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BE IMITATORS OF GOD! Ephesians 4:25-5:2: August 12, 2018

Introduction:

One of the things that we all have in common is that we dress and undress a couple of times each day. We take clothes off and we put others on.

In the verses before our passage today, Paul reminds his readers of their becoming Christians, being taught from the Bible and growing in the Christian faith. (Read Verses 20-24) He tells them that they are to 'put off' their old self and 'put on' their new self. As Christians, they were new people. They'd been born all over again and so their lives were to be different.

In our passage Paul expands on this theme in a very practical way. We'll look at them under several headings:

1. The truth. (4:25) He writes *Put off falsehood and speak truthfully.* Why? *For we are all members of one body.* As Christians we belong to God's Church. We are sisters and brothers in Christ.
2. Anger. (4:26-27) He writes, *don't let the sun go down while you are still angry.* It would be sinful to hang on to our anger and would *give the devil a foothold* in our lives.
3. Stealing. (4:28) Those who are in the practise of stealing should stop! Do we steal? We might not rob a bank but do we steal time? Withhold money from the Lord's work? Cheat on our tax? Paul says, instead of stealing they should get a job! Why? *So that he may have something to share with those in need.* The early Church was very good at sharing with other Christians. We see this in Acts 2:44-47 (read!) Are we prepared to share in this way? Do we steal time or have light fingers at tax time?

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4. Our speaking. (4:29-30) Paul writes, *do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* What would be classified as *unwholesome talk*? These things would be included: smutty, crude & coarse jokes and language, character assassination, swearing & using God's name as a swear word.

What would be included in the idea of *building others up*? How about encouragement, commendation, sharing answers to prayer and what we've been reading in the Bible.

Paul adds that the mis-use of the tongue grieves the Holy Spirit. It makes God sad when His children speak badly to one another.

5. Lots of negativity. (4:31) Wow, Paul lets fly with six ungodly characteristics which Christians, if they have them, should *get rid of* completely: *bitterness, rage and anger (again), brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* Here is a word picture of a very unpleasant and un-Godlike person who's supposed to be a Christian! Do you need to *get rid of* any of these qualities?
6. Loving kindness. (4:32) Having listed six awful qualities, Paul now lists three qualities which we should all have! *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.* Here is sacrificial love at work. To what degree should we put these qualities on? *Just as in Christ God forgave you.* The Gospels give a great many examples to show that the Lord Jesus was kind. Jesus was compassionate. Jesus was forgiving when people turned back to God in repentance and faith.
- His death and resurrection makes it possible for our sins to be forgiven when we ask Him to be our Saviour.

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7. Imitate God! (5:1-2) In every area of our lives we are to imitate God. Why? Because we are His *dearly loved children*. As God's children we should reflect His character.

Children often look like one of their parents and even take on some of their mannerisms and expressions of speech. That's what God wants of us; to be like Him.

When we are trying to teach another person some skill, we might say *copy me. Do it this way*. A language teacher will pronounce a word in another language and then say *now you say it like me*.

God is saying through Paul, *imitate me. Copy me. Be like me*.

Paul gives one example of imitating God: *live a life of (sacrificial) love*. What will this love look like? He tells us: *just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. Jesus' love is the template for our love.

We read in 1 John 3:16 *this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us*. What love is this! Our love for other believers is to be like that.

Conclusion:

Being a Christian is an immensely practical thing. It requires action. There are things that we are to put off and things that we are to put on. This passage spells it out clearly.

All that remains is to do it, with God's help, with the encouragement of others and with much prayer.