

## Becoming Imitators of God The Vision

It is really a pleasure for me to be back with you again for the next 4 weeks. I heard good reports from Jim about your time with him these past 5 weeks.

As I prayed about the topic for these next four weeks, I was reminded that I am called to preach what Jesus is teaching me. And God is working on my heart. He wants to make me more like Jesus. He's got a lot of work to do but I am seeing some progress. I also have been reading an excellent book by Dallas Willard entitled The Renovation of the Heart which is all about transforming us / helping to become imitators of God. And that is our scripture this morning, taken again from the book of Ephesians – chapter 5 beginning at verse 1. Hear the word of God.

**Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children; and walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (NASB)**

Father, help. We want to be like the beloved children who want to do everything they sees their father doing. Father we want to be like Jesus – who only did what he saw the Father doing. We confess that this is not where we are. Use today and the next three weeks to transform our hearts, our minds, and our bodies – Start renovating our hearts – Use my words to be a vehicle in this transformation – but Father I ask that You only use the words of mine that are Your words. Cast all the rest away. Amen

Some of you may have observed that memorizing scripture is important to me. The older I get, the more I find that I need more of God's word deeply embedded in my heart. The Psalmist says – "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."<sup>1</sup> I need to learn how to be more like Jesus – and not sin against him. Let's try it together:

"I have hidden your word in my heart" Again

"that I might not sin against you" Again

Now without me.

Let's also try our scripture this morning:

"Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children" Again

What is Paul saying here? Imitators of God? Is he kidding?

The God who created the universe?

The God who holds the stars in the palm of His hand?

The God who gave His only son – so that we could live?

The word that Paul uses here is the word from which we get the word Mime of mimic. Paul wants us to be like little children who just love to mimic their parents. Have you ever seen the little boy

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:11

with the little tool belt following dad around the house. Or the little girl with the toy vacuum following her mom? I don't know what happens when they become teen-agers – but Paul is talking about little children here. And that is the image that he is giving us. We are supposed to be mimicking what we see our Father doing.

What does that mean we are supposed to be doing? What's implied in Paul's injunction: Be imitators of God as beloved children?"

We have watch / we have study God / we have to observe Him – and then do things the way He would do them. We have to have a Vision of Him.

We can summarize this 4 part series with this little acronym : Vision of HIM. If we are going to be imitators of God we need to:

- V – Have a vision for it – we need to know that we are called to it and that it is do-able – that's this week
- H – Healing – we need to be healed – We can never imitate God with a deep healing – that's next week
- I – Intention – Our will – we need to have our wills converted to this cause – the third week – and finally
- M – Means – We need to know how to do it – we need the means to become imitators of God.

Oswald Chambers says: As long as our eyes are focused on our own personal holiness, we never even get close to the full reality of [God's purposes].<sup>2</sup> Our goal during this series is not to make you introspective – but to have a **Vision of HIM**. That's the focus.

**Are we really called to become “Imitators of God?”** (Lev 11:44; Matt 5:48; John 13:5; I Peter 1:15;)

The call for us to become “imitators of God” is one of the most settled truths in all of scripture. Let me call some witnesses from the past:

I would like to call Moses to the stand. Moses – Is Paul right here that God wants us to imitate him?

Moses: Larry Oh yes – when He gave the Law he said

**For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am holy.**<sup>3</sup>

Thank you Moses: You may step down. I would like to call Jesus [Brian] to the stand. Jesus did you teach your disciples to become imitators of You and Your Heavenly Father?

Jesus: Yes Bob. [I love it when He calls me by name. Don't you love it when He calls you by name?] Don't you remember that during the Sermon on the Mount I said: “Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>4</sup> And then after I washed the disciple's feet I said: “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My Upmost for His Highest January 30th

<sup>3</sup> Lev 11:44

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:48

<sup>5</sup> John 13:5

Thank you Jesus. I would like to call Simon Peter to the stand. Peter – your brother Paul is telling us that we are to be imitators of God. Do you agree with him?

Peter: I wrote in my first letter “But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.”<sup>6</sup> So yes I agree.

Brothers and sisters. I rest my case. In the presence of these august witnesses – the case is settled. We are called to become imitators of God.

### **Why do we need to become “Imitators of God?”**

Good question. But I have an easy answer. Look around you. And look within. If this is Jesus’ Vision for the Church, shouldn’t the church be different from the world. Shouldn’t we see continual transformation in the lives of those involved in the church?

Last week I had the privilege of visiting a college roommate who became a Christian about 10 years ago. Dirk was my roommate 34 years ago when I first was a Christian. About a year and a half ago, Dirk and his wife and three other couples planted a church in their home town. And last Christmas, things had not grown the way they wanted. So the board (which consisted of the 4 couples) voted on whether they should continue holding public services or if they should just go back to meeting in their homes. The vote was 6-2 in favor stopping the Sunday service. As they began to make plans to implement this decision, one man informed them that he didn’t go along with this decision and that since the church was in his name, their vote didn’t matter.

Come to find out, unbeknownst to any one else, he and his wife had transferred all of the official documents and the resources to him. No one else knew this.

Dirk was devastated. How could a Christian do this?

And isn’t that the question we often find ourselves asking. How could a Christian do this? And most of the time, if we are honest, we are asking it of ourselves. The reason is simple – we haven’t allowed the Father to transform us – to make us in his image.

Christians aren’t perfect – amen to that – just forgiven. That’s a nice bumper sticker – but a little weak in the theology – the just forgiven part. Forgiveness is huge. It cost Jesus His life. And as Christians, we aren’t just forgiven, we are called to perfection. We are called to be “Imitators of God.”

### **Can we really become “Imitators of God?” (I Thess 4:3; Phil 2:5)**

Listen what C.S. Lewis has to say about this:

"The command 'Be ye perfect' is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. ... If we let Him - for we can prevent Him, if we choose - He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into ... dazzling, radiant, immortal creatures, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to Him perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and

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<sup>6</sup> I Peter 1:15

in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what he said."<sup>7</sup>

Paul not only says that we are called to be "Imitators of God" – he says that it is God's will. You ever wonder what God's will is for your life? Paul says

"For this is the will of God –your sanctification"<sup>8</sup>

For this is the will of God – that you would become Saints – Saint Jeff and Saint Brendon and Saint Pam!

This is God's will!

Brothers and sisters – this isn't idealist gas.

I want to give you one example from my own life that I hope gives you hope! If God's boundless power and delight can begin to do this in me – believe me He can do it in you.

Last fall, I had just started a new project at work but had not finished the last project. This new project had some very tight schedules and the work for the previous project was a significant distance from our office.

So one day, I left home early so as to get there at 7:00 to try and get this old project done by noon. Everything went wrong. Well noon came and went. 2:00, 4:00 6:00, and 8:00. Finally, dead tired I left at 9:00 knowing that I had to come back another day and delay starting this new project.

When I arrived home, I found the basement flooded (this was that weekend that we got 12 inches of rain). I spent the next 5 hours bailing water out of the basement as it was coming in as fast as I bailed. At 3:00 in the morning, the rain finally stopped and I was able to go to bed.

As I crawled into bed – I picked up a book I had read several times The Sacred Romance by John Eldridge. John is describing the Christian walk as this great adventure with a God who is in love with you – life as a sacred romance. What surprised me was my response. I had a day right from the pit of hell – but my response was YES! YES! Lord I love the way you love me – you woo me – pursue me. Normally I am a grump after a day like that. But God has begun a work in me. It has taken a long time – it has sometimes been painful – but He is doing it – making me more like himself.

Let's try our scripture again – "Be imitators of God as beloved children." 2x

God wants this for us. We need it. It's do-able. We need to start with the V – a Vision that God really wants this – that we really can do this. We need a Vision of HIM (V-HIM) to do it.

Next week we are going to look at the first step in becoming Imitators of God. That's the H in V-HIM – Healing. Let's pray.

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<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," Macmillan, 1952, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> I Thessalonians 4:3