

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Be Imitators of God

Ephesians 5:1-2

1998

Introduction

The whole Christian life could be summed up in one statement, "Be imitators of God."

There is a pattern of imitation that is found throughout the scriptures:

1. Jesus imitated the Father

John 8:28 "So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

John 14:31 "... the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.""

2. The disciples imitated Jesus

John 20:21-23 "Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

3. The believers imitated Paul

1 Cor 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

1 Tim 4:12 "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

4. Others are to imitate us

2 Tim 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

But it all begins with imitating God.

What is the purpose of imitating God?

It is be extensions/reflections of Him

Our existence on this earth is to be far more than counting the days until His coming.

God has strategically placed you to be a visible, flesh and blood, reflection of God so that an unbeliever can look at you and have a pretty good idea of what God is like.

You may balk at that, but that is what scripture teaches.

Illustration: The Christian "cop out"

Someone comes to us and points out hypocrisy in the church.

We respond by saying, "Don't look to men -- look to God."

There is certainly some truth to this. But I think it has become an excuse for not presenting to the world an accurate reflection of God.

Illustration:

Sometimes when people meet our kids they recognize physical similarities between me and Johnny and between Becky and Michael. And as time goes on, not only physical appearances become evident, but even their character and personalities become similar to ours. This is where the saying, "Chip off the old Block" comes from. Or children watch us and often imitate us.

The greatest compliment I've ever been given was the day my son Johnny said, "Daddy, I want to be just like you!"

The goal of the Christian life, first and foremost, is to be like God.

I Be Imitators of God

Imitators = Mimetai = Mimic

If you want to put it in one word, you can say it this way, "Be godlike."

That is the goal of Christianity. It is to produce men and women, boys and girls, who are godlike in the midst of an ungodlike world.

Now notice, it does not say, "Be gods." That is what the cults say. That is the lie of the devil. That is the satanic twist to the original declaration of God. He distorts the truth and makes it come out as a promise to us that if we follow our own desires, throw overboard all restrictions, cast aside the bonds of authority, and do what we want to do, we can be gods.

This is not what the Christian faith says. It says rather, "be godlike," i.e., reflect the one true and holy God. Be a godlike man. Be a godlike woman.

From this we get our English word *godly*. After all, this word *godly*, which makes many of us cringe and feel uncomfortable, is simply a shortened form of the word "godlike." That is all. It originally came from that word "godlikeness."

So everything that is true of God's character and personality is to be reproduced in us.

A. The general call to imitate God

This same thought is mentioned frequently in scripture:

1. Be kind and compassionate

Eph 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

2. Be merciful

Luke 6:36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

3. Be peacemakers

Matt 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

4. Be pure

I Jn 3:3 "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

5. Be holy

1 Pet 1:15-16 "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

6. Be perfect

Matt 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We clearly do not have it in ourselves to live this kind of life. But Christ in us can!

Only once we become God's children is it possible for us to imitate Him.

B. Paul's specific call to imitate God

1. In His forgiveness

One of the clearest demonstrations of Christian love is found in forgiveness

Eph 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Col 3:12-13 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Rom 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

2. In His love

I Jn 4:11-12 "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Matt 5:44-48 "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Luke 6:35-36 "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

C. Hindrances to imitating God

1. An underdeveloped relationship with God
 - a. I don't have a strong enough relationship with God to want to imitate Him
2. An underdeveloped knowledge of God
 - a. I don't have enough information about God to know how to imitate Him.
 - b. If I am going to imitate Him, I must know what He is like
 1. This requires a consistent and systematic study of God's Word.
3. An underdeveloped submission to God
 - a. I'm not ready to surrender my life and agenda for His
4. An underdeveloped obedience to God
 - a. I am not willing to choose His ways over my ways

Our problem is that we rightly recognize our hopelessness when it comes to this task of imitating God.

What's the answer?

God in us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit can transform us.

Eph 3:16-19 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Therefore = points back to 4:31-32

II Live A Life Of Love

A. The foundation of our love

1. God's love and acceptance

Rom 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

I Jn 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

2. God's adoption of us

John 1:12 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

The prerequisite to godlikeness -- is that we become His "dearly loved children."
Why does he put that in? Because that is the only kind of people who can be imitators of God. It is his beloved children. Why only they? Because they alone have what it takes to be godlike. You see, you can never be godlike without God's life in them.

B. The scope of love

1. Love for God

Deut 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

2. Love for others

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

III Be Imitators Of Christ

A. The general call to imitate Christ

1. Be humble

Phil 2:5-8 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"

2. Be loving

Eph 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

3. Be a servant

John 13:14-17 "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

4. Be willing to suffer

1 Pet 2:21 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

5. Be just like Him

1 Jn 2:6 "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

B. Paul's specific call to imitate Christ

1. In His love for us

John 15:12-14 "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."

2. In His surrendered life

1 Jn 3:16 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

a. A fragrant offering

1. To God

Lev 1:9 "He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD."

2. To others

2 Cor 2:15-16 "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?"

b. A sacrifice to God

Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship."

Conclusion

God has called us to a higher standard. You are saints of the Most High God! You have been seated with Christ, you have been given His Spirit, you have been anointed by God to be his ambassadors to make an astonishing difference in the world! Our world needs revival and it begins with us, as believers, repenting and making wrongs right ("pono" in Hawaiian) with others.

It is a privilege to live out the calling God has for us to imitate Him. God's agenda is to transform us into the likeness of Christ. I know that this is difficult while living on earth; even though our spirits are redeemed, our bodies are not. Even so, I'm exhorting and encouraging you to imitate Christ. It's what our world needs; it's the only hope. It's the basis of God's deliverance throughout the ages--it's His called people, responding, living walking and obeying the King of kings and Lord of lords!

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