

IMITATORS OF GOD NO. 1725

A SERMON
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*“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”
Ephesians 5:1*

WE shall read the text as it should more properly be translated—“Be ye therefore *imitators* of God, as beloved children.” Upon the word “imitate,” our discourse will hinge.

The division into chapters is often most unfortunate, and in this case it causes a break in a passage which in its sense is one and indivisible. The apostle had said, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye *therefore* imitators of God, as dear children.” He has forgiven you, therefore imitate Him. It is a pity to have divided the argument from the conclusion.

Here, while your minds are fresh, let me remind you that this is Hospital Sunday. And let me add that my text is an argument, and a powerful one, for helping those houses of mercy. Your Lord would have you kind one to another and tenderhearted—but how can we be kind and tenderhearted if the sick poor are not cared for?

When all the machinery and all the medical skill are waiting to relieve the suffering poor, it is a crying shame that beds in hospitals should be unused because of lack of funds. Yet this is sadly the case, and several of those grand institutions are running into debt. We may ourselves have no surgical skill, or nursing art, but we can each give of our substance to aid those whose lives are consecrated to the Christ-like work of healing.

We cannot be kind and tenderhearted unless we give according to our ability to such noble institutions as our hospitals. Preachers generally put the application at the end of a discourse, but on these warm days you are apt to grow tired, and therefore I put the application at the beginning, that you may not give faintly and scantily when the sermon is over.

All sorts of religionists are contributing to the common fund, and we must not be lacking. When the box comes round, “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children,” in the largeness of your liberality and the freeness of your gifts.

The apostle urges us to give and forgive. If you be imitators of God, give, for He is always giving. Give, for if He were not to give, our lives would end. Give, for He gives unto all men liberally and upbraids not, and every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. Be ye imitators of God, the constant, generous Giver, who spared not His own Son. Thanks be to His name for that unspeakable gift!

Then comes that which to most men is a harder task, but which to a Christian man is a delight—I mean to forgive. God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us. He has blotted out our transgressions like a cloud, and cast our sins into the depth of the sea, plunging them into oblivion. Therefore, let us forgive most freely all who have done us wrong, so that when we bow our knees we may say without hypocrisy, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.”

Let giving and forgiving be two prominent features of our lives as Christians—giving to the needy and forgiving the guilty. Giving to such as ask of us, and forgiving such as offend us. By these two things let us show that we walk in love as Christ also has loved us. He has given Himself for us, and through His precious blood we are forgiven our iniquities. Let us, therefore, blend giving and forgiving into one God-like life, imitating our God. This is our Father’s commandment—let it be our delight.

I. With this as a preface, let us now come closely to the text, and let us CONSIDER THE PRECEPT here laid down—“Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.”

I note upon this precept, first, that *it calls us to practical duty*. Many precepts of the Word of God are thought by men of the world to be unpractical, but even in those instances they are in error, for the result and outcome of such precepts produces the practical holiness which all profess to desire. In this instance there can be no cavil at the too spiritual, sentimental, or speculative character of the text—there can be no question as to the eminently practical character of the exhortation—“Be ye imitators of God, as dear children,” for it points to action, continued action of the best kind.

“Be ye imitators”—that is, do not only meditate upon God and think that you have done enough, but go on to copy what you study. Meditation is a happy, holy, profitable engagement, and it will instruct you, strengthen you, comfort you, inspire your heart, and make your soul steadfast.

But you may not stop at meditation—you must go on to imitation of the character of God. Let your spiritual life not only bud and blossom in devout thought, but let it bring forth fruit in holy act. Be not satisfied with feeding the soul by meditation, but rise up from the banquet and use the strength which you have gained. Sitting at the feet of Jesus must be succeeded by following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Neither does the text say to us, “Be ye admirers of God.” This we ought to be, and shall be if we are true Christians. The pure in heart, who alone can truly see God are filled with a reverent admiration of Him. With the angels, every gracious heart exclaims, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.” “There is none holy as the LORD” (Sam. 2:2).

When the best of men are compared with the Lord, their holiness is not to be mentioned. “Who is like unto thee, O God, glorious in holiness?” But we cannot rest satisfied with rendering such admiration—we must prove that we do really admire by closely imitating. The world’s proverb is that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.”

I shall alter it, and adapt it to a higher use. Imitation of God is the sincerest form of admiring Him. Neither can we believe that you know God, and are at all charmed with His holiness, unless you endeavor, as He shall help you, to imitate Him as dear children.

Neither does the text stay at adoration, though that is a sublime height. Adoration springs out of meditation and admiration, and is a very high and noble exercise of the mind. Perhaps we rise to the highest possible service of God on earth when we are adoring Him—this is the engagement of saints and angels before His throne, and never are we nearer heaven than when we follow the same occupation here below.

Beloved, let your whole lives be adoration to God. Not only on Sabbaths, and at certain hours, or in your assemblies, but everywhere adore by good works—a manner of worship which is as real and acceptable as the most reverent public service. Remember that “to obey is better than sacrifice”—holy living outshines all other solemnities.

To love is to adore. To obey is to praise. To act is to worship. If you are imitators of God as dear children, your adoration will be proved to be sincere. Worship unattended by imitation is feigned—true adoration dwells not in words only, but as it comes from the heart, so it affects the entire nature, and shows itself in the daily behavior.

Let us spread our adoration over all the day, till from the moment when we open our eyes till we close them again at night, we shall be practically worshipping the Lord by reverencing His law, delighting in His commandments, and imitating His character. It is clear that the precept before us is eminently practical. You who boast in being such practical men, give heed to this!

Next, *this precept treats us as children*—it treats us as what we are. And if we are lowly in heart, we shall be thankful that it is worded as it is. Some men are very high and mighty. Measured by their own rod, they are great men, and hence they must be original, and strike out a path for themselves. You are not commanded to do anything of the kind—the path is laid down for you—“Be ye imitators.”

This is a similar doctrine to that which we teach to boys at school. You, my boy, are not to invent a system of writing—yours is a much easier task, keep to your copy, imitate every letter—ay, every turn and twist of your master’s hand. Scholars can only learn by imitation, and we are all scholars.

It may be something to aspire to be the head of a school of painting, but the first thing for the young artist to do is to copy. He who cannot copy cannot originate—depend upon that. I have heard great outcries about young preachers imitating, but I would suggest that, in their early efforts, this is not blameworthy. What more natural than that Timothy should at first be much influenced by Paul’s manner of speech? How could a man become an artist if he did not attach himself to some school of painting, and sit under a certain master?

He may be of the French school, or the Italian school, or the Flemish school, but he must begin as a follower even if he grows up to be a leader. When he has been well-trained, and has done much work, he may outgrow his master and become an original, but he must *begin* as a careful copyist.

Here you are invited to become imitators—but the Master is such a one that you will never be able to learn all that He can teach, and so strike out a better path. Though you are immortal, yet throughout eternity you will never advance beyond your Model, for it is written, “Be ye imitators of God.”

Listen to me, you aspiring minds—if you must needs be original, the most wonderful originality in this world would be for a man’s character to be a precise copy of the character of God. In him there would be novelty indeed, for he would be like Him whose name is called “Wonderful.”

When our Lord Jesus exhibited on earth the character of God, His life was so original that the world knew Him not. They were puzzled and amazed at the sight of One who was so like unto the Father. His life struck men as being the most singular thing they had ever seen. And if we are close copyists of God, our characters will also stand out in relief and we shall each one be “a wonder unto many.”

You see it is a humbling exhortation which only men of childlike spirit are likely to regard. Wisely does the Scripture address it only to such—“Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children”—if you are not His children you cannot imitate Him, and you will not even desire to do so.

Observe, next, that while it thus humbles us, *this precept ennobles us*, for what a grand thing it is to be imitators of God! It is an honor to be the lowliest follower of such a Leader. Time has been when men gloried in studying Homer, and their lives were trained to heroism by his martial verse. Alexander carried the *Iliad* about with him in a casket studded with jewels, and his military life greatly sprung out of his imitation of the warriors of Greece and Troy.

Ours is a nobler ambition, by far, than that which delights in battles. We desire to imitate the God of peace, whose name is love. In later ages, when men began to be a less savage race, and contests of thought were carried on by the more educated class of minds, thousands of men gloried in being disciples of the mighty Stagyrte, the renowned Aristotle.

He reigned supreme over the thoughts of men for centuries, and students slavishly followed him till a greater arose, and set free the human mind by a more true philosophy. To this day, however, our cultured men remain copyists, and you can see a fashion in philosophy as well as in clothes. Some of these imitations are so childish as to be deplorable. It is no honor to imitate a poor example.

But oh, beloved, he who seeks to imitate God has a noble enterprise before him—he shall rise as on eagle’s wings. We are copying infinite goodness. We seek after moral perfection. We are to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.”

But as God is infinitely more than that, so are we to rise above mere innocence into actual holiness. To refrain from evil is not enough—we must be filled with all goodness by the Spirit of God. Is not this a mark worth aiming at? Judge you what that grace must be which is to raise us to this height! O angels, what happier task could be laid before *you*? What higher ambition can *you* know?

God’s only-begotten Son, who is this day Lord of all, wears His Father’s s image in His glory, even as on earth He was such a copy of God that He could truly say, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” “I do always,” said He, “the things that please him.” The perfect Son of God is as His Father in holiness.

You see your calling, brethren, to a high place in the rank of intelligences you are bidden to ascend by God Himself. In this respect take your seats in the highest room. Imitate, but note well that you do not select an imperfect example—“Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.”

While it ennobles us, *this precept tests us*—tests us in many points. “Be ye imitators of God.” This tests our knowledge. A man cannot imitate that which he has never seen. He who does not know God cannot possibly imitate Him.

Do you know God, my hearer? Have you turned unto Him with repentance? Have you ever spoken with Him in prayer? Have you had fellowship with Him in Christ? Can you say, “I have set the LORD always before me”? You cannot possibly follow a copy unless you fix your eye upon that copy, and have some intelligent knowledge of what it is. We must have a spiritual idea of God or we cannot imitate Him. Hence the need of the Holy Ghost. How can we know the Lord unless the Spirit reveals Him in us?

What is more, this precept tests our love. If we love God, love will constrain us to imitate Him. But we shall not do so from any other force. We readily grow somewhat like that which we love. In married life, persons who have truly loved, though they may begin with great dissimilarity, will gradually be conformed to one another in the process of years.

Likeness is the natural product of love, and so if we love God truly, we shall by very force of that love through His blessed Spirit grow more and more like Him. If we do not love the Lord, we shall not follow Him. But if we truly love Him, we shall say with David, “My soul followeth hard after thee; thy right hand upholdeth me.”

Our text does even more than this—it tests our sincerity. If a man is not really a Christian, he will take no care about his life. But in the matter of close copying, a man must be careful—a watchful care is implied in the idea of imitation. You cannot copy a document without being intent to read and mark each word.

If I sit down to write an article out of my own mind, I have nothing to do but to make my own track, and there is my work, such as it is. But if I have to copy from a book, then I must needs look to each line, and I must read it over attentively, for otherwise I may misrepresent the writer whose language I transcribe.

In copying from nature, how careful the artist has to be at every touch, or he will fail in his picture. If a sculptor is producing a replica of an ancient statue, he must keep his eyes open and follow every line and mark.

My friend, you cannot imitate God if you are one of that sort of Christians who are habitually in a condition between sleeping and waking—with one eye a little open and the other closed. Such men live a slovenly life, and attempt a sort of happy-go-lucky religion, which may be right or which may be wrong—but its character they cannot tell—for they run with their neighbors, and never examine for themselves.

Such people live at random, and never take a day’s life at night and examine it to see its faults. Thus sin grows upon them like weeds in a sluggard’s garden. Such persons, playing at hit or miss with holiness, are sure to come short of it. But he that is in earnest will give his prayerful thought and anxious desire to it, that he may become in very deed a successful imitator of God. He will also call in the aid of the Holy Spirit, and thus be led into holiness.

Moreover, the precept tests us as to our spirit whether it be of the law or of the Gospel. “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children” not as slaves might imitate their master—unwillingly, dreading the crack of his whip—but loving, willing imitators, such as children are. You do not urge your children to imitate you. They do this even in their games.

See how the boy rides his wooden horse, and the girl imitates her nurse. You see the minister’s little boy trying to preach like his father—and you all remember the picture of the young girl with a Bible in front of her, and an ancient pair of spectacles upon her nose, saying, “Now I’m Grandmamma.” They copy us by force of nature—they cannot help it.

Such will be the holiness of the genuine Christian. He is born from above, and hence he lives above. His imitation of God springs out of his relationship to God. Holiness must be spontaneous, or it is spurious. We cannot be driven to holiness like a bullock to his ploughing—we must delight in the law of God after the inward man.

“Be ye imitators of God, as dear children,” because you do not wish for anything better than to be like your Father, and have no ambition in the world that approaches your aspiration to be holy even as God is holy, according to that Word, “Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Have you that filial spirit? Have you a burning love to holiness? Or is sin your delight, and God’s service a weariness? Where your pleasure is—there is your heart. If you love evil you are not the children of God at all, and cannot imitate Him nor render to Him any acceptable service whatever. The Lord make us to be imitators of Him, even as children from a natural bent copy their parents.

While it tests us, *this precept greatly aids us*. It is a fine thing for a man to know what he has to do, for then he is led in a plain path because of his enemies. What a help it is to have a clear chart, and a true compass! We have only to ask—“What would our heavenly Father do in such a case?”—and our course is clear.

As far as we are capable of imitating the Lord, our pathway is plain. We cannot imitate God in His power, or omnipresence, or omniscience—certain of His attributes are incommunicable, and of them we may say—they are high and we cannot attain to them. But these are not intended in the precept. Creatures cannot imitate their Creator in His divine attributes, but children may copy their Father in His moral attributes.

By the aid of His divine Spirit we can copy our God in His justice, righteousness, holiness, purity, truth, and faithfulness. We can be tenderhearted, kind, forbearing, merciful, forgiving. In a word, we may walk in love as Christ also has loved us. To know what to do is a great aid to a holy life. This puts us into the light, while the poor heathen gropes in darkness, for his false gods are monsters of vice which he may not dream of imitating.

Another blessing is that it backs us up in our position, for if we do a thing because we are imitating God, if any raise an objection it does not trouble us, much less are we confounded. We did not expect when we commenced a holy life that everybody would applaud us, but we reckoned that they would criticize us.

And so, when their censure comes, we are supported by the consideration that those who blame the imitation find fault with the copy—if, indeed, the imitation be well done. He who follows God minds not what the godless think of his way of life. A clear conscience is our portion when we have in all things endeavored to please God.

I will leave my first head when I have made one more observation. *This precept is greatly for our usefulness*—“Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.” I do not know of anything which would make us so useful to our fellow men as this would do. What are we sent into the world for? Is it not that we may keep men in mind of God, whom they are most anxious to forget? If we are imitators of God, as dear children, they will be compelled to recollect that there is a God, for they will see His character reflected in ours.

I have heard of an atheist who said he could get over every argument except the example of his godly mother—he could never answer that. A genuinely holy Christian is a beam of God’s glory, and a testimony to the Being and the goodness of God. Men cannot forget that there is a God so long as they see His servants among them, dressed in the livery of holiness.

We ought not only to be reminders for the careless, but teachers of the ignorant by our walk and conversation. When they look us up and down, and see how we live, they ought to be learning somewhat of God. Holy men are the world’s Bibles—the world reads not the Testament, but they read our testimony.

Brethren, a close imitation of God would make our religion honorable. The ungodly might still hate it, but they could not sneer at it. Nay, the more candid among unbelievers, perceiving our holiness to be

the result of our faith, would say nothing against it. The name of Christ would not be so evil spoken of if our lives were not so faulty. Holiness is true preaching, and preaching of the most successful kind.

What a support it is to the preacher when he has a people around him who are daily witnessing for God at home and in business. If the pastor can turn to his church and say, “See, here, what the doctrines of grace can do! See in the lives of our church members what the Spirit of God can produce”—then he will have an unanswerable argument wherewith to silence gainsayers.

Does not the Lord say, “You are my witnesses?” Are we not detained in this world on purpose that we may bear testimony to our Lord? How can we bear forcible witness for Him unless our lives are pure? An unclean professor is a fountain of skepticism, and a hindrance to the Gospel. To be useful we must be holy. If we would bless men as God blesses them, we must live as God lives. Therefore, “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.”

Thus much upon the precept.

II. Secondly, I invite you, dear friends, as we are helped of God’s Spirit, to WEIGH THE ARGUMENT.

The argument is this, “Be ye imitators of God, *as dear children.*”

First, as *children*. It is the natural tendency of children to imitate their parents. Yet there are exceptions, for some children are the opposite of their fathers, perhaps displaying the vices of a remote ancestor. Absalom did not imitate David, nor was Rehoboam a repetition of Solomon. In the case of God’s children, it is a necessity that they should be like their Father, for it is a rule in spirituals that like begets its like. Those who live wickedly are the children of the wicked one—no proof is wanted, you may take it for granted—life is the evidence of nature.

Those who live godly and righteously in Christ Jesus, believing in Him, are God’s children. And though the godly sin, yet they do not love sin, nor remain without repenting of it. Holiness of life is the proof of regeneration, neither can we accept any other. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” is a rule of universal application.

God’s children *must* be like Him. With all their faults and failings, there must be about their lives, as a whole, a likeness to God. The copy may be blurred, but it is a copy. I say to any man here who bears the name of Christian and professes to be a child of God, either be like your Father or give up your name.

You remember the old classic story of a soldier in Alexander’s army whose name was Alexander, but when the battle was raging he trembled? Then Alexander said to him, “How can you bear the name of Alexander? Drop your cowardice, or drop your name.”

So I say to those who are unholy, unclean, impure, unkind, ungracious—be like God, or cease to bear the name of a child of God. What need is there that you should aggravate your sin by pretending to a character which you do not possess! Be like Christ, or be not called a Christian. Do not play the Judas unless you have a mind to be a second “son of perdition.”

The argument, then, is that if we are children we should imitate our Father. But it is also said “*as dear children.*” Read it as “*children beloved.*” Is not this a tender but mighty argument? How greatly has God loved us in that He permits us to be His children at all. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.”

A “behold,” is placed there, as if it were a thing of wonder. Do you not wonder at it in your own case, that you should be called a child of God? Behold the love which chose you when you were dead in trespasses and sins, and quickened you into the life of God! Do you not remember the text—“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”? What love was that which revealed itself in your new birth and your adoption, giving you the nature and the status of a child of God!

Furthermore, since you have been a child, was there ever such kindness received by a child from a father as you have received? Behold, He deals with you as with sons. You could not wish for God to

improve upon His dealings with you, since He acts towards you as He uses to do unto those that love His name.

Behold how He has borne with your ill manners! How He has put up with your mistakes and your forgettings! How He has cared for you in all your cares, helped you in all your difficulties, and pardoned you in all your sins! I do not know what *you* have to say, my brother, but this I can say—I am filled with admiration at the love of God to myself.

I have been a child greatly beloved of his Father. His love to me is wonderful. I am a deep debtor to His grace. Are you not the same? Then imitate your Father, for the more the love of a child to his Father, the more his admiration of his Father, and the stronger his desire to be like Him in all things. Let it be so with you.

However, this word “*as dear children*,” bears yet another meaning. Children differ. A father loves all his children, but he cannot be said in all respects to love them all alike, for some force him to love them beyond the rest. You have one dear son who lies nearest your heart. What a sweet child he is!

You have got another boy—he is your child, and you love him, and do your best with him—but he is an awkward bit of stuff. He gives you little pleasure, and you are not particularly anxious to have him around you all day long. The first child loves you with all his heart and strives to please you. How obedient he is! How content and happy! In all things he is a comfort in the house.

Your heart binds its tendrils about your Joseph more closely than about the wayward boy—you do not make a favorite of him—and so excite the jealousy of the others. You must own to a nearer and dearer love than usual when you think of him. You cannot help your heart clinging to him—his behavior is such that he is the son of your right hand and he has a tender place in your soul—in a word, he is one of those whom the text calls “*dear children*.”

Just so, the Lord has certain *dear* children. Master Trapp says, “God has but a few such children.” I am afraid that the quaint old commentator is correct, and that few imitate the Lord as they should. Yet some of the Lord’s children give themselves up wholly to Him, are watchful and tenderly obedient, and walk in such closeness with Him that they deserve the title of “*dear children*.”

Brethren, aim at this. Here happiness lies. Here heaven lies this side of heaven! To be not only children, but *dear* children, is to antedate eternal bliss. Our Lord Jesus had disciples, but of some He said, “Then are ye my disciples indeed.” Be such. May the Holy Spirit make you such!

Around us there are troops of third-rate Christians—oh, for more first-class believers! We have many who appear to come into the Father’s house at mealtimes to get a bit of bread, and then they are off again into the world. I counsel you in one thing to be like the elder brother, to whom his father said, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.” “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.”

Oh, to be of David’s mind—“I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” Be ye imitators of God, then, in so high a sense that you become dear children, whose one thought is how to please their father, whose sorrow it is to grieve Him, whose beauty it is to be like Him.

III. In the third place, I desire, dear friends, to SUGGEST ENCOURAGEMENTS.

Did I hear one cry, “Oh, sir, this imitation of God is beyond us. How are we to be copyists of God?” I will encourage you by giving hints, which you can work out for yourselves.

First, *God has already made you His children*. I speak to you that are believers—you are God’s sons and daughters. The greater work is done. If you are to be imitators of God, as dear children, you must first be His children—that is already accomplished. You could not have made yourselves children of God, but He has done that for you. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” It must be a much easier thing to imitate the Father than to become a child.

You might adopt a child, and call it yours, but you could not really make it your offspring, do what you might. But the Lord has “begotten us again unto a lively hope.” We are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” And by this new birth we are renewed in His image.

Hence the greater part of the task, the insurmountable hill of difficulty, is over, and that which remains is but our reasonable service. Should not the child imitate his father? Will he not do so naturally?

Next, remember that *God has given you His nature already*. Does not Peter speak of our being “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust”? It remains for you to let the new nature act after its own manner. A well of living water is within you, sing you unto it, “Spring up, O well.” Let the holy thing that has been born in you now occupy the throne, and subdue the body of this death. Pray God it may.

It seems to me a small thing to let the new nature have scope and freedom compared with the giving of that nature. A clean heart and a right spirit have been bestowed—let these show themselves in clean lives and right feelings. The living and incorruptible seed will produce a harvest of good works—water it with your prayer and watchfulness. If anything does hinder it, repent and do your first works.

Next, *the Lord has given you His blessed Spirit to help you*. “Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmity.” Never forget that. Things impossible with men are possible enough to the Spirit of God. We have the Spirit abiding in us, vitalizing our whole nature. The most beautiful harp you ever saw has no music in itself, but must be struck by the fingers of a musician—but the Holy Spirit makes us into living harps, which from themselves pour forth a natural and spontaneous melody.

Is not this marvelous? We have not to look abroad for power to be holy, for the Spirit of God abides in us, and works in us, creating in us “the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Oh, to be filled with the Spirit of God!

Meanwhile, it is no small help in the imitation of God to have the anointing of the Holy One, and to be instructed by Him. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, and hence He can teach us to imitate God. He is also the Spirit of holiness, and none can better promote our holiness. Be of good cheer! With such a Helper you cannot be defeated.

Again, remember, dear friend, that *the Lord allows you to commune with Himself*. If we had to imitate a man and yet could not see him, we should find it hard work. But in this case we can draw nigh unto God—some of us can shut the closet door and be alone with God when we will—we can even walk with God all day. What better conditions could we be under for imitating our God?

Nearness to God brings likeness to God. The more you see God, the more of God will be seen in you. You remember the Persian story of the scented clay? One said to it, “Clay, whence hast thou thy delicious perfume?” It answered, “I was aforesaid nothing but a piece of common clay, but I lay long in the sweet society of a rose till I drank in its fragrance, and became perfumed myself.”

Oh, if you dwell much with God in seasons of retirement, and abide with Him in all the affairs of life, you will be changed into His image. As surely as the type will make its impression upon the paper, and the seal will stamp itself upon the wax, so will the Lord impress Himself upon you, and stamp His image upon you if you dwell in Him.

This ought also to inspire you with ardor to remember that you have to imitate God or you cannot go to heaven, for this is one of the main delights of heaven—to be like Christ because we shall see Him as He is. “They are without fault before the throne of God.” His name shall be in their foreheads—that is to say, the character of God shall be most conspicuous in them.

Surely that which is to be our destiny eternally should be our desire today. We should strive after holiness according to His working who works in us mightily. We must become close copyists of God that we may enjoy everlasting communion with Him. May His Spirit work us to that end.

IV. Now by turning our subject a little round, we shall close WITH CERTAIN INFERENCES.

I have hitherto spoken only to saints, but here is an inference for seekers. “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.” What do I infer from this? I infer that *God is ready to forgive those who you offended Him*. O you that have never been pardoned, listen to this—the Lord must be ready to forgive. We are to make God our pattern, but if God were unwilling to forgive, He could not be a pattern to us.

We are to be ready to pass by the offenses of others, therefore if God is set forth as our example, He must certainly be more ready to forgive than any of us can be. O you that are covered with sin today, I would urge you to catch at this fact.

Suppose I were to bid you imitate your earthly father in frankly and freely forgiving all who vexed him? Then you might reply, “Do you know my father?” If I answered, “Yes,” you would say, “Is he really a good example of patience and forgiveness? For I offended him some time ago, and I have always been afraid to go to him, lest he should refuse to receive me.”

If I could answer, “Yes, your father is an example that you may safely follow in that respect,” then you would reply, “I will go home to him and tell him that I desire his forgiveness, and am sorry to have caused him pain.”

O poor sinners, you do not know what a forgiving spirit the heavenly Father has. He gave His Son Jesus that He might be able to pass by our sins, and yet be the righteous Judge of men. There have been good men in the world who have delighted to pass by offenses. Some here present have been taught of the Lord till it has become easy and pleasurable to overlook injuries and forget wrongs.

But our heavenly Father is much more kind—and with far more delight blots out the sinner’s iniquities. They said of Cranmer that he was more than ready to forgive, for he always returned good for evil. It was a common saying, “Do my lord of Canterbury an ill turn, and he will be your friend as long as you live.” That was fine, but my lord of Canterbury was nothing in gentleness compared with the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The holy Leighton, also, was of such a gentle spirit that one day when he went out for a walk and came back, he could not get into his own house, for it was locked up, and his servant had gone away for a day’s fishing without leave or notice. All the good man said was, “John, next time you go fishing, please to let me know, or at least leave me the key, so that I may open the door.” That was all.

If even men have come up to such a degree of patience, much more will you find long-suffering in God. Oh, trembler, do believe that our Father in heaven is willing to forgive you. You backsliders, you great sinners, have right thoughts of God, and come to Him at once for reconciliation. There is forgiveness with Him. “He delighteth in mercy.” “The LORD is good, and ready to forgive.”

Christian friends, is there one among you who thinks God will not keep His promise to you? Now listen. God is an example to us, therefore *He will surely keep His word*. He must be faithful and true, for you are bidden to copy Him. If God could be false to His Word, we could not be exhorted to imitate Him, and therefore we are sure that He is faithful and true, because we are bidden to imitate Him closely.

You may be sure that every word of His will stand fast, for He would have us righteous and upright in all our ways. “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed towards his name.”

Another inference—only a hint at it—is, if you are told to be “imitators of God, as dear children,” then you may depend upon it, *the Lord is a dear Father*. The dear children of God have a dear Father. We may rest assured that He will be kind and tender to us, since He would have us loving towards Himself.

I know you are heavy in spirit at this time. I know you are depressed and troubled, but your Father is kind and good. Believe it if you cannot see it. If reason says that He deals somewhat harshly with you, for He chastens you, remember that this is His way with His beloved. Has He not said, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten”? Those stripes are seals of love.

Chastisement is a high proof of wise affection. Your heavenly Father is much better to you than you are to Him. He is dearer, and kinder, and more loving as a Father than you have been as a child to Him. Rejoice in your Father though you cannot rejoice in yourself.

Lastly, when the text says, “Be ye imitators of God,” it bids us keep on imitating Him as long as we live. Therefore I conclude that God will always be to us what He is. He will continue in His love since

He makes that love the example of ours. God will persevere in bringing us home to heaven, for He teaches us to persevere, and make this a part of our likeness to Himself.

The Lord will not turn His heart away from us. He will not fail nor be discouraged—having begun to make us meet for heaven, He will never stay His hand till that work is done. Wherefore rest ye upon the immutable goodness of your Father, and pray for grace evermore to imitate Him until you come to see His face. May His presence be with you and may He give you rest. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EPHESIANS 5

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—136, 651, 645

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