

Sermon – 07/12/2008 am

Imitators of God

Study Text: Ephesians 5:1

The other day a relative said that I sound just like my father when I speak. Why the surprise I thought. My father and mother taught me how to speak. I lived with them, listening to them every day for seventeen years. As I listened so I learnt – not just how to speak but how to live. It would be unusual if I did not speak and act like my father in many ways.

It follows does it not that a child of God will speak and act like their heavenly Father. If you are born again of the Spirit of God and adopted into his family; if you are listening to and learning from your heavenly Father you will naturally grow to be like him. If you honour him and worship him you will want to be like him.

Imitators of God

Be imitators of God (5:1). What an amazing thing for Paul to write. How can mere men imitate God? This is the only place that Paul writes such words, but elsewhere he writes *imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ* (I Corinthians 11:1). Christ lived as a man so to imitate him seems reasonable – but to imitate God! The KJV has: *be followers of God* – and that we can understand. But the word Paul uses is *mimetai*, a word meaning ‘mimic’ or ‘imitate’. To mimic someone means to be like them.

In what ways are we to imitate God? Clearly some attributes of God we cannot imitate. God is infinite and immutable. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God is the creator of all things visible and invisible. God is the judge of all men. God in Christ has worked salvation for us. No man can ever do such a thing (Psalm 49:7). These attributes are unique to God. In theology we call them incommunicable attributes.

But God also has communicable attributes. It is these that we can and must imitate. Look at the context of this verse. We have entered a new chapter but remember in the original there are no chapters or verses. We have just been told to *forgive one another even as God in Christ forgave us* (4:32). In other words we are to be like God, we are to imitate him in forgiving those who sin against us.

In the next verse we are told to walk in love just as Christ also loved us. God is love. As children of God we are to imitate God’s love and walk in love. Jesus said *love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34). The apostle John writes, *He who does not love does not know God* (I John 4:7). So here are two ways in which we are to imitate God: in forgiving others and loving others.

Other communicable attributes which children of God are to possess include truth, holiness, grace, mercy and patience. God revealed himself to Moses as merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6). God is truth. God cannot lie. Paul has just told us to put off lying and speak the truth (4:25). In doing this we are imitating God.

God is holy; and it *is written, be holy for I am holy* (I Peter 1:16). God is merciful; and Jesus said *blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy* (Matthew 5:7). We are to show mercy to fellow human beings because God is merciful and gracious.

These attributes are all supremely displayed in the life of God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ. This is why Paul can call us to imitate Christ, and to be imitators of God. He sought to live as Jesus did when he walked on this earth. He sought to learn more and more about Jesus in order to be like him (Philippians 3:10). We have the gospel records of the life of Jesus which are sufficient for us to learn how he lived as the Son of God. The question is, do we read this record and are we moved by the Holy Spirit to obey what we read.

The communicable attributes are part and parcel of the new man that we have put on in Christ. The old man was a stranger to these attributes. Yet we must also strive to grow these attributes. The word, *be* in *be imitators* is strictly speaking *become* – *become imitators* of God. This is what Paul is urging the Ephesian church by way of practical teaching in this letter.

Jesus Christ must be the role model for your life. We hear of prominent sportsmen or movie stars being portrayed as role models for young people growing up today. Young people admire some famous person and try to be like them. They try to imitate them. But soon they learn that that person takes drugs, or is a drunkard, or beats his wife. Their role model has failed them. They can either continue to imitate a corrupt person or choose someone else. And so it goes on.

The only one who will never fail as a role model is Jesus. Oh that young people would turn to Jesus not only a role model but turn and believe in him who forgives their sin and will faithfully lead them in the way to truth and holiness – the way of life.

Become imitators of God. This calling will occupy us all our earthly life. God possesses all these attributes in perfection. His love is infinite, whereas the love of even the most mature believer will always be finite. We will never be perfect while we live in this body.

The apostle Paul wrote *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:14). He said that he was not yet made perfect. He was pressing on to lay hold of that for which Christ had also laid hold of him (Philippians 3:12). He knew the call of Jesus for all God's children to *be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 5:48).

Dear Children

Famous sportsmen, men the young are told to make their role models, do not even know who these young people are. They may get fan mail and read the name of this young person but they never get to know them or love them. They are more likely to exploit or abuse them than to bring them blessing.

The apostle Paul refers to us as beloved children. We are the beloved children of God. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God* (I John 3:1). It is because of the love of God demonstrated in giving his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross bearing our sin, that we have become the beloved children of God. It is all of God's doing.

It is by his sovereign election; it is by his grace that we are called the children of God. God found us in the gutter of sin and depravity. He took us, cleansed us of our sin and adopted us into his family. Now we are children with all the rights and privileges of a true son. We are heirs to an incorruptible inheritance in heaven.

You are not just some number to God. You are not just a name to him. You are known and loved by God – fully known and fully loved. Remember who you are and how you became who you are; a beloved child of God.

Paul calls us to *be imitators of God as beloved children*. We called by God and loved by him. But the emphasis in this verse is not so much upon our rights as upon our responsibilities as children of God. We have been adopted into the family of the King, the King of heaven and earth. The king's name is most honourable. He alone is worthy of the worship of men. The behaviour of his children reflects upon the King. His children bear his name. They can either bring honour or dishonour to that name.

My son gets disgusted at the behaviour of a child who comes to play with his daughter. She hits and bites. She tells lies and says horrible things. Do you know what he says? He says it no wonder the child behaves like this with the parents that she has. But other children behave like this even when their parents lovingly discipline them – often our own! Their behaviour is 'unbecoming' we say.

God is perfect. He is the perfect Father. Does your behaviour reflect such a Father? What do people say about your heavenly Father when they see what you do and what you say? Do you bring honour or dishonour to the name of your heavenly Father? As beloved children seek to honour God's holy name in all you do. *Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify you Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). Seek to imitate God for in doing so you will bring honour and glory to his name.

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