

**“An Acceptable Imitation”**

Ephesians 4:25-32, 5:1-2; John 6:44-45

At a recent conversation over lunch with some church members, the discussion turned to the high cost of healthcare... for PETS! And how those costs can sometimes relate to medical conditions that they may share in common with ‘two-legged animals.’ In particular, **diabetes**. I learned that there is apparently a brand of insulin made by Wal-Mart that is MUCH more reasonably priced compared to the brand-name products. And being a former ‘drug-pusher’ (i.e., Pharmaceutical Representative), I brought up what made a **substitute acceptable**. You see, Generic drugs can fall in a certain range of potency (plus or minus) and still be considered ‘equivalent.’ But for certain therapies, the body needs a more specific dosage for optimal benefit. Like, for instance, **Thyroid hormone**. (You see, I used to market the product “Synthroid,” the ‘**gold standard**’ for thyroid hormone replacement therapy). A product that many physicians will write ‘DNS’ (**Do not substitute**). Some doctors recognize that for the best possible **outcome** for the patient, there are certain treatments for which one should ‘**Accept NO imitations.**’

But I DO know that ‘imitation IS the most sincere form of flattery.’ (Just not always in medications). And in today’s passage from Paul’s letter to the church (at Ephesus, and beyond) he does call for faithful believers to exhibit (in the words of this saying) ‘flattery’ to God through their ‘imitation.’ So, while I know that our actions could never be fully ‘equivalent’ to God’s, let us consider some of the ways that the Great Apostle suggests that we might offer ourselves to our Lord as “**An Acceptable Imitation.**”

As we consider ALL that these ‘brief’ 8 verses have to say to us about being ‘imitators of God,’ I was reminded of something that we talked about at our Men’s Group (LC) on Thursday. In considering the ways that we can get more out of our study of Scripture, it was suggested to put a key verse from each Sunday on a piece of paper, and put a copy on your mirror, or dashboard, or refrigerator. Well, with all of the ‘key’ verses in this passage, you wouldn’t be able to SEE your ‘mirror, dash, or frig. There are a LOT of ‘arrows’ here to put into your

Scriptural 'quiver.' But to make it more simple, I would put Paul's ways to live more like true **'beloved children of God'** into three categories: how we honor God with our **HANDS...** with our **LIPS...** and with our **HEARTS**. How we can become better 'imitators of God' by what we **DO...** by what we **SAY...** and by what we **FEEL**.

First, there is what we **DO** with the labors of our **HANDS**. In v. 28, Paul writes, ***"Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy."*** (Eph. 4:28) 'WHOA!' you might say. ***"Thieves?"*** I KNOW that this passage is not talking to ME! And I don't know that Paul was talking about those who take from others. (Tho some might consider some 'TAXES' or exorbitant user 'FEES' in this light! ☺) But perhaps here he is reminding the people of the true **Giver**, and **purpose**, of rewards for our labors. That all we have comes ultimately from God, and therefore, we are to give back for the good of God, and God's people. 'Working honestly,' is also translated ***"Doing something useful"...*** ***"so as to have something to share with the needy."***

How are YOU 'doing something useful'... in order to 'have something to share with the needy?' It could be someone you don't even know at a food pantry or a homeless shelter... or even someone you know very well in this particular faith, or larger local, community. It could be someone halfway around the world... or out on this very street. It could be a young student at an elementary school... or an elderly man or woman in a nursing, or private, home. As we seek to improve this 'image of God' in which we are made, how are we caring for OTHER 'images'... by how we **DO** 'something useful' with our 'hands'...

Paul also speaks extensively on how we are 'imitators of God' by what we **SAY** with our **LIPS**. This passage begins with the exhortation, ***"Let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another."*** (Eph. 4:25) If that phrase ***"speak the truth"*** sounds familiar, one might flash back a few lines to verse 15 of this chapter: ***"...speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."*** (Eph. 4:15, NLT) We **KNOW** in our heart-of-hearts that we **DO** grow more like our Lord Jesus, the head of the church, as we 'speak the truth in love.' The trouble is, too often we can be **SO** concerned about speaking what we *believe* to be the **truth**, we forget about the **love** part...

It is what follows in v. 29 that we might find the most challenging. ***“Let no evil (‘unwholesome’) talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up...”*** (Eph. 4:29) It certainly reminds us of the power of our words to be useful for building up... OR *tearing down!* But I would add a very important ‘addendum’ to this statement. There is considerable Biblical scholarship that adds a word at the end of the phrase: ***“...only what is useful for building up FAITH.”*** Now THAT sure puts a different perspective on what kind of ‘talk comes out of our mouths,’ wouldn’t you say? Hey, I like talking about sports, or music, or TV shows, or FILL-IN-THE-BLANK as much or MORE than the next man (or woman). But this really makes me think about whether my words are spoken ***“only what is useful for building up faith.”*** ...HOW ABOUT YOU? How often does the ‘talk’ you engage in build up the FAITH of a brother or sister? Faith is MUCH more important than football or politics... you know, our other ‘religions’...

And finally, besides what our ‘hands do,’ and our ‘lips say,’ what both of those actions flow out of is what we FEEL in our **HEARTS**. Right after his exhortation to ***“speak the truth”*** (...in? LOVE!), Paul says we are to ***“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.”*** (Eph. 4:26-27)

I find this one verse filled with meaning. First, Paul tells us to ‘BE angry!’ Strange? No, even Jesus got angry... remember what happened at ‘church’? (OK, the ‘temple.’) Jesus’ ‘turning the tables’ reminds us that there are things that happen in our world, to those we love and to those we don’t even know, that SHOULD make us ‘angry.’ Call it ‘righteous indignation.’ But how do we CHANNEL that ‘anger’... that ‘righteous indignation?’ In ways that ***‘do not sin.’*** In ways that are ***“useful in building up faith.”*** NOT in hearts filled with, in Paul’s words, ***“bitterness, wrath, slander, and malice.”*** Perhaps we should share this verse with those protestors in Charlottesville, VA and Washington, DC, and around the nation.

Paul also says to ***“not let the sun go down on your anger.”*** When I counsel with couples getting married, I always talk about this verse... and how it will be one of those statements that I will personally want to talk with God, and/or Paul, about. Beause from a pragmatic standpoint, I believe that sometimes it is GOOD to ‘let the sun go down on your anger.’ That when you wake up, what seemed so important the day before doesn’t anymore. And that if it’s still an issue, it most certainly SHOULD be addressed. Perhaps this could be looked at in terms

of the 'sun going down' representing our **ignoring** a problem that is making us upset, angry. And that there is great wisdom to not handling difficult situations by 'sweeping them under a rug.' But rather, by dealing with them 'in the light of day'... before 'the sun goes down'...

Paul closes this passage with another key **feeling** we are to bear in our **hearts**: ***"be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another...***

***as God in Christ has forgiven you."*** (Eph. 4:32) As I've said before, there may be no better word to encapsulate the essence of our life of faith in Christ than the word **"forgiveness."** Which goes hand-in-hand with a **two-word** description of God: **'unconditional love.'** The forgiveness that Paul challenges us to demonstrate to one another is embodied in the unconditional love of Jesus... who showed that love for us in his humiliating, humbling death on a cross where he cried out to Almighty God, ***"Father, forgive them... for they know not what they do."***

As we seek to be 'imitators of God'... in what we DO, and SAY, and FEEL... there is only one TRUE way to do so: **follow Jesus.** In speaking of 'imitations'... not that I know from *personal* experience... I understand that those who counterfeit money (true **'thieves'**) do so not by looking at other imitations, but by studying the original. The real thing. That which is from the **ultimate source**, the U.S. Treasury. And if we are to do our best to be the **most accurate representation** of our **God** ... the **ultimate source** of LIFE... we too must look at the 'real thing': the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

As I prepared for today's message, I came across a number of companies that wanted people to not settle for any substitute for their product. That you should listen to them and they will lead you to the best alternative to care for your needs. Each company encourages the consumer to 'accept no imitations: That for the best **French fries**, you should only go to **McDonalds**. For the best **sticky notes**, only choose **Post-It notes**. Especially at this time of yr., when you buy a **backpack**, the one you should buy is **Jansport**. And, if you go by the name of one of their albums, the best **rock-and-roll band** is **KISS**.

We are bombarded every day by messages that inform us what the best choice to make is... be it from insurance to trial lawyers to automobiles to medications. All VERY important decisions. 😊 But let us be mindful of the One whose 'advice' we can always trust. The only

One who can truly satisfy our every need... our every hunger, our every thirst. **The Bread of Life.** The Son who said of His Father: ***“No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.”*** (John 6:44) As we seek to obey Paul’s charge to be ***“imitators of God”***... as we strive to live out our identity as God’s adopted children... let us follow the best example, the highest standard... the TRUE ‘gold standard’, Jesus Christ. The ONLY Savior. **Accept NO imitations!** And as we follow His example, we will become more and more **“An Acceptable Imitation’**...

### **CHARGE**

As I read this, I was reminded of the manner in which a civic organization (which shall remain nameless, since members of *another* one says I will be fined for mentioning it by name) opens up its meetings. It is entitled “The Four way Test,” and asks the members to challenge themselves with these questions:

- >>** That “of the things we THINK, SAY, or DO, is it the **TRUTH?**  
Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?  
Will it build **GOODWILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?**  
Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?

Let us see how such **concerns** are **grounded in Scripture**...

which comes to us through the **inspiration of God.**

The same God who **‘inspires’** you to be the best **‘imitation’** you can be.

As you go forth to **bear witness** to the **Father** who **draws you** to Himself,  
and the **Son** who **raises you up**, KNOW that you do not go alone...