for some great cause. What it means is that Christ died in our place, in our stead, as our substitute. This meaning is unquestionably clear.
 - a. The idea of sacrifice to the Jewish and pagan mind of that day was the idea of a life given in another’s place. It was a substitutionary sacrifice.
 - b. The idea of sacrifice is often in the very context of the words, “Christ gave Himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2).

John 6:51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 11:51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.

John 10:15 “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

John 17:19 “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (See Jn. 10:11; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14.)

2. The words “Christ gave Himself...a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” gives a higher meaning to the death of Christ than just meeting our need. The word “offering” refers to the burnt offering of the Old Testament (Lev. 1: 1f). The burnt offering was given to God not merely because of sin, but because a person wished to glorify and honour God. A person wished to show his love and adoration to God. This is an aspect of Christ’s death that is often overlooked — an aspect that rises far above the mere meeting of our need. In giving Himself as an “offering to God,” Christ was looking beyond our need to the majestic responsibility of glorifying God. This means that His first purpose was to glorify God. He was concerned primarily with doing the will of God — with obeying God. God had been terribly dishonoured by the first man, Adam, and by all those who followed after him. Jesus Christ wished to honour God by showing that at least one man thought more of God’s glory than of anything else. Christ wished to show that God’s will meant more than any personal desire or ambition that He might have.

He said: “but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. “Come now: let us leave” (John 14:31: see Lk. 2:42; Jn. 5:30).

The point is this: the believer is to walk in love, *just as Christ has loved us and has given Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God*. The believer is to love so much that he gives himself as an offering and a sacrifice. There is to be no limit to the offerings and sacrifice of our lives to God and to men. Remember: God's love — agape love — is always an acting love.

Eph 5:2 *And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

John 13:35 *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

John 15:12 *“My command is this: ‘Love each other as I have loved you.’”*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

1 Th 3:12 *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

1 John 3:16-18 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

1 John 4:7-8 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

1 John 4:20 *If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

III. Ephesians 05:03 Be Morally Pure

The believer imitates God, third, by being clean-bodied, that is, morally pure. If a believer is to follow and imitate God, he has to be morally pure; he has to keep his body clean. He cannot let it become dirty and spotted.

=> He has to keep his body free of sexual immorality (see Gal. 5:19-21).

=> He has to keep his body free of any kind of impurity (see Eph. 4:17-19).

=> He has to keep his body free of greed (see Eph. 4:17-19).

Note the importance of rejecting these sins: there must not even be a hint of these sins. And the command is an imperative: “there must not be even a hint” — not even a *hint*.

You, that is, your body, is never to engage in sexual immorality, any kind of impurity, or greed. Note another fact: such things are not even to be talked about. They are not to be named, talked about, or mentioned in our conversation. Immorality and indecent conversation and jokes are to be the farthest thing from the mind of the believer who follows God. God has nothing to do with such dirt and filth.

Mat 5:8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

1 Tim 1:5 *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

1 Tim 5:22 *And do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

IV. Ephesians 05:04 Be Pure in Speech and Conversation

The believer imitates God, fourth, by being clean-mouthed. If a believer is to follow and imitate God, he has to be pure in speech and conversation; he has to keep his mouth or tongue clean. He cannot let his mouth become foul and polluted, filthy and vile.

1. He is never, not once, to be engaged in *obscenity* (aischrotes): using the mouth in obscene, shameful, foul, polluted, base, immoral conduct and conversation. What an indictment of our day — a day of sodomy and perversion. And note: the word refers to both conduct and speech. How polluted and foul-mouthed so many have become — so much so that society could easily be known as a second Sodom and Gomorrah.

Rom 1:26-27 *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

Rom 6:19 *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

Eph 5:4 *Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*

James 1:21 *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

2 Pet 2:9-10 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings.

2. The believer is *not to hint* or engage in *foolish talk* (morologia): empty, unthoughtful, senseless, wasted, idle, aimless or purposeless talk; talk that just fritters away and wastes time, that has absolutely no purpose to it. It also means sinful, foolish, silly and corrupt talk.

1 Tim 1:10 *For adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.*

Job 15:2-3 *“Would a wise man answer with empty notions or fill his belly with the hot east wind? Would he argue with useless words, with speeches that have no value?”*

Prov 10:19 *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

Prov 29:11 *A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

Eccl 5:3 *As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.*

Eccl 10:13 *At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness.*

3. The believer is *not to hint* or engage in *coarse joking* (eutrapelia): to joke, talk foolishly, poke fun, act or speak without thought; to be suggestive in conversation; to make wisecracks. It also has the idea of being cunning and clever, of being polished in suggestive and off-coloured joking and using it to attract attention and win favours (Wuest. *Ephesians and Colossians*, Vol. 1, p. 121). Coarse joking is often used in off-coloured jokes or conversation, at parties or breaks in order to be suggestive.

Prov 26:18-19 *Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbour and says, “I was only joking!”*

2 Tim 3:6 *They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.*

1 Pet 3:10 *For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his Ups from deceitful speech.*

Note that such talk is not fitting or becoming to believers. Believers are to be engaged in conversation that builds people up and offers thanks and praise to God.

Eph 5:18-19 *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.*

Col 3:17 *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Col 4:6 *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

1 Th 5:18 *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim 1:13 *What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

Titus 2:8 *And soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

Eccl 10:12 *Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.*

V. **Ephesians 05:05–06 Know God's Solemn Warnings**

The believer imitates God, fifth, by knowing God's solemn warning. Note three significant points.

1. Uncleanness has no part with God, no part whatsoever. The profession of a person does not matter: if he practices these things, he will not share in the kingdom of Christ and of God. And note, *the doom* pronounced is not future; it is present. It does not say, "he shall not have," but rather, "he does not have an inheritance with God." He may have houses, lands and all kinds of possessions; but he does not have one scrap of the kingdom. He has lost all that is really worth having. Note the specific sins mentioned that doom a person.

=> Being an *immoral person* (pomos): illicit sexual intercourse; fornication; prostitution; immoral behaviour.

=> Being an *impure person* (akathartos): unclean, immoral, dirty thoughts or behaviour.

=> Being a *greedy person* (see note above, Eph. 5:3).

=> Being an *idolater* (see Gal. 5:19-21).

2. There are deceivers walking all about us. There are people who will tell us...

- that sex is the normal and natural thing for man — that a one time affair will not hurt — that it is acceptable and will not harm us.
- that securing possessions is normal behaviour and banking and storing up is acceptable. It builds position, ego and self-image, and that could never be wrong: and having more than what we need enables us to give to help the needy as we desire.

Rom 16:18 *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*

Eph 4:14 *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

2 Cor 11:13-14 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*

2 Tim 3:13 *While evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Titus 1:10 *For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.*

2 John 1:7 *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

3. Barclay points out that there were and still are two main deceptions about Christianity (*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 192f).
 - a. There were those who felt that they could say and do anything and still be acceptable to God. This argument came primarily from those *outside* the church, although there were some within the church who held the same argument. This idea finds its roots in the philosophy of Gnosticism. Gnosticism said that man is both body and spirit. They felt that the spirit is the only important part of man — the only part that really matters. It is the only part that really concerns God. What a man does with his body does not matter; the body is not important. It makes no difference whatsoever if a man abuses his body: gorges, dirties and fouls it.

However, Christianity counters, “Never!” Both body and soul are important. We see this in Jesus Christ. He honoured the body by taking a body upon Himself (Heb. 2:14). Today He honours the body by making it the “holy temple” for His presence in the person of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Jesus Christ is interested in the body of man as well as the spirit of man. He is interested in the whole man, and He saves the whole man.

- b. There were those primarily within the church who felt that sin was irrelevant. How much a person sinned just did not matter. God is love and He forgives and forgives no matter how much wrong we do. In fact, some argued that the more we sin, the more God is able to forgive and demonstrate His mercy in us. So why not live the way we want? Why not sin and let God’s mercy and love shine through us, for the more we sin the more God’s grace will be seen. But Christianity counters, “Never!” God’s love and grace are not only a gift and a privilege, but a responsibility and an obligation.

However, note what God says: “Because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient” (v. 6; see Eph. 2:2). The *wrath* (orge) of God is a decisive anger, a deliberate anger that arises from His very nature of holiness. It is an anger that is *righteous, just and good* — that stands against the sins and evil of men — their dirt and pollution and immoralities — their injustices and neglects of a world that reels under the weight of lost, starving, diseased and dying masses. God could never overlook the whore-monger who destroys family life nor the covetous man who overlooks the needy. He would not be God; He would not be loving or just if He overlooked such evil persons.

Rom 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

Rom 2:5 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Eph 5:5-6 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Psa 2:12 *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

VI. Ephesians 05:07 Separation from the Unclean

The believer imitates God, sixth, by separating himself from the unclean. No believer is to take part in the sins discussed in these verses. In fact, he is to separate himself from all who do take part in such sins.

Acts 2:40 *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."*

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

1 Cor 5:9 *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.*

2 Cor 6:14 *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

Eph 5:11 *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*

2 Th 3:6 *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.*

1 John 2:15 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. ■*