

ISSUE

19.52

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

December 24,
2017

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Imitators of God

By Kyle Pope

In his beautiful letter to the Ephesians, Paul had just talked to the brethren about the relationship they shared with each other as members of the **“one body”** that is the Lord’s church (Eph. 4:4; cf. 1:22-23). He will go on later to talk to them about the relationship Christians should maintain within their families, with husbands demonstrating headship (Eph. 5:23), wives acting with loving respect in submission (Eph. 5:22, 33), and children obedient to their parents (Eph. 6:1). Yet, before this he talks to them about the most important relationship humans can enjoy—the relationship that makes fellowship within the church possible—the relationship that sets the patterns for family relationships—a relation-



ship with God. He charges them **“be imitators of God, as dear children”** (Eph. 5:1, NKJV).

Since the translation of the American Standard Version in 1901, most modern translations have rendered the Greek noun *mimētēs* in this text (from which our word “mimic” is derived) with the word **“imitators.”** Prior to this most English translations used the word **“followers,”** probably because it seems unnatural to think of human beings *imitating* Deity. Man is not God, and no efforts to mimic Him can change that! This hesitation to accept the clear sense of this text, however, may miss the modifier—**“as**

dear children.” All of us have seen little children look at the mature actions of their parents and try their best to imitate them. Whether it is the little boy stretching to look in the mirror and act like he is shaving, or the little girl stirring a spoon pretending to mix food in an empty bowl, children who love their parents seek to be like them.

Much of the focus of the verses that follow may reflect this objective. Why are Christians charged to **“walk in love”** (Eph. 5:2a)? Because beloved children of God should imitate God in the flesh who **“has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice”** (Eph. 5:2b). Paul names six sinful behaviors that are **“not fitting”** (Eph. 5:4d). In the context why should such things **“not even be named among”** Christians (Eph. 5:3d)? Because God would not practice such things! Would God engage in fornication, uncleanness, or covetousness (Eph. 5:3a-c)? Of course not—a **“covetous man”** is **“an idolater”** (Eph. 5:5)! Can we picture God engaging in **“obscenity”** (Eph. 5:4a,NIV), **“foolish talking or coarse jesting”** (Eph. 5:4b-c, NKJV)? Of course not—our Father in heaven doesn’t talk that way!

Earlier in the epistle Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus what they used to be when they were **“children of wrath”** (Eph. 2:3) living as **“sons of disobedience”** (Eph. 2:2). If Christians fail to imitate the character and virtue of God our Father, **“the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”** (Eph. 5:6) who surrender **“any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God”** (Eph. 5:5). Imitation of our heavenly Father is not just an idealistic aspiration that’s an option no one will ever really attain, it is the heart and soul of what shapes the behavior of a child of God.

There is another relationship that the apostle also explores in the midst of this appeal for imitation of Deity. Paul has just spoken of God’s wrath coming upon



the **“sons of disobedience”** (Eph. 5:6). To this, he adds the warning, **“Therefore do not be partakers with them”** (Eph. 5:7). The word translated **“partakers”** in the Greek is *summetochos*. The prefix *sum-* adds the sense of “with” or “together” to the noun *metochos*, which Thayer tells us is a “a partner (in a work, office, dignity).” The Hebrew writer uses this word of the special relationships the Christian enjoys in Christ. He tells us through the Holy Spirit that Christians are **“partakers of the heavenly calling”** (Heb. 3:1), **“partakers of Christ”** (Heb. 3:14), and **“partakers of the Holy Ghost”** (Heb. 6:4, KJV). In our text in Ephesians it is a different *partnership* Paul has in mind. To fail to imitate our Father makes us partners with the **“sons of disobedience”** who practice the **“unfruitful works of darkness”** (Eph. 5:11b). Christians must **“have no fellowship”** with such things, or those who practice them (Eph. 5:11a). All were **“once darkness”** (Eph. 5:8a), but the child who imitates His Father in heaven may **“walk as children of light”** (Eph. 5:8c).

The majority of Greek manuscripts, including with the second (or possibly even first) century Chester Beatty papyrus (P⁴⁶) preserve the wording **“fruit of the Spirit”** in Paul’s description of this walk as **“children of light”** producing **“goodness, righteousness, and truth”** (Eph. 5:9, NKJV). Most modern translations, following the Sinai, Vatican, and Alexandrian Greek manuscripts, and most ancient translations read instead “fruit of the light” (ASV, NASB, ESV). At some point in the transmission of the text a scribe either repeated the wording of Galatians 5:22 **“fruit of the Spirit”** or blended the figure of light that runs throughout this passage into this description—**“fruit of the light.”** Those in Christ, having left darkness now **“are light in the Lord”** (Eph. 5:8b). They reject **“fellowship”** (another word

for a *partnership*) with **“the unfruitful works of darkness”** but **“rather expose them”** (Eph. 5:11)—that’s what light does. How could an imitator of God practice such things?—**“it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret”** (Eph. 5:12). Instead, **“all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light”**—imitators of God expose the errors of darkness **“for whatever makes manifest is light”** (Eph. 5:13). Those who leave darkness may, **“arise from the dead”** in assurance that **“Christ will give you light”** (Eph. 5:14).

It may be that by this point in the text Paul is no longer emphasizing imitation of Deity, but a case could be made that this theme runs until Paul shifts to instruction on the family in verse 22. He has explained that **“children of light”** who bring forth the **“fruit of the light”** (or **“of the Spirit”**) seek to find **“out what is acceptable to the Lord”** (Eph. 5:10). Picture that little child looking up intently at his



father or mother, carefully studying every move his parents make. That may be the idea Paul continues. An imitator of God will **“look carefully”** (RSV, cf. ASV) how he should walk. He will **“not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is”** (Eph. 5:17). It is possible to understand **“what is acceptable to the Lord”** (Eph. 5:10) and what **“the will of the Lord is”** (Eph. 5:17b)—we learn our Father’s will and character through looking to

His word. Our Father in heaven would never **“be drunk with wine”** (Eph. 5:18a). We should be filled, with what fills Him. As we come to understand His will in looking to His word we come to be **“filled with the Spirit”** (Eph. 5:18c). Christians **“speaking to one another”** in song **“making melody in your heart”** (Eph. 5:19a) may not reflect imitation of Deity—man sings *to* God and *of* God. Does God sing? Even so, children who imitate their heavenly Father offer worship **“to the Lord”** (Eph. 5:19b). Their interest is not *“what’s in it for me?”*—they are looking heavenward, **“giving thanks always for all things to God the Father”** (Eph. 5:20). The imitator of God will not splinter the unity of his brothers and sisters of light through selfish self-interest. He or she will be too busy, **“submitting to one another in the fear of God”** (Eph. 5:21). The soul who looks to God with loving respect, as our Father who loves us and cares for us will willingly look to the character and will of God, because such a soul wants to be just like his Father in heaven.



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4700 Andrews Ave.
Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
www.olsenpark.com

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● **Let us know if you have any questions.**