

If someone were to do an impression of you, what would they try to do to get people to think it was you? Usually, they would pick out some character trait that you do, and really emphasize it. In my case, people usually try to imitate my voice. They try to get as low as they can with their voice, and say, "Hello Pastor Schulz, how are you doing? But I'm not the only one out there, that people try to imitate. You have your President Obama stand up comedians, who sometimes not only imitate the voice of the politician but actually make themselves look like the politician. Staying closer to home, the greatest imitators of us, are usually our children. If Dad is a builder, puts up houses, builds decks, and storage barns, you'd better believe that if he has a son, that son is going to want to imitate dad and learn how to pound nails and build houses as well. And dad will probably do his best to show his son how to do that. On the other hand, if mom loves to have a garden and plant flowers around the house, her daughter will also have a love for flowers and plants when she gets older. Unfortunately, our kids also tend to imitate our bad habits. If we are quick to anger when a problem arises, blow a gasket, look to your children to handle problems in the same way. If you are a family that eats out a lot at restaurants, and really doesn't have that home cooked meal and family gathering at suppertime, don't expect your kids to be gourmet cooks oneday as well. We are a people that tend to imitate those around us that we love and care about, whether they have good habits or bad habits. Today, we are all given a tall order by the apostle Paul about our day to day lives. Humanly speaking, the request is impossible. But with the Holy Spirit working on our hearts and showing us the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we are ready to "Be Imitators of God."

If we are going to be imitators of God, we will need to know how God behaves, how He acts in various situations. Obviously, God always behaves correctly in every situation. Now you and I are in trouble. How can we imitate perfection? But that is where the Holy Spirit comes to our rescue. The Holy Spirit takes people who are dead in their sins, people who are blind to the grace of God, and people who are born enemies of God and turns them into the children of God. He does this by bringing them to believe that God's Son, Jesus, gave himself to God as a sweet offering and sacrifice which was completely acceptable to God. His death on the cross covered and paid for every one of our sins.

That does not complete his work, though. Once converted, there's a lot of house cleaning that needs to be done. Attitudes have to change. Sinful habits need to be broken. Smiles have to be painted on people's faces. Desires that are sinful need to hit the trash bin and desires that are godly need to be brought in.

Look at it this way. Imagine that you decide to get into the rental property business. You buy an old, run down house that has little or no value. But you know you can make something of that old place. You start by throwing out all the trash the previous owner left behind. You scrub down the floor and install a berber carpet. Old cabinets are torn out and new ones put in. The old wood floors are sanded down and refinished. The walls are painted. The roof is replaced. A new kitchen and bathroom are installed. You work hard to make this the kind of place that you would be proud to live in! You rent out the house to the first renters and drop by as they move in. You notice three cats and two dogs and wonder about the new carpeting you installed. A week later you start to see the trash pile up on the lawn. Next week a window is broken upstairs. How does it make you feel to see all your sweat and work being destroyed? "Grieving" might be the best way to describe the feeling.

Paul says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." We were bought with a tremendous price. It took the blood of Jesus to redeem us for God! And since the day the Holy Spirit reclaimed us and brought us to faith, he

has been working at making us new from the inside out. Can you imagine how the Spirit must feel when we rent a room of this newly converted house to this sin or that? Is there a room in your spiritual house that you've rented to sin? How about a room rented to bitterness? Paul said that we should first of all get rid of all bitterness. He used a Greek verb there which means to "carry off." It's what you do with the trash underneath your sink. You take it out often so that it doesn't stink up the house. Likewise you'll have to carry off your bitterness toward others if you don't want it to stink up your life. You can't just suppress it. That would be like ignoring the egg shells and chicken bones piling up under the sink. They'll just become more stinky and gross – like bitter feelings do when they are not "carried away" from the heart. Who do you have bitter feelings toward? There's always someone or something to make us bitter. That bitterness grieves God as we hurt ourselves and others. Yes, we hurt ourselves. "Ever notice that we describe the people who bug us as a "pain in the neck"? Whose neck are we referring to? Certainly not theirs. We are the ones who suffer." Bitterness shackles us, it consumes our conscience. We suffer; we sin; we sabotage our relationship with the loving, heavenly Father and those we love.

Or take a look at our temper. Someone rubbed us the wrong way. Something didn't work out as planned. And we are a person with the quick fuse. That's right attack whatever or whoever is around. Stick our face out at them. Wave our finger at them. Raise the voice to a decibel level that startles the neighbors. Add to the rage and anger something called slander. We tell someone about someone we can't stand. We say things that are true about the person, or maybe we tell something that isn't quite true about them, but our intent is just to make them look bad. We want that person to pay for how they treated us. So we blackball their reputation. We are a people, at times who desire to inflict injury, harm, or suffering on another simply out of a deep-seated meanness. The word for this is malice.

Our lives are almost like a brothel. The rooms are filthy. The Holy Spirit is unable to clean and redecorate. And that makes the Holy Spirit sad.

But there is good news for the poor imitators of God. If the Holy Spirit grieves when he sees sin crouching at our door, or us renting out one of the rooms in our spiritual house, he really must care. I know that as a parent. If a child walks by me at the park and uses foul language, I get annoyed. But it doesn't really bother me. Because I have no relationship with that child. But if I should hear one of my own children use a four letter word or say something really nasty, that would really bother me. Why? Because I care! I love them and I want them to grow up to be respectful and godly children. I've carefully taught them which words they can use and which words they shouldn't. I've given them my example and have been careful not to curse or swear. Friends, God the Holy Spirit really cares about us or he wouldn't grieve when we've given ourselves to sin.

And God the Holy Spirit has given us the motivation to clean up and get rid of the garbage in the rooms that we have rented out to sin. Listen to Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." God doesn't remember your sins, not a one. In fact, he doesn't even remember your rebellion from yesterday because he let it all go when Christ "gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." God lets go of every sin, even our bitterness, rage and anger. Christ took care of that when he offered himself on the cross for us as a fragrant offering or sacrifice to God.

Plus what God demands of us, the Son has already perfectly done for us. There was not a single time when Christ let his mouth run away from him - even with the Pharisees who were a constant burr under his saddle! There was not a single time in Christ's life when bitterness got

the better of him - even with his disciples who denied him and sold him. There was not a single time where Christ threw a sucker punch, even though the people might have “deserved it” - opting instead to turn the other cheek. Jesus Christ his whole life long was a walking, talking, compassionate, loving, forgiving imitator of his heavenly Father. Christ is, literally, PERFECTION PERSONIFIED.

Now the potent love of Jesus is going to empower us to do the impossible: *to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*. How? It's simple 1) Remember who you are! 2) And then - to rip off a quote from Nike - “just do it!” Who are you? According to Scripture, you are a special object of God's compassion. He has a heart for you! According to God, you are a sinner 100% forgiven in Christ. You are an imitator of the Heavenly Father. (Think of how our children imitate us when they are young - imitating the way we talk, imitating the way mom does makeup, or the way dad shaves.) Through God the Son, you, too, are DEARLY LOVED sons and daughters of God the Father. Finally, you are people for whom Christ was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice - a people willing, therefore, to sacrifice themselves for others. That's who in Christ you are! That's who you are. So when it comes to living a life of love: JUST DO IT! Christian love, you see, is not some much of a feeling - it is an action! Take the Good Samaritan as an example. He didn't stop to think of what he thought about wounded Jews. He didn't reflect on how the highway-robbery situation made him feel. He didn't make a list of three people who would be more qualified to help wounded travelers. He didn't attend a six week seminar on helping out to wounded people. He didn't stop double check which church board, committee, or council had the responsibility to help. He saw a man in need of help, so he rolled up his sleeves and helped to the greatest degree possible. See it. Do it!

So a person has not taken your words and actions in the kindest possible way. So a person is telling others things about you, that you did not say or do. So a person is avoiding you because they just can't stand you. If you encounter these people, be kind to them. Look for positive things you might do for them. If we waited for someone to be kind to us before being kind, we'll all wait a long time. The kindness of Christ covers you. Kindness: See it. Do it! *Be compassionate to each other* - have a heart for each others needs. Try to put yourselves into their shoes to better understand them. If you waited until you *felt* like helping, you'd do nothing but wait. The compassion of Christ beats in your heart. See it. Do it! Be compassionate to one another.

*Forgive each other*. Forgiveness is when you give up the right to punish someone for what they have done to you. You file a quit claim on the lawsuit. You turn them over to God. IT is unconditional. The person doesn't have to say he or she is sorry. No conditions! The forgiveness of Christ has literally cleansed your soul. Forgiveness: See it. Do It. Don't hold grudges.

Every day we commit the same sins and every day Jesus stands before his heavenly Father and pleads on our behalf. Do you suppose he ever gets tired of doing that? If one of your children kept stealing from her classmates, wouldn't you get tired of going to the principal's office to apologize? I'm glad Jesus doesn't get tired of pleading forgiveness on our behalf!

So its time for all of us to be imitators. Don't imitate me! Don't imitate the person sitting next to you. Rather imitate God! Live a life of love! Today, the Holy Spirit is smiling vs. frowning. That's because we Mimic the Master! Amen.