

Who You Are Determines Who You Imitate

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[0:00] God, now as we come into your word, God, would you address us? Would you conform us by your word in the power of the Holy Spirit to the image of Christ?

I pray, Father, that you would make us imitators of you and your holiness, imitators of Christ and his love. Set us apart, God, for your name's sake.

Amen. All right. Let me ask you a question. Who do you want to be like?

Who do you want to take after? I've got a lot of similar mannerisms as my dad, Steve Salvati. We look alike.

We can talk alike. We have a very similar sense of humor. In fact, we laugh alike. And we laugh a lot together. Who do you imitate?

[1:06] Who do you take after? As Christians, we're to take after, to imitate God our Father. We're to be like him.

We're to be like God in holiness. We're to be like God in his love. Who you are determines who you imitate. Who you are becoming like.

And so would you open up your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 5. And I'm going to read verses 1 and 2. But we're going to be reaching back into Ephesians 4 this morning in order to get the kind of thrust of Ephesians 5, 1 and 2.

So let me just read Ephesians 5, 1 and 2. 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. Therefore, be imitators of God, Christ the King Church, beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[2:21] We can't make a mistake about it. God in Christ has redeemed us. Those of us who have professed Christ as our Lord, have exercised faith in him.

God has redeemed us. He's reconciled us. He's adopted us. So that we would be holy as he is holy. So that we would love others as Christ has loved us.

And so this morning, I want to show you two things from Ephesians 5, 1 and 2. First is this. We're to imitate God and his holiness. And the second thing, we're to imitate Christ in his love.

We're to imitate God in his holiness. Therefore, be imitators of God. Be imitators of God. Therefore, be imitators of God.

Whenever you see a therefore in your Bible, you've got to ask what question? What is the therefore? Therefore. And that therefore actually reaches back into Ephesians chapter 4.

[3:28] And so if we start reading in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 17 through 24, we're picking up where Paul is in 5, 1 kind of using the therefore to summarize.

In 4, 17 through 24, God is commanding us to no longer live as we used to live when we were non-Christians. Saying don't live that way anymore.

It's not who you are. We're to put off the old self, the former manner of life. The way that we used to walk when we were dead to God, corrupt in our desires and godless.

We're to put that off. Because that's not who we are anymore. Now we're to renew our minds. To remember who we are in Christ. To remember what God in Christ has done for us.

We're new creations. We've been made new. And then to put on the new self. When we remember who we are, we need to live that out.

[4:33] To live out who we already have become in Christ. That's what he's talking about in Ephesians 4, 17 through 24. And in 24, he says, put on

the new self, created in the likeness of God.

You see that in verse 24? Created in the likeness of God. Your new self is a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The old is gone. The new has come. And from God's perspective, it's done. Done. For those of us who are in Christ, there's no going back to the old self.

It's done. God has wrought a change in us that will go on forever. There's no going back to the old self. As new creations, we have a new likeness.

We're in Christ now. Made in the likeness of God. Does that ring a bell for anybody?

Ding-a-ling-a-ling. Ding-a-ling-a-ling. Remember Genesis chapter 1?

[5:38] God says, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Paul's reaching way back. Another way to say about this, to summarize it, is that when we became Christians, we were recreated in the likeness of God.

That's the kind of work God has done in us by His grace. We're new creations in Christ Jesus made in the likeness of God.

And maybe you're asking yourself the question right now, well, what does likeness mean? Like what? Well, he goes on in verse 24 to tell us what. Created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

And it's that word holiness I want to key on this morning. Because Paul in 5.1 is coming back. That's the therefore. To be imitators of God in His holiness.

God created you in Christ to be holy as He is holy. A holy likeness. And that's been His plan all along. Ephesians 1.4 says, Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

[7:00] God's loving plan from eternity past was to make us holy in Christ. We were destined for holiness to be recreated in the likeness of God.

So what is holiness? What is it? Well, at its most basic essential sense, holiness is to be set apart. To be qualitatively different. To be distinct from the rest. Quick question. Growing up.

Did anybody grow up in a home where you had plates for everyday meals and then you had this special set of plates for the special occasions? Do you know what I'm talking about?

Well, some of us did. Some of us didn't. Some of us grew up every day eating off of cheap ceramic and plastic. And then when the nice meal came around, you're on China.

[8:03] Every other year kind of a thing. I mean, there's differences in material. Plastic versus China. Difference in beauty. Kind of a stamped machine stamp print versus a hand-painted print on China.

There's a big difference in the beauty there. Process. Everyday wear is just kind of processed in mass. But the nice stuff is handmade.

Availability. The everyday stuff, dime a dozen. The nice stuff, the China. It's rare. It's valuable. Each is used for a distinct purpose.

The everyday stuff, everyday wear is for everyday stuff. The nice stuff is used for special purposes. Designated purposes.

Designated purposes. We were created in Christ Jesus in the likeness of God. He created us to be set apart for His purposes.

[9:14] We exist for Him now. We were dead. God has called us out of that way of life.

We are distinct now. We are to be holy as God is holy. You know, there's no other word in your Bible that's repeated three times to describe God.

In Isaiah 6, God has described the seraphim are crying out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. There is no other word in your Bible repeated three times to describe God.

You don't hear love, love, love. You don't hear wise, wise, wise. You hear holy, holy, holy. God is distinct. He's transcendent.

He is like no other. And He's calling us to be like Him. That's what He created us in Christ Jesus for. So in Ephesians 4, 25 through 32, you know, we have spent the last several weeks walking through this.

[10:19] If you can think about it in terms of holiness, it helps. So in verse 25, we're not to speak falsehood. We're to speak the truth to our

neighbor.

Why? Because we're holy. We're set apart, distinct, just as our God is. In verses 26 and 27, regarding anger, we're not to sin in our anger anymore.

Why not? We're holy. We're to exercise a holy anger. We're to get angry at what God gets angry at, and we're going to get angry the right way.

So we're slow to anger. And then when we do get angry, we're quick to resolve it. We don't let the sun go down on our anger. There's this great repeated refrain throughout your Bible.

God is merciful and gracious. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. We're to be holy when it comes to anger.

[11:21] We're to be holy in how we use our hands. We're not to steal anymore. We're not to take anymore. We're to do honest work in order to help other people in need. We're to be holy in the way we do our work.

Distinct. We're to be holy in the effect of our speech. Verses 29 and 30. Instead of using our mouths in order to corrupt people, we use our mouths now as those made in the likeness of a holy God.

And we use our mouths to build up, to edify. Not to grieve the Spirit, but we use words to be used of the Spirit of God to build up His body.

Isn't that awesome? Holy. Likeness of God. Last week I preached on Ephesians 31 and 32.

We're no longer to be bitter, but we're to be forgiving of one another. I had to cut that sermon short. Ran out of time. I want to come back to it right now.

[12:30] We're called to be distinct and holy in our response to people who wound us. We're not to be like the world. We're not to be like we used to be. We're to be Christ-like.

We're to be God-like. So instead of being malicious, we're to be kind. Instead of holding a grudge in a hard heart, we are to be compassionate from a tender heart. Instead of being bitter and demanding payment, we are to be forgiving.

We're to pay the price ourselves. Just as God and Christ forgave you. It's a holy response to being sinned against.

It's distinct. It separates us. It's a new way we live. A new way we walk. Because we're new creations in Christ Jesus. But there were some but-ifs I never got to.

What about this? What about that? Because moving from bitterness to forgiveness is not easy, is it? Especially if you've been deeply wounded for a long time. It's not easy. So let me take a couple of these but-ifs.

[13:36] Do you mind? But what if this person who sins against me isn't repentant? They don't ask for forgiveness. What do I do?

Well, wouldn't it be great if that person did ask for forgiveness? That's like ideal. They sin against you, they wound you, and they come up to you and say, Oh, man, I am so sorry.

God convicted me that that wound was sin. I am so sorry. I saw it caused you pain. Will you forgive me? And then we get to forgive them as God and Christ forgave us. That's the ideal situation, right?

But what happens if you don't have that? What happens? You're to forgive them still. Do your best. We are to seek peace with all men.

Do our best to do that. And so you forgive as far as you can go before the Lord. You're waiting on them to take ownership of it, right? And so in the meantime, you're like, God, I forgive them as God forgave me.

[14:36] Oh, God, God, I don't want to hold this over them. Lord, I forgive them. You have forgiven me of so much more. But you know what the reality is? You end up living in an in-between place of unresolved conflict.

It's a partial peace, isn't it? It's unsatisfying, right? But you know what? There's a way to walk in holiness here. You go as far as you can go in faith.

I'm going to come back to what it looks like to live in that in-between place in a minute. But what if the person who asked me for forgiveness, they're asking, but you know what?

There's been so much damage done, I don't trust this person. Anybody live there? What do you do then? Well, you forgive them as many times as they ask.

Matthew 18, 22. You forgive, you forgive, and you forgive. But just in case you're wondering, there is a difference between giving forgiveness and the restoration of trust in a relationship.

[15:46] There's a difference between the two. Forgiveness is necessary to take place for a relationship to experience a full restoration of trust.

But if it's not experiencing that, you're living in an in-between place. You're waiting for that trust to be reestablished. And the way that's reestablished is the one who breaks the trust needs to own that.

And then needs to follow through with what they say. To be consistent. To be trustworthy. And the person who has had their trust broken, they need to forgive and they need to be willing to trust once again.

But in the in-between place, it's very uncomfortable, isn't it? But you're stepping out in faith. You know, the restoration of trust in a relationship has ebbs and flows.

Two steps forward, one step back. But there's a way to trust God in the in-between. There's a way to trust God in the partial piece of incomplete trust.

[16:54] There's a way to walk in holiness. What if the person who hurt me, if I forgive them, they'll get away with it?

They'll get away with it. It's a question of justice. Who's going to pay? Romans 12 says, vengeance is mine.

It's mine to repay. God's saying, that's mine. I'll take care of that. I'll take care of that. But you're thinking, I want justice now.

I want this made right now. Now. Well, it may. Probably won't.

God has set a day. It's a day of judgment. A day of judgment when all the secrets of man and woman will be revealed.

[18:00] All wrongs will be exposed. Everything will be brought to justice. On that day, it will be public.

On that day, it will be final. No more loose ends. No more waiting. God brings justice for all on that day.

And so if you're struggling, you don't want to forgive because you don't want this person to get away with it. God sees. God's not mocked. You reap what you sow.

So if you're longing for justice, make a little adjustment. A deferred justice. A waiting for God to act at the end of time.

His justice on His time. And in the meantime, we're living in this in-between place of deferred justice. It's an uncomfortable place to be. So whether it's unresolved conflict, if it's incomplete trust, if it is this sense of deferred justice, do you know what we're to do?

[19:14] We're to lament. We're to cry out to God. We're to say, this is hard, but God, I trust you nonetheless. Nevertheless, that's where we live.

In the in-between place. And we seek to forgive and to forgive and to forgive. That's the holy way of living. That's how we move from bitterness to forgiveness with what God has given us.

We've been created in the holy image of God our Father and it changes the way that we live. And so when we get to Ephesians 5, we read, We're to be distinct, set apart, holy, because it's who we are.

We're beloved children. It's who we are now. We are God's children. Like father, like son. Like father, like daughter. As those adopted by God, we're to bear the family resemblance of holiness. It's who we are now. Who you are determines who you imitate. And if you are a child of the living God, you are to imitate your holy father.

[20:42] And so we've looked at what it means to imitate our holy father. Now let's turn to what it looks like to imitate the love of Christ. In 5.2 we read this.

And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Walk in love. Would you just look back at Ephesians 4.17?

Do you see that? Paul says, now this I say in testifying the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. Don't walk this way, as though when you were dead to God.

And in 5.2 he's saying, walk this way. Now that you've been made new in Christ. For the good of others. The call to love like Christ is a call to die to ourselves for the good of others.

We are being called to give ourselves up for the good of others. This kind of loving distinguishes us Christians from everybody else.

[21:52] Because this is a Christ-like love. The Apostle Paul gives us some distinctions of this love in verse 2 here. And I just want to roll through them so that we can get a sense of the fullness of what God is calling us to here.

Not only are we to be holy, as our Father is holy, we're to love like Christ. And what we see is the love of Christ is sacrificial. And He gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The way we're to love each other is at cost to ourselves. To die to ourselves. To give ourselves up for one another.

And the words from Romans 12 help us to understand that a little bit more. We are to be living sacrifices. Constantly offering ourselves up for the good of others.

Do you know what's going to need to die in order for you to love others like Christ? Convenience. It is inconvenient to love people as Christ loved people.

[23:12] Your plans will need to change in order to love others well. There's another kind of sacrifice.

Sacrifice in time. Sacrifice in energy. Sacrifice of money. Even reputation. It can be very costly to love others the way Christ has loved us.

But that's the nature of sacrifice. Sacrifice hurts a little bit, doesn't it? It hurts to love.

Jesus knows that firsthand. Why are we to love this way? Because Jesus loved us this way. The second thing I want you to see is not only is Christ's love sacrificial, it was voluntary.

He gave Himself up for us. He gave Himself up for us.

[24:14] Jesus wasn't forced into dying on the cross in our place. I was reading John 10 this morning, and I read this. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. And in verse 18, He says this, No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

He voluntarily gave His life for you. In 1 Peter 5, Peter addresses elders, and he says this to them, Shepherd the flock, love the flock, not under compulsion, but willfully, as God would have you.

To love is to voluntarily give yourself up. We are to voluntarily sacrifice ourselves for others.

Why? Because that's what Jesus did for us. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself in our place, which brings us to the third distinction of Christ's love.

[25:35] It's redemptive. It accomplished something. It accomplished our salvation. He gave Himself up for us voluntarily so that we would be reconciled to God.

He did it for our good. The greatest good that Jesus did for us was our salvation, to reconcile us to God.

He forgave our sins, cleansed us, made us holy, included us in the family of God, gave us eternal life. It was for our good that He died.

It was redemptive. And we're being called to that. We are being called to a redemptive love of one another. Now, I can't die for you, and you go to heaven because of that.

My blood can't do that. Your blood can't do that. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. But we can take our Savior's death as an example, and we can voluntarily sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.

[26:39] And so if you invest half a day bringing a brother in Christ to the hospital, you're doing it for His good. If you're crawling underneath the fellowship hall, insulating the steam pipes, you're doing it for the good of the people of this church.

Those people serving in the children's ministry, in the tots ministry, they love kids, but they're doing it for your good so that you can be here worshiping God, hearing from His Word.

Moms of little ones, love your children redemptively for their good. For their good. I know what it's like. I've seen it.

It goes like this. Feed, clean, clothed, bathe, repeat. Feed, clean, clothed, bathe, repeat. Love. Moms, love your children.

Love them redemptively. Scrubbing toilets, vacuuming carpets, giving rides, leading small groups, mediating conflicts, disciplining children, confronting someone in love, forgiving someone in love, reading the Bible with someone else, praying with someone else, we can all do it for the good of others.

[27:50] Redemptively. The greatest good, though, we can do for someone else is to tell them about Jesus. At cost.

Even if that means our reputation. Even if that means straining a relationship. We speak to others about Jesus for their greatest good, that they too would be saved.

So a love like Christ is sacrificial. It's what we've been just talking about in terms of redemptive. There's another in there that I'm not calling mine right now.

But the last one I want you to see is fragrant. It's fragrant. It's pleasing to God. He gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The picture there is this. In the Old Testament, they would offer sacrifices and then burn those sacrifices and the aroma would go up to God as a pleasing aroma to him.

[28:53] So the picture here is of a pleasing sacrifice to God. We are to love others in a way that pleases God. It's a sweet aroma to him.

Jesus died. He said, not my will, but your will be done in order to please his Father. He died for our good in order to please our Father.

And we are to sacrifice ourselves for the good of each other in order to please our Father. Our Holy Father is well pleased when we love each other like Christ.

Another way to say it is this. We sacrificially give ourselves for the good of others and the glory of God. We've looked at two things this morning.

As new creations, we're to be holy as our Father is holy and we are to love others as Christ has loved us. God's brought himself.

[29:57] He's given himself to us. Let me ask you a question. Has he brought anybody to mind? As we've been talking about love, has he brought someone to your mind?

Maybe that person's from our church. Holidays are coming. Maybe it's someone in your extended family. Maybe it's one of your neighbors that if you go over, it's two hours.

What you're being called to is love them as Christ has loved you. sacrificially, voluntarily, redemptively as a fragrant aroma to God.

We're to be holy. We are to be loving because it's who we are now in Christ Jesus. Who you are determines who you imitate.

Let's pray. God in heaven, thank you so much for your word. I pray now, Father, that you would help us to respond how you would have us respond, independence on you, seeking to be holy, seeking to be loving.

[31:12] We know it pleases you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.