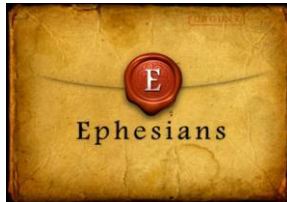


Route 66

Ephesians: Imitators Not Imitations

Part 49 – January 30, 2011



Unlike many other NT epistles, Paul's letter to the Ephesians isn't correcting some heresy or confronting some problem in a congregation. It's a short letter of encouragement, to a group of believers that Paul had been very close with. When Paul was leaving them, never to return, we're told that ...

They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. – *Acts 20:36-38a NIV*



Paul had founded the church at Ephesus (in modern day Turkey), and pastored there for three years. Paul's preaching had so disrupted the revenue of the false idol trade that a mob of craftsmen rioted until all Ephesus was in an uproar. (*Acts 19:23-41*) A silversmith named Demetrius publically denounced Paul:

[Paul] says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty. – *Acts 19:26b-27 NIV*



And Demetrius was absolutely right to be nervous! This is all that's left of "the temple of the great goddess Artemis" that Demetrius refers to: one lone column in a swamp! This was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and measured 425' long, 220' wide and 60' high.

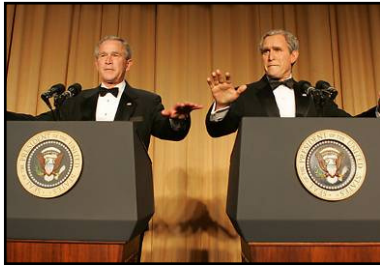
When Paul was saying his final goodbyes in Ephesus, he said:

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. – *Acts 20:22-23 NIV*

God's Spirit was preparing Paul. Now, about five years later, he is writing to his Ephesian friends while under arrest in Rome. Look how Paul signs off at the end:

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am **an ambassador in chains**. – *Ephesians 6:19-20a NIV*

An ambassador is a messenger who resides in one land without compromising allegiance to another. And they do their utmost to represent the heart of their true leader as closely as possible.



Paul's theme throughout Ephesians is to imitate Christ. The objective is to be an imitator without being an *imitation*. Both words have the same root, but we think of an imitator as one who studies and mirrors someone else. Whereas, we think of an imitation as something artificial or fake.



So which are you: imitator of Christ or "NoSalt"? Jesus is the highest example of loving intimacy with God, joyful obedience to God, and thoughtful compassion to others. And it was *always* God's plan that we should be just like His Son.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ ... -
Ephesians 1:4b-5a NIV

And if imitating Christ seems out of your reach, try this one on:



[You were] **created to be like God** in true righteousness and holiness. - *Ephesians 4:24b NIV*

We don't know what all this implies, but we do know that like God: We are **spiritual**: we have everlasting souls; We are **intellectual**: we think and we reason; We are **relational**: we give and receive love; We are **moral**: able to tell right from wrong.

However, the oldest temptation in the book (*literally*) is in Genesis 3:5. The serpent says to Eve, "You will be like God". So, were we created to be like God or not? Yes, we were ... and ... no, we weren't. Notice Paul's qualification: in true "righteousness and holiness"



Paul tells us to take on God's *nature* by *submitting* to His authority. The enemy tempts us to take on God's *authority* by *rebell*ing against His nature. We're not called to be a god, but to be Godly. Whenever we try to control people or circumstances in a manner that doesn't reflect the God's nature, we're buying into the oldest deception there is. We were created to bear God's image by maturing in His values, attitude, and character; not out of guilt, pressure, or threat of punishment, but joyfully as ...

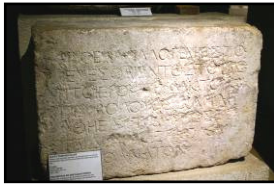


Well, here's how Paul puts it:

Be imitators of God, therefore, **as dearly loved children** 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. - *Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV*



This was hard for a gentile in Paul's day to get his head around. This area of the temple was only for Jews, and off limits to gentiles. It had a barrier around it called a "dividing wall" or "balustrade". And the ancient historian, Josephus describes warnings to the gentiles that were posted on it.



Archaeologists have unearthed one of the actual warnings from that dividing wall. And it reads:

No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade ... whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death which will follow

Now we can better appreciate the impact on the Ephesians (who were mostly gentile), when Paul wrote:

For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. - *Ephesians 2:14-15 NIV*

Jesus not only destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile, but between sinful man and a holy God.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. - *Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV*

Our Obedience can now be motivated by and a response of love and joy and gratitude for what *Christ* has done, and can truly be given as a "fragrant offering". Nothing is more fragrant than a freshly washed and powdered baby.

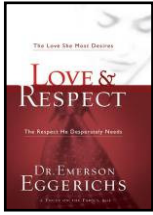


And nothing is more off-putting and pungent than the reason that same baby *needed* to be washed in the first place!

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. - *Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV*

I want to stick this image in your head: the "you" that doesn't reflect Jesus, smells like a dirty diaper ... to God, to everyone who gets close to you, and even and especially to yourself. But, the "you" that reflects Jesus smells like baby powder. Christianity's greatest proof is the new person it produces.

A standard routine for impersonators is to ask something like: "What if Robert De Niro worked in a complaint department?" Well, we're called to daily ask ourselves: "What would Jesus look like as a husband, wife, parent, child, boss, or employee?" And Paul covers each one of these categories in Ephesians.



In the book “Love and Respect”, the author makes a strong case that women speak the language of *love*, while men speak the language of *respect*. And he sees a “secret” formula “hidden” in Ephesians:

... each man must **love** his wife ... and the wife must **respect** her husband.
- Ephesians 5:33b NLT



Wives need love the same way they need air to breathe. And when a husband shuts off her air supply, she reacts ... verbally and critically. Deprived of love, she reacts without respect. And this shuts off his air supply. And he reacts silently and coldly. Because, deprived of respect, he reacts without love.

Her contempt fuels his coldness. His detachment fuels her disdain. And back and forth it goes; each reacting to the deprivation of what they need most - he becoming ever more unloving, and she becoming ever more disrespectful. Only one thing can break this viscous cycle: imitating Christ.



Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... - *Ephesians 5:25 NIV*

Jesus didn't love the church *because* it was holy; He loved the church *to make* it holy. His love wasn't a reaction; it was an unconditional gift that He offered in the face of scorn and contempt.

And just as husbands are to submit to their wives as Christ submitted to the church ...

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church ... - *Ephesians 5:22-23a NIV*

This isn't calling a wife to *worship* her husband, but to respect his role as a servant-leader even when he's blowing it. Husband *and* wife must submit to putting the other first. We can learn to *love* the worth and *respect* the dignity of the person even while confronting sinful attitudes and offensive behaviors.

The next time your spouse says, “I need some air!” think about it! When a wife feels cherished, she responds with appreciation and respect. And when a husband feels appreciated, he responds with tenderness and devotion.



This may be a *winning* formula but it sure ain't an *easy* one! The enemy stands against us and tempts us to seize control. So if we're going to get serious about imitating Christ, we'll need to be fitted for the fight!

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. - *Ephesians 6:11 NIV*

What is the “full armor of God”?

Paul must have been astounded when the Spirit showed him that a full suit of spiritual armor was in the OT, just waiting to be assembled by those who are serious about imitating Christ.

Goodness and fairness will give him strength, like a **belt** around his waist. – *Isaiah 11:5 NCV*

He put on righteousness as his **breastplate**, and the **helmet** of salvation on his head ... – *Isaiah 59:17a NIV*

How beautiful on the mountains are the **feet** of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace ... – *Isaiah 52:7 NIV*

God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my **shield** and the horn of my salvation. – *2 Samuel 22:3a NIV*

He made my mouth like a sharpened **sword** ... – *Isaiah 49:2a NIV*

And then Paul put it together so we could put it on:

Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place, and with your **feet** fitted with the readiness that comes from the **gospel of peace**. In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the **helmet of salvation** and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the **word of God**. – *Ephesians 6:14-17 NIV*

You’ll notice there’s nothing to protect your backside. This armor is only for those ready to leave their dirty diapers behind, and face this world, as an ambassador of Christ, head on.