

October 6, 2013
"Imitate God" Part 2
Eph. 5:1-2

Ephesians 5:1-2 NLT

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. 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.

What is Paul talking about when he tells us to imitate God? Paul calls us God's dear children; Just as children imitate their parents, so we are to imitate our Father in Heaven, but in what way? v2a answers that question: "Live a life filled with love." Imitating God has something to do with the way we relate to others.

Genesis 1:26a, 27

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves...." So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

I pointed out last week that this verse confirms the Christian teaching of the Trinity. This is the teaching of one God, but within the Godhead is a community; a triune family of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are one in will and purpose, love and righteousness. How does this triune family love one another? They love one another with an other preferring love, they are self-emptying, giving, bonding. Love like that.

If God is an eternal community of three persons in heaven, and we are made in His image and meant to imitate God in the way we love then as we relate together in this world we are designed to reveal something about how the eternal God relates. We are called to relate in a way that reveals God and the way He loves.

God loves by both inviting others to Himself for rest and moving toward others to impact their lives... Love like that.

God became human in Jesus Christ to give us an example of how a perfect human being loves. So Paul goes on to tell us that living a life filled with love is (v2b) "following the example of Christ."

What is the example of Christ that we are to follow? (v2c), "He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God." Jesus loved us while we were yet sinners, and gave Himself for us to the glory of His Father.

The Bible is telling us to love as we relate to others, even when being treated badly by them, that we will reveal something unique of God's relational character, and bring Him glory. Love like that. What will that kind of love look like (loving others in a way that reveals God's relational love), in your relationship with your spouse parent, children, friends, other Christians?

Psalms 51:5

For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

I'm a born sinner and more likely to be selfish than loving. I lived selfishly and it was destroying my life and hurting those around me, those that I should have been loving better; that it until I realized that I needed a change; a new way to live, a solution... and a solution was offered in Jesus Christ and I received Him and His solution for my sin.

Jesus came to forgive us and empower us to love, by giving us His Spirit. Without the Spirit of Christ selfishness is the primary energy in the human soul.

But now that we are Christians we love everyone perfectly all the time, right? NOT! Perhaps, like me you can relate to the problem that Paul had...

Romans 7:15 NLT

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

Is that really Paul saying this? The spiritual Apostle Paul, author of much of the New Testament had this problem?

Romans 7:18b-19 NIV

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.

Paul knew what was right, he had the desire to do what was right, but he didn't have the ability to carry it out. Can you relate to that? I sure can. Paul's words are the desperate words of a sincerely struggling person. And if we Christians are honest we will admit that we have the same struggles. We don't always love in a way that reveals God.

Now, listen to Eugene Peterson's translation of...

Romans 7:20b-24 THE MESSAGE

Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

That is the real question and this question, "Is there no one who can do anything for me?" is a good question and it's a question with an answer:

Romans 7:24-25 THE MESSAGE

Is there no one who can do anything for me? ... The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.

NLT: Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus is the answer to the question, "Who will free me?" That is the real question, but we don't ask it. Why? Because we don't see our sin. We are not going to ask for help if we don't see that we need help. Why don't we see our sin and ask the question of who will free us? We don't see our sin because we don't first ask questions that would help us to see the condition deep within us. If we would just scratch beneath the surface of most of our words and actions we would discover a motive of concern for our own well being, and a commitment to use others, even God, for self-centered purposes. In other words, "it's all about us."

Thank God there is an answer, in Jesus. But first we must see our need. We are not going to cry out, "Oh, what a miserable person I am!" and turn to Jesus for help if we don't see our need.

Whatever is wrong in us that remains unidentified still has the power to keep us relating poorly. Only a deep, hard look inside our hearts asking, "What is going on that Jesus Christ our Lord is wanting to change?" will cause us to look to Christ for the transformation we need.

We must become more aware of what we're doing, how we're feeling, and how it is impacting others. Once we do that we can ask ourselves the difficult why questions:

The previous week when I started this message I had an appointment. I left my office a little later than I should have. I still could make the appointment on time, but it would be close. I got on Vernon Ave. right around the block headed toward 112. I have learned that the light on that corner is one of the longest lights in the area. When the light turns red there is a 60 second or more wait for the light to turn green again. When it does turn green, it doesn't stay green very long.

I was driving toward that dreaded light, it was green, and I want to make the light because of my appointment and not having a minute to spare. However, in front of me was a car driving 15 to 20 miles per hour. As I am approaching the green light, that I desperately want to make, I found myself shouting out loud to the car in front of me, "come on, come on, come on...OH!" As I slam my hand on my steering wheel when the car in front of me stopped just as the green light turn to yellow.

I was furious. Now the person in front of me didn't know I was furious. I didn't get out of my car, or pull up next to them and start screaming... only by the grace of God.

The light changed, we both made a left, and got stuck at the next light. Now, I'm just

shaking my head. Since the other car in front of me turned into the left lane, I made sure to pull into the right, so I could speed past that other car when the light changed.

Up to that point I didn't know if the driver was a man or a woman, so I pulled up next to the other car to give a stare at this person who had the audacity to drive so slow in front of me when I'm trying to avoid being late for an appointment. It was a woman, not that it really mattered.

As I passed her and went on my way I didn't think any more about the incident.

Then the Lord put this message on my heart, about spending quiet time thinking about our feelings and actions and wrestling with "why" questions. I was trying to think of an example and that's when I remembered this incident. I've mentioned to you before that the Holy Spirit tends to convict me with the message before I get to preach it to you. (I don't like that He does that, but He does it just the same).

Alright, so what was really going on in me? I got quiet before the Lord, but at first I thought this is not a good example, it was really not big deal. Then I thought about my feelings and actions. I was angry, really angry, slammed my hand on the steering wheel, blaming the other driver for making me late, when it wasn't her fault at all. If I would have given myself enough time it wouldn't matter how slow she was going, or that I got caught at the longest light in Patchogue.

But why am I blaming her? What is really going on inside me? Why is it so important that I be on time, besides just being considerate to the one that is expecting me? Could it be that I don't want the person I'm meeting to be upset with me? Could it be that I don't want them to have anything against me? And could it be that the desire to please people, and myself was replacing imitating and pleasing God? Even though the other driver had no idea what I was thinking, was the way I related to that driver reflecting the love of God? Is it all about me or is it all about God?

Asking ourselves "why" questions like:

Why must I be on time? Or Why am I always late?

Why am I devastated by certain comments? Or why am I not devastated by certain comment?

Why do I avoid a certain person or a certain type of person?

Why do I have to be in control? Or Why do I never want to be the one taking the lead?

Why do I panic when I have to confront someone?

Why do I really do what I do? Is it because I'm serving God or do I do it to feel good, look good or to be praised?

These kinds of questions and other we ask ourselves about our feelings and actions (what did I feel, How did I act, then the why questions) can help us to look below the surface of our lives see something that is wrong and repent at a deeper level than we have before.

When we do we will cry out the good question that has a good answer: (Romans 7:25) Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

This kind of repentance gets to the core of our soul where God is and somehow things change. It is not a commitment to try harder; it is a humble surrender to the Spirit of Christ who frees us. He frees us from our selfish demanding that life goes well according to our ideas, preferences, and wants. And it frees us from our foolish and sinful dependence on strategies under our control to protect ourselves from hurt, especially in relationships, and our strategies to acquiring love and respect in our way rather than trusting God for it.

When a quiet time with God, asking why questions about our feelings and actions (what did I feel and why did I feel that way, what did I do and why did I act that way) – when this leads to seeing, acknowledging, and repenting, you will sense a new power in operation as you embrace the Spirit in you. And you will realize that what you were designed to do God has already given you power to do: relate to others in a way that reveals God and how He relates, imitating His love and bringing Him glory. You can live that way, God designed you to live that way.