

Imitators of God
Ephesians 5:1-2

Sermon

Hobart, July 11th, 2010

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Scripture Readings:

Genesis 1:26-28 NLT

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make people* in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals,* and small animals.”

²⁷ So God created people in his own image;
God patterned them after himself;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and told them, “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals.”¹

* **Genesis 1:26a** Hebrew *man*; also in 1:27.

* **Genesis 1:26b** As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*.

¹ *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Ge 1:25). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Be imitators of God, therefore,
as dearly loved children

² and live a life of love,
just as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us
as a fragrant offering
and sacrifice to God. ²

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Eph 5:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

INTRODUCTION:

I. TODAY I'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT OUR LIFE

A. WHO WE ARE;

1. Who God created us to be
2. The life we are called to live

B. IN THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE SCRIPTURES WE ARE TOLD THAT GOD MADE US

1. And he made us deliberately in a particular way
 - a) with a particular purpose, and reason for being
 2. When we know and live according to that purpose, life is blessed
 - a) When we are unaware of it, and live our lives contrary to that purpose, life is miserable
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S.P.S:

A. WE ARE GOING TO START WITH OUR PASSAGE IN EPHESIANS 5

1. and then spend some time exploring who we are, and the life we are called to live

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. CONTEXT

A. IN HIS LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS, PAUL HAS BEEN EMPHASISING THE CALLING OF CHURCH MEMBERS, JEW AND GENTILE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THEIR CALLING

1. He shows that it has been God's plan to unite all mankind, Jew and Gentile, as one, in and through Jesus Christ

Ephesians 1:3-5

How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. ⁴Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.³

B. WHAT DOES HE SAY IS OUR CALLING?

4b God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

1. This is the theme that runs throughout the letter, and very much to the centre of our passage in ch. 5

C. START BY READING A SECTION OF THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER:

1. Let's read part of chapter 4 that leads us to ch 5:

Ephesians 4:11-17

³Holy Bible : New Living Translation. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Eph 1:2). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

¹¹ He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³ until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

D. THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN IS FOR THE CHURCH TO BE BUILT UP,

- 1. so we can become more and more united in faith and knowledge of Jesus,**
- 2. and become more and more fully grown in him.**

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.⁴

E. NOTICE THE EMPHASIS ON UNITY

- 1. Working together in community, in loving partnership for the benefit of each other, and the whole body**
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⁴*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Eph 4:10). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

III. EPHESIANS 5:1-2

5 :1 NIV Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ⁵

5 :1 NLT Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children.

A. THE KEY PHRASE TODAY IS THIS;

1. "Be imitators of God"

- a) vse 2 expands on what imitating God's example in everything we do entails

NLT ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

A. HOW DO WE KNOW HOW TO LIVE?

1 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,

1. What is our motivation for our actions?

1b because you are his dear children.

2. How do know how to imitate God?

² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

B. JESUS' SACRIFICE SHOWS HIS TOTAL LOVE FOR THE FATHER AND US

1. Peter O'Brien comments on this;

To serve others in this way is not only to please God; it is also to imitate both God and Christ.

⁵The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Eph 5:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

C. IMITATING GOD, IS WHAT WE WERE CREATED FOR

1. It is what we read right back in the beginning;

Genesis 1:26-28 NLT

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make people* in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals,* and small animals."

²⁷ So God created people in his own image;

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²⁸ God blessed them and told them, "Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals."

D. WE ARE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

1. To be patterned like him

2. To be blessed in living and imitating God

E. THIS IS FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

1. It helps us know who we are

a) Who we are to be

(1) How we are to live

(2) The way of blessing, true fulfilment and joy in life

2. What we first need to understand though, is who God is, and what he is like

a) Too often we tend to make God in our own image, rather than humbly letting God reveal who he is to us

b) By "worshipping a false God"

(1) Having wrong images of God, we end up imitating and following the wrong way of living

* *Genesis 1:26a* Hebrew *man*; also in 1:27.

* *Genesis 1:26b* As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*.

F. SO THE QUESTION BECOMES:

- 1. How can we know what God is like in order to imitate him**

G. WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

- 1. As we read about in Hebrews 1:**

- a) Paul has already talked about Jesus being the one we learn from and follow in order to live a godly life, and get rid of ungodly thinking and living

Ephesians 4:21-22

²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,
²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

- 2. Jesus, and the truth about God, and his way of living, are in clear contrast to old nature & corrupted lifestyle**

H. O'BRIEN:

“Because it lacks true relationship with God, Gentile thinking suffers from the consequences of having lost touch with reality and is left fumbling with inane trivialities and worthless side issues.”

- 1. Michael Jenkins adds;**

Even as Jesus reveals to us our true humanity, he judges our false humanity, our sin-sickness, our disease, our disgrace and our independence.

In light of his humanity we stand accused because at the heart of our being we have turned away from and denied the God on whom we depend for our very being. Denying this God we have shattered the bonds of love that would join us to one another and world reflect the character of God among us.

In other words, seeing ourselves in light of Christ, the one whose whole life was an event of self-giving for the sake of the other, we understand the nature of our sin as a refusal to be in communion, as a denial of that social relatedness that is the *image of God*.

That for which we are created is nothing less than the joy and fullness of the most intimate communion with God and one another. The salvation, or liberation, that Christ brings us is fundamentally social because sin is fundamentally social in its corruption of the image of God in us. Our failure is a relational failure, and so our redemption must be the restoration to relatedness. Or to put it another way, God restores us in Christ to the image of God, the essential being in communion, for which we are created.⁶

Ephesians 4:23-24

²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.

²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

I. WE HAVE SEEN HOW WE NEED FATHER AND THE SON TO BE WHO WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE

- 1. Paul shows we also need the Spirit to put on the new nature, to grow to be like God**

J. AGAIN, THE KEY IS TO BE AS WE WERE CREATED TO BE

- 1. To get rid of the corrupted self, and put on the new nature of Christ**

a) To be re-created as we were originally supposed to be,

"created to be like God--truly righteous and holy"

K. EPHESIANS 4:31

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

⁶ Michael Jenkins, p.176

- 1. Again the underlying point is to live like God does, specifically as God lived through Jesus Christ right here on this earth, as one of us**
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L. I'D LIKE TO READ A BIT FROM A COUPLE OF AUTHORS WHO GET TO THE HEART OF THIS FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE FOR OUR LIVES

- 1. This "imitating of God" by following the example of Christ**

M. FIRSTLY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

- 1. in order to properly know him who we are to be like and imitate**

- a) James Torrance writes about the need to get back to a proper understanding of the Trinity;

We require a better doctrine of God. For too long, our concepts of God have been dominated by Plato, Aristotle, Stoic concepts of God as primarily the give of natural law, the contract-God of Western jurisprudence who needs to be conditioned into being gracious by law being satisfied, static concepts of...God as an unmoved mover and an impassible first cause, etc. We need to recover a biblical understanding of God as the covenant God of grace, not a contract-God, the God who has his loving Being-in-communion, and who has, in the freedom of his love, created us and redeemed us that we might find our true being-in-communion with him and with one another.⁷

...we have been created by God to find our true being-in-communion, in sonship, in the mutual personal relationships of love.

What is needed today is a better understanding of the person not just as an individual but as someone who finds his or her true being in communion with God and with others.⁸

⁷ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*, IVP Academic, 1996, p.35

⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, p.38

2. Torrance talks about how we find our true being when we are like God, living in communion with him and one another.

God is love and has his true being in communion, in the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit--*perichoresis*.

This is the God who has created us male and female in his image to find our true humanity in perichoretic unity with him and one another, and who renews us in his image in Christ.

Jesus said: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, so ought you to love one another" (Jn 15:9-13). As God has loved us and accepted us freely and unconditionally in Christ, so we must love and accept one another freely and unconditionally in him.⁹

N. MICHAEL JINKINS HIGHLIGHTS THE SAME THING:

The humanity that God has created in his image cannot rest in isolation, indeed, cannot be human in solitariness.¹⁰

The most basic idea in all of Christendom, [G.K.] Chesterton reminds us, is the idea that *God is love*. But it is nonsense to say this without understanding *that God is himself a holy Family, a family bound together by the love that God is*. It is this Trinity of love, the "holy Family," this "beautiful independence and intimacy" within the very being of God that is revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth, the God who became a human to show us what it means to be human.¹¹

O. WHEN WE GATHER TOGETHER FOR SERVICES:

1. We do so to commune together, to worship and fellowship with God

- a) To praise and thank him
- b) To hear from his word and reflect on him

⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, p.38

¹⁰ Michael Jinkins, p.170

¹¹ Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology*, IVP, 2001, p.172-173

2. We also gather together to commune and fellowship with one another

- a) to share our lives, our ups and downs, our concerns, feelings, our inner self, our needs, and to hear and share those of one another

3. It is all about relationship

- a) Our every day lives should be the same, consisting of worshiping and praising God in all we do
- b) And sharing our lives with those we come across each day

4. Just as Jesus did

CONCLUSION:

A. LET US CONCLUDE BY SHARING IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

- 1. That communal activity that pictures our intimate relationship with God through Jesus and the Spirit, and with one another.**

2. Torrance:

As in worship, so also in our personal relationships with one another, we are given the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father, in the trinitarian life of God. This means that perhaps we are never more truly human than at the Lord's Table, when Christ draws us into his life of communion with the Father and into communion with one another. God's purpose in Christ is "to create in himself a single new humanity" (Eph 2:15) to fulfill the purposes of creation and establish his kingdom.

In our modern world... we usually equate the concept of "the person" with that of "the individual." But in a Christian understanding this is a mistake. Just as the words "father," "mother," "husband," "wife," "brother," "sister"

are relational terms, so with the word "person." The human person is someone who finds his or true being in relation, in love, in communion.¹²

3. Torrance calls on us;

to return to "the forgotten Trinity"--to an understanding of the Holy Spirit, who delivers us from a narcissistic preoccupation with the self to find our true being in loving communion with God and one another--to hear God's call to us, in our day, to participate through the Spirit in Christ's communion with the Father and his mission from the Father to the world--to create in our day a new humanity of persons who find true fulfillment in other-centered communion and service in the kingdom of God?¹³

IV. LORD'S SUPPER:

A. OUR TAKING OF THE WINE

1. Remind us of our being made new in Jesus' blood of the new covenant.

a) Being loved and forgiven, redeemed and adopted into the family communion of God

B. THE BREAD

a) Reminds us that we have been made one with Christ, who makes us one with the Father, one with one another

b) We are called as persons to live the life for which we are created, to be in God's image, imitators of God, through Christ and the Spirit

(1) To live and share the communion that this Lord's Supper is focused upon

C. BREAD:

D. WINE:

E. MICHAEL JINKINS:

What we have been saying is the Jesus Christ not only reveals God to us, he also reveals to us our humanity as God intended it to be, as (indeed) it truly is in Jesus Christ in the very heart of God, a humanity that fully reflects the image of the Trinity.

¹² Torrance, p.39

¹³ Torrance, p.41

We have been created by God, the Holy Trinity, to reflect God's own being in relationship. To be fully human, as Christ has shown us in his own person and being, is to live in communion.¹⁴

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children
² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering
and sacrifice to God.

F. PRAYER

¹⁴ Jinkins, p 173