

“Imitators of God”

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President Calvin Coolidge invited some people from his hometown to dinner at the White House. Since they didn't know how to behave at such an occasion, they thought the best policy would be just to do what the President did. The time came for serving coffee. The President poured his coffee into a saucer. As soon as the home folk saw it, they did the same.

The next step for the President was to pour some milk and add a little sugar to the coffee in the saucer. The home folks did the same. They thought for sure that the next step would be for the President to take the saucer with the coffee and begin sipping it. But the President didn't do so. He leaned over, placed the saucer on the floor and called the cat. Sometimes, we have to make sure we're imitating the right person!

What is it about American society in general that's led to the creation of certain sub-cultures in our culture? The flappers, the greasers, long hairs, flower children, the Beatles, and “make love not war.” But note, as soon as a sub-culture reaches a certain popularity, it becomes so cultural that it's no longer ‘different’ or counter cultural. That raises the question, What has become the norm in our culture and where do we as Christians fit in? Are we ‘the culture’ or ‘counter-culture’?

Open to Ephesians 4. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he's talked about what the theology of the church is and its implications for the Christian. In verses 1-3, Paul tells us what we as Christians are to do and why. *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Literally, what he's saying is that as God's people, we're to live like this! **We're to Walk Worthy of Your Call.**

But if we don't have Jesus, we have nothing! **Life Without Jesus is Meaningless!** Look at what life is like away from Jesus. Verses 17-19, *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”*

People who walk without Jesus, have lives that are **Darkened**. They don't have the Light of Jesus Christ leading them! Their hearts are **Hardened**. When you have a hardened heart, you aren't open to having someone else being in control! Your mind's already made up! Because they're making decisions for themselves and not by the Holy Spirit's power and Will, they're walking in **Ignorance**. And when they continue to be confronted with decisions that don't match theirs, they become **Callous** and uncaring! They can't see any reason to change.

A lot of Christians are up in arms about the current state of affairs in our world. Prayer's been taken out of our schools, the Ten Commandments aren't allowed on the walls, a sixteen year old girl has to have a permission slip to go on a field trip with her class, but in some states can get an abortion without even informing a parent, schools can teach Islam, but can't mention Jesus or give their students Bibles.

Sure, all of these things are horrible! Our world is really messed up! No doubt about it! But my question is: Why are we surprised that the world is behaving like the world? Aren't we told in the Bible that the world is in the control of the evil one? We're even warned that while we have to live in the world, Christians are not to be OF THE WORLD! Why not? Because we're supposed to be DIFFERENT!

As Christians, we know life with Jesus is transforming! Look at verses 20-24, *"But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Paul's saying, *"don't give the devil a foothold in your life!"* **Put Off the Old Self**. This self is connected to your sin which is continually part of daily life. This self-is connected to what the world is doing. Instead, **Put On the New Self**. The self-God created us to be, pure and holy! In Baptism, the Old Self of sin is washed away, and the renewed, New Self is put on. You're recreated in the likeness of God and made new!

The Bottom Line: Imitate God! Look at verses 28 through 5:2, *"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 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."*

As we imitate God we need to do what He's done and share the qualities He has. We need to **Give**. God saw our need and gave His only Son, Jesus Christ to take our punishment on the cross. We need to give ourselves to others and **Share** with others what God has given us and what He can give them to help them. He loves them! We need to **Forgive** because we've been forgiven. This is a key quality, not only of living in Christian community, but of preserving unity. Knowing what God has forgiven us of, how could we NOT forgive each other?

The last quality, and foundation for life, is **Love**. We live this way because of what God has done for us in Christ. That's certainly a counter-cultural way of life! But that's what the Christian life is supposed to be! **Life with Jesus is to be Different from the World!**

The truth is that for all of us, if we put our lives side by side with Jesus, we all fall way short! But God is transforming you more and more into the image of His Son each and every day. He wants you to be different! As people see you, He wants them to see Jesus! That's His goal and desire to change you! Have you been letting Him?