

Imitators of God

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As a young Christian, I became very interested in the doctrines of the Church. I analyzed them enthusiastically. I studied Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and the other letters, looking for laws and procedures the Church should follow. But in all of this studying, somehow, I neglected to study God himself. I imagine others have made this mistake. I was trying to be a servant of God without knowing God, trying to be a Christian without knowing Christ, trying to perfect the procedures of the Church without understanding the Lord of the Church.

Christians are not defined by the procedures they follow but by the Person they follow. This must be the predominant motive in the Christian's mind. So Paul says in **Ephesians 5:1**, "*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*" The high calling of a Christian is to imitate God. Be like God. Literally, to mimic God.

What does it mean to imitate God? The meaning of this calling is in the context. **Ephesians 4:32-5:2**:

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (5:1) Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. (2) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

In our relationships with other people, we're to imitate God in our motives, thoughts, behavior, and speech. We're to treat people like God treats people.

In what specific ways should I imitate God?

LOVING LIKE GOD

Paul says to love as Jesus loves us. This is an other-worldly way of living and loving. So Jesus explains in **Matthew 5:43-48**:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (44) But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (48) Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

There's nothing special or divine about loving people who love me. There's nothing special or divine about geniality towards my friends.

The divine love that we must imitate is contrary to human nature. God blesses everyone. God loves undeserving people. God calls us to love in the same way – loving undeserving people (like us), loving unjust people (like we used to be).

MERCIFUL LIKE GOD

In a related passage, Jesus explains how Christians should imitate the mercy of God. **Luke 6:32-36**:

But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33) And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. (35) But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (36) Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

There's nothing special or divine about lending money to people who will pay me back. But when we give with no expectation of getting back, then we're imitating God. When we love our enemies, then we're acting like God. When we show mercy to evil people, then we're reflecting the character of God.

HOLY LIKE GOD

Is there any area of the Christian life that shouldn't imitate the character of God? **1 Peter 1:13-16:**

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (14) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; (15) but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

As kids, when we would misbehave, we used to deflect guilt by saying: "Well, you know, I'm not Jesus. I can't be perfect." Adults can have this attitude too. We forgive ourselves for being human. We happily consent to our flaws because we know we won't be perfect. That's not the attitude of a Christian. We want to be like God, and we must not make excuses for our failures.

AS DEAR CHILDREN

Imitating God is not a robotic process. We mimic God in the same way a beloved child imitates his or her parents. We imitate God with adoration, not grudgingly, hesitantly, or bitterly. We imitate God because we want to, not only with a sense of duty and obligation but also with fondness and adoration, with complete trust, knowing that we are precious children of God.

How is this high calling attainable? Because we have been infused with the nature of God our Father. **Romans 8:13-14:** "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."