

The imitation game: Ephesians 5.1-14

Many thanks to Kate for today's TFTD.

I once read mothers' reminiscences of their children, the first stated "My youngest daughter likes to discipline her older brother and sister! She knows how we usually count down as a warning before time outs up in their room. One day at the table loud and clear at age 2 she said to her older brother, "Eat your food..10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4,3,2,1,0...Ok... up to your room!" and she points upstairs! Needless to say we could not stop laughing! Because of listening to us, my daughter could count backwards before she could count forwards".

Another mother shared "When my daughter was just close to two years old she was sitting on the couch with me. My second child was just a newer baby, probably a few weeks old, and while we were sitting watching Barney, I was nursing him. My daughter had her stuffies and doll sitting around her while she watched her show, and when I looked over at her at one point, I noticed she was holding her doll so she could nurse it too. The funnier part was the look on her face as if this was just an everyday thing to do...I guess it was! It took everything I had not to laugh because it was so cute!"

It's hard not to laugh when kids come out with such imitations that directly mimic things they've heard from their parents say countless times.

Just as children imitate their parents, in Ephesians 5, Paul commands us to imitate God by walking in love as Christ loved us (5:2) Here Paul expects the "beloved children" (5:1) of God to reflect the character of the One who re-creates them in his own image.

In this expectation Paul follows the example of his Master who taught his disciples: "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect "(Matt. 5:48). Luke's version of this dominical teaching is also worth quoting: Love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36). Note, the notion of imitating God and all exhortations to moral perfection can be dangerous. Wrongly understood, they can provoke a variety of irrational or despairing responses.

Imitating God comes naturally to those who by grace receive a new nature. Not effortlessly but willingly, believers will clothe (themselves) with the new self, created

according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. If like Paul, they know how God in Christ has forgiven them they will like Paul, imitate this graciousness to those around them.

As helpful as Paul's own example is for understanding what it means to imitate God, the supreme example that Paul holds up in this regard is Jesus Christ. To imitate God means, above all, to live (walk) in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God". Our love for others should be of the same kind- a love that goes beyond affection to self-sacrificing service.

We are also encouraged to live as children of light, as adopted children of God through Jesus Christ, looking more and more like Him with each passing day. And as we grow in our identity as imitators of God, we'll learn to come towards that light because exposing what is not good and true and right will no longer terrify us. Our desire for purity will overcome our shame and our fear. Just like Jesus, we'll no longer have any tolerance for darkness. Instead, like our Saviour, we will be a light in that darkness, shining out for all to see!

Friends, God did not save us only to put us under a basket. He lit up our darkness with His perfect light, exposed the things we needed to surrender to Him, and cancelled our eternal debt making us pure and bright because He wants us to in turn give light to everyone in the house!

The Bible tells us He is not willing that any should perish, ([2 Peter 3:9](#)) but that all should come to repentance. Our Lord longs to see every man, woman, boy, and girl surrender to His perfect light. He has placed us, like a city on a hilltop, as ambassadors for Him.

And as we live in the open, walking as children of light, people will notice. They'll see the difference in us. Our light will be impossible to hide, and it will expose the darkness in them, giving them the choice to come into the light, as we have, or to reject it. The result is not our responsibility. But we are encouraged to become imitators of God, blazing like the Son as we are living in the light of His love. Amen.

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