

# Imitating God

Be imitators of God ... - Ephesians 5:1

Standing alone, this notion that we might imitate God would seem too staggering to even consider. In what respects can the creature ever hope to imitate the Creator? The very notion smacks of hubris and irreverence. Fortunately, the words immediately preceding and following this injunction qualify what Paul had in mind. Given our profound limitations, a child of God must still seek to pursue the ethical character of the Father Who loves him, and he must do so in order to lend authenticity to his profession that he loves His heavenly Father.

The section of Ephesians preceding chapter 5 touches upon Christians living in community together in ways that reflect that they have stepped out of the world's dominion of darkness and into God's kingdom of light. The "new self" that we are told to put on always opts for truth over falsehood; industry over sloth and theft; beneficial speech over "unwholesome talk"; gentleness and compassion over every form of malice; forgiving grace over bitterness. Then, in the words that follow, we learn that all of this is motivated not by any mentality that we can rack-up merit points in God's eyes. On the contrary, we imitate God in every ethical and character pursuit as a reflection that we are loving children who adore our Father and simply yearn to be like Him.

<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup>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

Many products are designed to imitate the real thing. Faux fur has been around for years as has cosmetic jewelry. Vinyl flooring is produced that looks like tile. Plastic decking is fabricated to look like real lumber. Depending on what one chooses to spend, hairpieces are available that looks like real hair (while others look sadly like the aforementioned plastic decking.) In some instances, these substitutes might be useful and/or economical. In other instances, one is compelled to ask, "What exactly is the point?" as in the case of a product called *Spray-on Mud*.

Say you have a four-wheel-drive SUV, but between hauling groceries and getting the kids back and forth to soccer practice and dance class, you rarely have an occasion to impress your buddies as that rugged off-road enthusiast you'd like for them to think that you are. Just apply a can of *Spray-on Mud* to your vehicle and your friends will be convinced that you've just returned from a wilderness adventure. Apparently, to some, \$15 a can seems a reasonable price for conveying the image of a robust sportsman.

Some synthetics are useful, but some seem rather pitiful compared to the real thing that they cheaply represent. There are many synthetics on which people rely to communicate their progress in Christ which are not nearly as satisfying or blessed as just acquiring the authentic virtues through patience, obedience and trust. Well-wishing can be mistaken for prayer. Success can be misconstrued as spiritual progress. Bumper stickers, jewelry and other forms of 'Christian' merchandise can pass for evangelism. An emotional response to an excellent presentation can be a synthetic form of authentic worship. Humorous, entertaining and motivating stories often replace sound Bible preaching and teaching. Clichés are handed out as wisdom. An attractive personality can be mistaken for a Spirit-filled life.

What pitiful substitutes all of these things are for their authentic counterparts. Our calling is not to perform, to achieve or to accomplish. It is to imitate our Father. A child will show himself to be a true child by wanting to grow up like his father. In the same way, God's precious children will be eager to copy him, as He enables them.

"Imitators" was a word used by those who taught oratory. The idea was, "Watch the masters and learn." Everything we have ever seen of God in Creation, in His dealings with the Jews, or in Jesus reinforces the truth that man is loved. As we have been loved, we must imitate God in the lives of one another. Worldly patterns for dealing with truthfulness, anger, greed, loose lips and our selfish fallen natures are of no value to us. They only provide cracks through which the devil sows seeds of harm. When we imitate God in our relationships, we step outside of the stingy, natural man and learn how to serve others. The Body is built up. The devil runs. And, God's Spirit sings for joy.

© 2011 by R. Karl Crouch, 551 Abbeyville Road, Lancaster, PA 17603