

# Ephesians Series

## 14 .Imitators of God [Sermon Notes] Ephesians Eph 4:25-31

Last time - put on the new man - it's an attitude of heart. We are not called to keep law. Because we may keep the letter of the law but may not keep the spirit of it. The weakness of the law is that it was only a shadow of what was to come. Now we find ourselves under something much higher. We are called to become imitators of God.

Christianity is about BEING not DOING!

That is at the heart of Ephesians what we ARE and therefore what we should BE. Remember that God's ways are usually opposite from man's ways.

Man Want to know God? Then you keep law (you obey), then you become more like God, and then become acceptable - if not - chop.

God We become acceptable to God through faith, we desire to please Him and therefore to imitate Him, we obey Him

In other words, we do not follow law as the Jews did because they live in fear that failure will condemn us - because that's what the law does. We are not like the Muslim or the Hindu who do things in order to please their gods and become acceptable.

Unfortunately some Christians forget that and resort back to law. There's nothing more depressing than hear Christian people spouting law at one another without love. We're not called to keep law, but to obey God in being like Christ. If we're imitators of God then we automatically satisfy His righteous demands.

Through Christ we are already a child of God - we are called here to live like one. We are called to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.

Last week we saw how Paul encouraged us not to live as the Gentiles do, in the way of self and of selfishness. So if we are acceptable to God through Christ, if we are encouraged to live according to the calling we have received, if we are called to be mature then what should we do about it?

This part of Ephesians is constructed to stop the Ephesians looking for law by focussing on **being**. Rather than *do this* the sentiment is - if you're like this, then you going to be like that. I'd sum it up overall by saying, if you are a Christian, then **BE** imitators of God. Paul refers to four things that God has called us to in Christ and characteristics that come as a result.

1. We have a new self - that's we don't live as the gentiles do (vv23-24)
2. We have the Holy Spirit - that's why we act as children of God. (v30)
3. We are called to be imitators of God - that's why we behave like Christ to one another (5:1)
4. We are children of light - that's why we don't do works of darkness. (5:8)

We'll deal with two this week and then two next week.

Whatever Paul says about their behaviour is prefixed by one of these.

**1. We have a new self** - we are made into new people. *24 put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

We looked at this last week. If we are new, then we don't act like the old. Why act like godless Gentiles when we are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness? It doesn't make sense does it? yet we do. Paul says - we have a new self so put it on and act like who you're called to be.

R.C. Sproul puts it. "As Christians we are to mortify the flesh by destroying the old nature. We are to feed the new man with all the means of grace that God has appointed and at the same time starve the old man by denying him the occasions for sin."

The verses that belong with this phrase are vv 25-29. They all involve being the reverse of what the gentiles are like. Paul seems to specifically aim these points at known problems in the Ephesian

church. Remember, this is a pastoral letter not law. It addresses their issues. But as our society is so similar, it is staggeringly accurate in its commentary on our society too.

*25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body.*

Speaking falsehood. Characteristic of our society not to be open with people. By speaking truthfully we could maybe consider verse 15 where we are encouraged to speak the truth in love. We are a caring fellowship but where the Lord would want to take us is to be open with one another, to speak the truth in love. How are you? I'm fine - no you're not. We haven't got that far yet. But in truth we can see how becoming a more caring church has changed the atmosphere here. Let's go deeper into this as a church.

*26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.*

Interesting phrase "In your anger do not sin". There is such a thing called righteous anger. We have a right to be angry when we see things that are not right - Jesus cleansing the temple. But the trouble with anger is that it can lead to loss of control and therefore sin. That's why Paul sees anger as something that must stop. We are not called to be Mr or Mrs Angry because it is through our loss of control that the devil gets a foothold and as Paul says in verse 31, leads to malice. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. It eats and gnaws at us. We become bitter.

We all know what Paul means. If we are rightly angry, then let's be open and get it over with. Because the longer it's there, the longer the opportunity there is for the devil to turn it into bitterness, rage, slander, even brawling - and it has been heard of in church.

And every time we do it, we sin, we dishonour God. The Holy Spirit is grieved - He's there to be our seal of ownership, to show that God has honoured us with sonship - yet we dishonour it. He is God, He's in us - how could we behave in this way?

*28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Stealing - that's not me. You'd be surprised how in our society stealing is so routine that we don't even think some stealing is stealing. This was particularly to Roman slaves who were mistreated by their masters and on whom they often wreaked revenge. We do the same to employers - nick their pens and paper, photocopies. Don't register software. The contrast is rather than deprive people of possessions, we need to use what we have to help those in need. We are called to be people who acquire things legitimately to help others. That is our calling. The reverse is theft.

*29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

Take care how you speak. Unwholesome talk can be anything that damage someone else or by implication in this verse means something that doesn't build them up. So unwholesome words can be gossip or backbiting but it can also mean not saying things that should be said to encourage someone. As I said earlier, in the past few years the Lord has been teaching us as a church to love and care for one another. But now we need to go deeper. It just isn't a case of being friendly, it is a case of using our speech to build each other up. We see a spiritual need and rather than hoping someone else will say something, or the Pastor will - we minister to each other.

One of the areas where we need to grow as a church is in this area I believe. Ministry is not just for the Pastor. We are all called to it. If someone needs words of encouragement, then give them - don't ask or expect the Pastor to do it - or leave him to do it - do it yourself whether or not the Pastor may do it anyway. Let's build one another up.

But right at the end of this comes the second of our four points. We desire to be like God because .....

**2. We have the Holy Spirit in us** as our seal. *30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

If you are a born again believer this morning then you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Chapter 1:13 *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.* That's how we know we are children of God.

You were sealed. Marked out. Look at *Romans 8:9* *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* If you belong to Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. God resides in you. If He does, then how much of your life reflects Him? A little or a lot?

What we have already considered this morning is that we are learning here about living life in a way that does not grieve the Spirit. We have already seen that we minister to one another, to minister to each other's needs, not to be false or angry but to use our speech to build one another up. To do anything else is grievous to the Holy Spirit within us!!

Being like Jesus, imitating God and certainly not grieving the Holy Spirit isn't about self, but about selflessness. Verse 32 sums up this whole idea *32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* The quality of our spiritual life is summed up in the quality of our spiritual life together.

We've started, now let's allow ourselves to go deeper into it because we need to.

⇒ There are people in the church that are hurting that need comfort -let's visit them and minister to them and just not expect the pastor or deacons or someone else to do it.

⇒ If people are sick, let's pray for them - and don't be embarrassed to do it in the church

⇒ If people are in need, don't be afraid to help them

My desire is that as a Church we continue to go down the road that we started going down. Ministry isn't a sole area of the Pastor, it is for all of us. You might not think you can do much but it makes a difference to visit someone, or to invite them to your home, to telephone them, to pray for them and by that I mean WITH them. Many of you already do this anyway. I want to encourage you to do it all the more. For those of you who don't then I just want to encourage you because we are built up as a fellowship as we minister to one another.