

The Imitation Game

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Ephesians chapter 5, Ephesians 5, and reading from the beginning.

Where Paul writes, I love watching films that are based upon a true story, especially war films, because, as you know, war films, they often picture and portray that great heroism and bravery in the face of the cruel reality of war.

And as you know, there are many war films that are based upon a true story. And there are, I suppose you could say, my favourite one would be Hacksaw Ridge, if you've ever seen it. It's a very, I don't know, very gruesome, but it's a very realistic film about war.

You know, there's one film that I've always found very fascinating, because it wasn't actually based upon, you could say, Flanders Fields and the fighting that went on. But also, it was a film that was based in Bletchley Park, which was the centre of deciphering and decoding all the decrypted messages of German intelligence during the Second World War.

And there's a film, maybe you've seen it, the film called The Imitation Game. The Imitation Game stars Benedict Cumberbatch. He's in loads of films. But he plays this man, Alan Turing.

[1 : 58] And Alan Turing, he's a British mathematician. He's a computer scientist. But he's also a codebreaker. And he's a codebreaker who's been conscripted to join a team of cryptographers, I don't have to pronounce it properly, and they're there to decode all these messages of the Nazis.

And the Nazis, as you know, they had what was called an enigma machine. And during the war, Alan Turing, he invented this machine that could not only decode and decrypt and even decipher all these Nazi messages, but Alan Turing's invention could also imitate and even impersonate Nazi coders.

And it could do it in such a way that it would even fool the Nazi coders into thinking that they were communicating with other Nazis. And in many ways, you know, you could say that Alan Turing's invention was one of the first instances of AI, artificial intelligence.

And his invention was based upon a paper that he wrote, and the paper was called, hence the name of the film, The Imitation Game. The Imitation Game, where Alan Turing's invention had intelligently interpreted Nazi code by imitating and impersonating Nazi coders.

In fact, it's believed that Alan Turing's invention, it saved many, many lives during the war. And it actually shortened, this is what they believe, it shortened the Second World War by about two years.

[3 : 29] It was the Imitation Game. The Imitation Game. And you know, as we come to this section in Ephesians chapter 5, that's what I was thinking about. Paul is calling us here to play the Imitation Game.

He's calling us to play the Imitation Game. Not that we are to decode or decrypt or decipher Nazi messages. But that as Christians, we are to imitate and impersonate God.

We are to imitate and impersonate God. That's what Paul says. And so I want us to think about this, I want us to think about it under two headings. First of all, Imitators.

And then Imperatives. Imitators and Imperatives. First of all, we look at imitators. Verses 1 and 2. Paul writes, Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Now, as you know, and as we've said many times before, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it's a game of two halves.

[4 : 44] It's split into two sections. There are six chapters in the letter and it has been separated into two sections. The first three chapters, Paul is teaching. The last three chapters, Paul is telling.

So chapters 1 to 3 full of information. Chapters 4 to 6 full of application. Chapters 1 to 3 full of indicatives. And as we see here in chapters 4 to 6, they're full of imperatives.

So chapters 1 to 3, they're full of encouragements. And chapters 4 to 6 are full of exhortations. And in chapters 1 to 3, as we know, Paul has encouraged us.

He taught us in chapter 1 that we've received all these blessings and benefits of salvation. We've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

In chapter 2, Paul reminded us, he reassured us that we've been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In chapter 3, Paul encouraged us that God has made known to us the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love in Christ.

[5 : 49] And so Paul, he has encouraged us. He has lovingly encouraged us through chapters 1 to 3. Which is why he now lovingly exhorts us through chapters 4 to 6.

He has lovingly encouraged and now he wants to lovingly exhort. And as we've seen and as we've said before, Paul introduces there at the beginning of chapter 4, he introduces this, what we've called a peripatetic illustration.

And I use the phrase peripatetic intentionally because the word Paul uses there at the beginning of chapter 4 and throughout chapter 5, it's this word peripateo, meaning to walk.

And you see that word appearing again and again and again throughout chapter 4 and throughout chapter 5. Paul uses this peripatetic illustration because for Paul, our Christian walk is important and it's integral to our Christian witness.

Our Christian walk is important and integral to our Christian witness. That's why Paul begins the second section of his letter in chapter 4 with this exhortation.

[7 : 03] He says there at the beginning of chapter 4, Therefore, as a prisoner of the Lord, I exhort you, I urge you, I beseech you, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

So Paul has already encouraged us by saying that we've been called to salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Therefore, you are now lovingly exhorted to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

You're to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. And Paul says how you're to walk humbly, gently, patiently, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity, walking as one body of Christ. Because there is only one body, says Paul. There's only one spirit. We've been called to one hope. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, who is over all, in all, and through all.

Therefore, Paul says, walk in a manner worthy of your calling to which you have been called. Follow in the footsteps of Jesus. But as we saw last week, we went into the second half of chapter 4.

[8 : 12] Paul exhorts us there not to walk like the world or to walk with the world. And Paul says it with such seriousness and such solemnity that he says there at verse 17, I testify in the Lord.

I testify in the Lord, you must not walk like the world. Paul warns us about our Christian walk. And he says to us, we have learned to walk in the path of righteousness.

We have learned to walk in the ways of Christ. We've learned to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Therefore, we are not to walk with the world and we're not to walk like the world.

We're not to cover up or conceal or camouflage our Christian character, conduct, conversation or commitment to Christ. Because as we saw in the picture last week, Christians are not chameleons. Christians are not chameleons. We're not to hide out Christianity. Our Christian walk is important. And it's integral to our Christian witness.

[9 : 19] Because as Paul is teaching us in the second half of his letter, the world is watching. The world is watching us. Therefore, Christians are not chameleons. We're not to blend into the background.

We're not to reflect our worldly surroundings. We are not to imitate our worldly environment. Because as Paul goes on into chapter 5, we are not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless.

We're to be imitators of God himself. And you know, he's so firm with us. We're not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless.

We are to be imitators of God. Therefore, he says, verse 1 of chapter 5, Be imitators of God as beloved children.

And you know, by using and you could say even utilizing the conjunction, therefore, he uses it. Paul uses it all the time in his letters. Therefore, therefore. He talks.

[10:20] He uses this great conjunction. Therefore, he's always building a case. And then he comes with the application. And Paul is saying there, at the beginning of chapter 5, He's saying, based upon all these encouragements I've given you in chapters 1 to 3, and all the exhortations I've set before you in chapter 4, Paul now says in chapter 5, I want you to see and be sure we are not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless.

We are to be imitators of God. We are not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless. We're to be imitators of God.

And Paul, when you look at the thought pattern of how he writes his letters, he bases everything and he backs up everything he says by giving the reason why.

Why are we to be imitators of God, he says? Well, the end of verse 1, because we are his beloved children. We are his beloved children. And this is important to remember as imitators of God, because Paul has told us already in this letter, we've been saved by the grace of God.

But now he reminds us here that we have been adopted into the family of God. We've received that spirit of adoption, where, as Calvin explains in his Institutes, God is our father, the church is our mother, Jesus is our saviour and our elder brother, the Christian is our brother and our sister, and the Holy Spirit is our comforter and counsellor.

[11:57] And you know, Paul is reminding us, you have a great family, a wonderful family that you're part of, that you've been adopted and accepted into. And you have been warmly welcomed into the family of God.

Therefore, says Paul, we are not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless. You're not to imitate someone who's outside the family of God. No, we're to imitate God himself as his beloved children.

And as you know, that's the thing about families. They're often family looks and family likenesses. We see that with parents and grandparents and children.

There are family traits and there are family traces. That's why we often say, like father, like son. Because there are, you could say, even movements and mannerisms.

There are characteristics. There are, even the way they have a conversation. There are almost, children are often imprints and even imitations of their parents. Where children, they walk and they talk in an almost an identical way to their parents.

[13:07] Do you know, even with baby Matthew, everyone asks the question, who does he look like? Who does he look like? And of course, he gets his good looks from his dad and he gets his happy nature from his mother.

I wish that were actually true because the sad reality is that children, and I see it all the time in our home, children copy all the wrong characteristics, conduct and conversations from their parents. But as children of God, we don't have that concern. We don't have that concern because our parent, our heavenly father, he's perfect.

He's holy. He's righteous. Therefore, says Paul, be imitators of him as beloved children. But as you know, well, we haven't seen God the father.

None of us have seen God the father. Yet Jesus teaches us, if you have seen me, you have seen the father. And as the writer to the Hebrews explains, he says, Jesus, he is the radiance of his father's glory, the exact imprint of his nature.

[14:21] And so in order to be imitators of God as beloved children, we need to be imitators of our elder brother, Jesus. We need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

We need to walk in the ways of Christ. Which is why Paul, he continues this peripatetic illustration in verse two. He says, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

And you know, you can't miss it. You can't miss Paul's exhortations there and also his, you could, his peripatetic illustrations. Because he says, beginning of chapter four, walk worthily of your Christian calling.

Middle of chapter four, do not walk as imitators of the world. Then he says, verse, chapter five, verse one, walk as imitators of God. And we do that by walking in love.

And as always, Paul, he gives us the reason. He gives us the rationale for walking in love. As he says there, why are we to walk in love? Because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a

fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[15:40] And you know, the thing is, whenever Paul is teaching us about living Christ-like lives, Paul repeatedly returns to the example of Christ. When Paul calls us to walk the Christian walk, he gives us the example of Jesus.

And we see that even at the end of the previous chapter. He says there at the end of the previous chapter, Paul exhorts us, right at the end of chapter four, verse 32, he exhorts us to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

So Paul says that we're to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving. And what's the reason? What's the rationale for our forgiveness? Well, God in Christ has forgiven you.

God has done it to you. Therefore, you are to show towards others. Therefore, he says, chapter five, verse one, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love.

Why? Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. And you know, what Paul is saying there is that as God's children, we're to be imitators of God by walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

[16:57] He's our example. He's the one we're to imitate and emulate. And Paul says, if Jesus lived a sinless, sacrificial, and sweet smelling life to God the Father, then that's how we are to live our lives as Christians.

We're to live, not sinless, but selfless. We're to live a sacrificial life and we're to live our life as a fragrant offering to God the Father.

It is to be a sweet smelling life, a fragrance of life unto life. We're not to walk with the world, we're to walk with Jesus. Because our Christian walk, for Paul, and he emphasizes it again and again, our Christian walk is important and integral to our Christian witness.

And this is why Paul, once again, gives us a whole host of imperatives. Which is what we see secondly. That's our second heading, imperatives.

So there's imitators and then there's imperatives. Imperatives. He says, therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[18:21] So as we've seen and as we've said, in the second half of his letter, Paul moves from teaching to telling, from information to application, from encouragement to exhortation, from indicatives to using imperatives.

And in the second half of Paul's letter, it's amazing how many imperatives he uses. Paul uses lots and lots of imperatives.

Last week, in the second half of chapter 4, we noticed that Paul used 11 imperatives. And he used them one after the other. There were 11 imperatives of what it means to walk worthy of our Christian calling in the face of a watching world.

There were 11 imperatives in the second half of chapter 4 about our Christian character, conduct, conversation, and commitment to Christ. And with these 11 imperatives, Paul kept telling us to put off and put on.

Put off and put on. Put off the old self, put off the old man, put off your former way of life, and put on the new self. Put on the new man, put on the new life in Christ.

[19:31] And so in the second half of chapter 4, Paul exhorted us to put off and put on with 11 imperatives. But here in chapter 5, or the first half of chapter 5, Paul implements even more imperatives.

because Paul gives us 20 in 20. He gives us 20 in 20. That's 20 imperatives in 20 verses.

20 in 20, which should only stress to us and show to us how highly Paul regards our Christian walk in this world.

And so the first imperative of 20, it's in verse 1. Be imitators of God. Why? Your beloved children.

Second imperative of 20, verse 2.

Walk in love. Why? Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Third imperative of 20 is in verse 3.

[20:37] But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you. Why? This is proper among the saints.

Now the Greek word that Paul uses here for sexual immorality is the Greek word pornea. Pornea, which, as you can guess, is where the word pornography comes from.

And you know, Paul is clear when he says there, he says that these things must not even be named among you. these things must not even be named among you.

In other words, as a Christian, you're not to entertain or even engage in sexual immorality, pornography, impurity, or covetousness.

And yet, you know, if you were to look it up, the sad statistic, even with ministers, the sad statistic is that so many saints secretly struggle with these things.

[21 : 43] But rather than secretly struggling with it, they should speak about it. But you'll never know unless they speak about it. That's why Paul brings it up.

That's why he encourages us, because our Christian walk is important to our Christian witness.

Then the fourth imperative of 20, verse 4, let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead, let there be thanksgiving.

Let there be thanksgiving. Now, like many people, I love laughing. And you know that I love laughing. I'm always laughing. I always love laughing at a good joke. But there are some jokes that are funny.

And as you know, there are some jokes that are filthy. And as Christians, Paul is teaching us, we need to be watchful. We need to be wary. We're not to blur the boundary lines. We're not to get dragged and drawn into a filthy joke that everyone else around us finds funny.

Because we have to remember Paul is teaching us, the world is watching. The world is watching.

And so you need to remember, Paul is telling us here, you need to remember you're a saint in your sitting room.

[22 : 55] The world is watching you. And the world is watching what you're watching. You're a Christian in your community. The world is watching. You're a witness in your workplace.

The world is watching. More than that, you're an ambassador for King Jesus. You're a representative of his kingdom. That's why Paul is saying to us here, your Christian walk is important to your Christian witness in this world because the world is watching.

The world is watching and he gives us all these imperatives about it. So, verse 5, he says, you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true and trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. So, with another three imperatives, Paul again warns us about our walk.

[24 : 18] That we're not to be deceived by the devil, we're not to be darkened by the world, we're not to be disobedient to the Lord. Instead, we are to discern, we are to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

We're to walk, Paul says, as children of light. And we're to walk as children of light because, as our Bible teaches us, God is light. We're to be imitators of God.

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. And if we cannot see God the Father, we know that his son Jesus is the light of the world. And whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John teaches us in the New Testament, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with him and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Which is why Paul, he implements his eighth and ninth and tenth imperative in verse 11. And he says there at the beginning of verse 11, he says, have no fellowship.

[25 : 24] That's literally what he says. Do not have koinonia with this. Have no fellowship. Verse 11, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

So have no fellowship with darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

And you know, with that, Paul begins to draw his peripatetic illustration to a conclusion because he writes about the importance and the integrity of our Christian walk.

And then he goes on and gives us another ten imperatives. Verse 15, look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, so redeeming the time because the days are evil.

[26 : 31] Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So with another ten imperatives, Paul says, redeem the time. Walk in love and walk like the Lord. Don't be foolish. Don't be filled with wine and spirits.

No, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be filled with the Holy Spirit so that you'll speak to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, not with slander but with psalms, not with hurtful comments but with hymns, not with shameful talk but with spiritual songs, always seeking to build up, not to tear down. Why? So that your life song, says Paul, is not a melody that mimics the world but a life song in which your melody is that you sing about the Lord and you submit to the Lord.

Paul's emphasis again and again is our Christian walk and there in the beginning of chapter 5 Paul gives us 20 in 20, 20 imperatives in 20 verses that show us and stress to us that the Christian life it's the imitation game.

[28 : 13] The Christian life is the imitation game. We're not to imitate what is graceless and godless. We are to imitate God as his beloved children and we're to imitate God as his beloved children by walking in a manner that is worthy of our Christian calling.

We're to walk in love. We're to walk in light and we are ultimately to walk with the Lord. It's a high calling but what a great calling it is to be called from darkness into his most marvelous light.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks this evening for thy word and even the call that it places upon us as thy people.

Help us, Lord, to remember that we are children. We are children of our heavenly Father and help us then, we pray, to imitate him, to emulate his son, to walk in his footsteps, to see him as our example and to follow him day by day.

And Lord, as we look at all these imperatives and know that they are commands for us to follow, help us, Lord, we pray, not to be crushed by them but to see that thy grace is sufficient for us, to see that thou art our great teacher and the one who promises to lead us and direct us.

[29 : 46] And Lord, we confess how often we faint and how often we fail, how often we are not walking in love, or walking in the light, but help us, we pray, to walk day by day with the Lord and to walk knowing him and loving him and seeking to follow him all the days of our life, knowing that his goodness and his mercy, they are following us.

Lord, bless us together, we pray. Teach us, we ask, to be more like Jesus. Conform us more to the image of thy Son, that when we are presented faultless, we will be presented faultless before thy glory with exceeding joy.

Lord, do us good and we pray, cleanse us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing the words of Psalm 1. Psalm 1 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 1, it's on page 200.

Another psalm that speaks about walking and the blessedness of not walking astray. And it's so important that this is the first psalm.

[31 : 12] It's teaching us how to walk. How we walk is, he tells us how to walk. That man of perfect blessedness who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men nor stands in sinner's way nor sitteth in the scornish chair.

This is how he walks. But placeth his delight upon God's law and meditates on his law day and night. And what's the result of walking like that? He shall be like a tree that grows near planted by a river which in a season yields his fruit and his leaf fadeth never.

So we'll sing the whole of Psalm 1 to God's praise. God, my God, perfect blessedness who walketh north the street north the street nor stands in sinner's way.

nor sitteth in the scornish chair but placeth his delight upon God's law and meditates on his law day and night.

He shall be like a tree and the cross near planted by a river which in his season yields his fruit and his leaf and his leaf he hated never.

[33 : 47] And all he does shall prosper well the wicked are not so but like they are unto the child which wind dies to not fro in judgment therefore shall no stop such a sun glory are nor in the stand with all the just shall wicked men appear for why the way of godly men shall fight be over throne the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all now and forever more amen to no to the me the who who who who who who who who who who who