

Epilogue: Imitating Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] We have been for 11 weeks working through a series on the 10 Commandments and we finished tonight. Derek last week looked at the 10th Commandment and tonight is a bit of an epilogue to the series. The modern modern person looks at the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 and says that the 10 Commandments are rules that suffocate a person's freedom. They are a boundary, they take away freedom, they don't give it and the Bible comes and says the exact opposite and we said this from week one that the Bible comes and says the 10 Commandments are the law of perfect freedom and the reason for that, the reason the Bible can say that that the 10 Commandments are freeing not restricting is because they reflect to God's character. Now if you look at the first four of the 10 Commandments, the table one of the law, they basically tell you to love God and God loves God better than anyone else does and if you look at the second table of the law commandments five through ten it says basically to love people and God loves people better than any people do. So God loves himself and God loves people. Table one, table two, see the 10 Commandments reflects God's character and God, if God exists and he does then that means that he has to be the most free being that there is and true freedom, what is true freedom? Well we learn that when we look at God true freedom is the ability to not be able to do some things, you know? There are things that God cannot do. God cannot cheat, God cannot lie, God cannot blaspheme, God cannot be unfaithful, he can't do any of that. He's not able and that means true freedom is not the ability to make choices as you wish. True freedom is the ability to be the very thing you're meant to be and so when you look at the 10 Commandments you're being called, you're being asked, not just to obey the 10 Commandments but to actually reflect God's character.

True freedom, not restriction but freedom. Freedom is not choices, it's not the proliferation of choices, no it's the ability to be like God, to be the one you were made to be. Okay so tonight you were made to be like God, that's the really the big picture, the big idea of the 10 Commandments to reflect God's character and that is why Paul says this incredibly outrageous thing that he says in Ephesians 5 1, he says, imitate God and this is not an idea that we talk about very often, especially as Protestants, we don't speak about the imitation of God. It sounds dangerous, how could a human being imitate God and yet Ephesians 5 1 Paul says imitate God. So let's think about it, it's really the summary of the whole of the 10 Commandments. Immitate God, first you're created to imitate God and then secondly, recreated to imitate God. Alright so let's think about that, first created to imitate. Alright I just want to say and point out this is a command, so you see it right there in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 1, therefore be imitators of God. It's a command, the word to imitate here is the Greek word mimesis and it means in English just to mimic, to copy, to follow after and another way to translate it is to talk about models.

So every single one of us grows up in this world and we need models, we need people that we look at and recognize as role models in our lives and you come across the Bible and you see that the Bible gives you lots of models in this life. So if you were with us last week, last Sunday morning in Mark chapter 12 Jesus pointed at a poor widow and said look at her, she follows God when she gave her whole self so follow her. So we need models in this life, sometimes the Bible says David is a model, sometimes Ruth is a model, there's all sorts of models across the Bible. Another way that the New Testament talks about this is to use the Greek word icon. So icon is translated in your New Testament as image but it can also be translated as model in a way, an image, a way of doing something, something you can follow, something you can copy. I wonder who you think are the biggest icons of Western history. I was thinking about this this week. I think it's got to be Elvis Presley, I think it's got to be Princess

Diana maybe, Michael Jordan, someone might add Taylor Swift, you know, Leonel Messi, you would have your list, right? You would contradict my list. The Bible comes and says that every

single one of us needs models and the reason models, icons, that very literal Greek word exist, is because we were made to mimic. We were made to copy, we were made to look at something and try to image it ourselves. And the Bible looks at the icons of Western history and says every one of these human examples, these human icons, they're great in their own way but a true icon, a true object of mimicry, someone we're supposed to follow, is only good. A human being is only good to follow if they are imitating God. That's what Paul says. Imitate God and really look to people, look around and imitate those who are imitating God. And so Paul says something unbelievable. He says, follow me, imitate me at one point in his letters as I imitate God. He says that. It's outrageous but he says this is exactly what we're made to mimic. We have to have people to look out and to follow and to mimic. Now how? Well verse one and two, he says imitate God and then you see in verse two, walk in love as Christ loved us. And that means that he's taking this, making this a bit clearer. Verse one, imitate God. Verse two, as Christ Jesus loved us. Now what he's doing there is saying to you, here's how you imitate

God more specifically. Imitate Jesus Christ. So if you want to know how to imitate God, you look at the life of Jesus and you imitate Jesus's life. Verse two, love like he loved. Now this is where it gets really dangerous. This is where we have an instinct, maybe you have an instinct tonight, to push back and to say, the imitation of Christ. There's been lots of books written with that title and it seems dangerous and there's a few reasons why. There have been three basic models in the history of Christianity for what it means to imitate Jesus Christ and all of them have been one sided and that's why we feel instinctively that this idea of imitating Jesus can be dangerous. The first of these models that developed a few hundred years into the life of the church was the ideal of becoming a martyr. And what happened here was people looked at the Gospels and they said, look Jesus, Jesus takes his life, he gives his life away in physical death, he suffers physically and that means the best way in this life you can imitate Jesus is if you're willing and you take it all the way to the point where you give your life away physically for him.

[7 : 44] And so there came a season in the church in church history where people were chasing martyrdom. They were really seeking it and it created levels of Christians. You know you can only really be a you can only really have assurance that you're gonna go to heaven if you become a martyr and so people chase after it and it created classes of Christians. Now we have something similar in our day, you know there are normal Christians and then there are missionaries, you know, and then there are missionaries and then there are the missionaries that go to North Korea, right? There's classes, this is how the idea of purgatory developed, you know there's levels. How can we really be sure everybody did everybody only the martyr really deserves it, right? It's a model, it's one-sided. It's an idea of imitation of Christ that kind of missed it actually. Now there's a second way that's one-sided that came along and it transferred from the martyr to the monk and the monk looked at Jesus's life and said well it's not really about his physical suffering by itself, it's about his solitude. So Jesus went out into the desert, remember for 40 days and he starved and so the monk said I need to do the same thing, I need to go out into the desert, I need to starve, I need to take away the goods of this life like Jesus, he was homeless, I have to be homeless and so they followed his example in exactly the same ways and he said so that look there's normal

Christians and then there's the monk, there's classes and this is the real imitation of Jesus. Now there's the martyr ideal, there's the monastic ideal but then the third one that developed much more recently in our history is the modern ideal and in the modern ideal people look at the gospels, the modern person, the modern person looks at the gospels and says the imitation of Christ, that's it. Jesus, you know the gospel is not good news, the gospel is this, that Jesus is my example. Jesus came into the world so that I could imitate him, so that I could follow him as an example. You see the modern rationalist looks and says Jesus is not my savior, he is my example and so Christianity is nothing but imitation. If I imitate Jesus, he'll teach me how to have the best life, how to be a good person, how to be ethical, so Jesus is a great ethical example but he's not a savior. Now we've got these three models of imitation throughout world history, church history and that's why people get nervous about this idea of the imitation of Christ and yet we come to

Ephesians 5.1 and Paul says imitate God and here's how, imitate Jesus and so we've got to say, we've got to say okay what do you mean and so the Reformation came along and says this, let's just lay it out, he says, they said look here's what the Bible teaches, the Bible says Jesus can only be your example, you can only imitate Jesus if he is first your redeemer. He has to be your redeemer if you want him to be your example and if he is your redeemer then he also has become

your example and so if you look tonight to Jesus as redeemer, Paul comes along and says now imitate him, imitate him but how? Before we get to that let me just say where's Paul getting this? Paul is getting this I think from Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 1 that's the very beginning by the way, verses 26 to 28 where God makes us and he says I've created you in my image, in my likeness, it's the very same idea. God said I created you in my image so you're made to image God, you're made to imitate God, it's the very very same notion. One way to think about it is that to imitate God means to be like a mirror, an image, to image something means that you are a living mirror. Okay what, how does a mirror work? I don't really know to be honest but you can take a mirror and I know this that whatever you stand a mirror in front of the mirror reflects the thing that it's facing right? You stand in front of a mirror, a mirror reflects you, you put a mirror in front of anything else and the mirror is going to reflect that thing. God says in the beginning you were made to image, to reflect, to mimic, to mirror God, made in God's image to image God, you're made to mimic, you're made to look at models and copy and that means that you're always in life going to put your heart, the mirror of your heart, you are a mirror, you're a walking mirror in front of something and whatever it is that you give your attention to most, that you're most attuned to, you will begin to reflect.

You're a living mirror, a walking mirror, you have to mimic, you have to image, you have to copy, you can't help but do it, it's in our very DNA, it's down in the depths of our bones. That's why the very first commandment is, God says at the beginning, have no other gods before me, right? Because if you, the mirror of your heart stands and is most attuned to anything creaturely, if that's the thing you focus on most, most you will start to image it, you'll start to reflect it, you'll start to become it. You worship whatever you're thinking about the most, you worship whatever your mind is most attuned to, your heart is most attuned to and whatever you worship, you become like that thing. That's a universal reality.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great writer and poet, he says, he wrote about this, he said this, a person will worship something, we may think our tribute is paid in secret, but it will come out. That which dominates our imagination and our thoughts, that, sorry let me read that again, that which dominates our imagination and our thoughts will determine our loves and our character.

[13 : 39] Therefore, it requires us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshiping we are becoming, he said. Now Charles Darwin, in late in his life he wrote an autobiography, he wrote about his own story and he says something really interesting about this. He talks about in his autobiography how he used to love poetry and music and how he used to be, he used to reflect often on the world of his own emotions and how he was attuned to his own psychology and he writes about how he loved to read Shakespeare and the beautiful lines of Shakespeare. He says I took great pleasure in poetry and in Shakespeare, but then he writes 20 to 30 years later I cannot read a line of it, it nauseates me, why? And he talks about this, he says I spent 30 years in deep analytical scientific obsession day in and day out with collecting facts and analyzing them. He says my mind has become a machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of data and he says I've lost my taste for poetry, I've lost my taste for music, I've lost my taste for the world of the emotions and he says it's because I stared at scientific data day in and day out from the time I woke up to the time I went to bed for 30 years and now he says the loss of this ability to read poetry, to delight in music, he says is the loss of happiness, it was injurious to my moral character in fibriling to the moral part of my character. Now you see what he's saying, you got to get underneath it a little bit to connect it with what we're talking about, he says you know he regrets it, he's regretting it and he's saying he's realizing that he's saying I spent my entire life worshiping science, that's all I did. Now science is a very good thing but he's realizing he wasn't balanced, he put his heart in front of scientific data all day all the time and it's not just that he did science, he became it, he became a machine, he couldn't do anything else, it's all his mind could think about, you see whatever you are standing in front of most often, whatever your heart is looking at, attuned to, you will become, you will reflect it until you become it, you become what you worship, it's an age old truth. Now that means here that Paul is saying you're not being invited to imitate, you do imitate, you do mimic, you do image, you have to, the question is who, what, what is it that your heart is most attuned to, most standing in front of most often, that is the very thing that you're becoming. Now secondly that means we need to be recreated in order to imitate rightly, we need to be recreated in order to grow in the imitation of God. How do we do it? Let me give you two as and we'll be done. They're right here in what Paul says and here they are. In verse one and two Paul says be an imitator of God and that means imitate Jesus Christ.

How? The first thing we need is, here's the first thing, a realist self- understanding, okay, a realist self-understanding. Just before Ephesians five one and two, Paul talks about putting away the old self, being honest about the condition of your heart, being honest about what you're worshiping in this life. He says you got to put away the old self and we need a realist self understanding if we're gonna ever be imitators of God. There are two main ways in other words that you can look at the Ten Commandments, let's bring it back to the Ten Commandments. There are two main ways, you can look at the Ten Commandments and be wrong, not really see what the Bible is trying to do with the Ten Commandments. Here's the first way, you can look at the Ten Commandments after this 11 weeks we've been going through it and you can say you know I haven't always been a perfect person, I know that. I've made mistakes but I'm not a liar and I'm not a cheater and I'm not committed adultery and I'm not murdered.

I don't steal, you know, I don't watch TikTok videos at work. I don't steal time from my employer, you know, I'm generally speaking a pretty good person and I saw one pastor call this, this is a Saint Nick theology, right, because you look at the Ten Commandments and you say I want to obey the Ten Commandments, I want to be a good person and I want to be a good person for goodness sake. It's good to be good, it's good to be moral, it's good to chase after goodness for goodness sake, you know, that's a wrong way of looking at the Ten Commandments, right, in other words you say you know you better watch out, you better not cry, you know, he sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake, so you better be good for goodness sake. You read the Ten Commandments and you say I want to be good for goodness sake, I want to be moral, I want to be a good person, that's Saint Nick theology and you begin to say is that God or Santa, right, and you see the first wrong way to look at the Ten Commandments is say I was made, here it is, let me make it simpler, I was made to be good, I was made to be a moral person and

Paul's coming and saying no the Ten Commandments don't exist because they're telling you you were made to be a moral person, a good person, they tell you you were made to imitate the God who made you, you know you don't exist for goodness sake, not at all, you exist for something much greater than goodness sake, but for God's sake you're made to imitate the living God, the God who made you, see, now there's a second way to be wrong about the Ten Commandments and this is where imitation can be dangerous, this idea, here's why, it's the rich young ruler understanding of the Ten Commandments, so in Matthew chapter 19 Jesus meets with this rich young ruler and he says to the rich young ruler, the rich young ruler says what must I do to get eternal life and he says if you want to have eternal life you've got to obey all the commandments, all ten of the commandments and the rich young ruler says you know well I've never murdered anybody, I've never, he goes through the list and said and he said I think I'm okay, I followed all the commandments from my youth and so Jesus says, Jesus says now go and give away all your possessions to the poor and follow me, now the rich young ruler had asked what must I do to get eternal life, you see he looked at the Ten Commandments and it wasn't I want to be good for goodness sake, it was I want to get to heaven for goodness sake, what must, how did the Ten Commandments get me to heaven, that's, it's for heaven's sake that I'm here to obey the Ten Commandments and it's almost as if Jesus gives into that, Jesus says yeah obey the Ten Commandments and you will and you say this isn't the gospel that I've been reading until Jesus says now go give away all your possessions to the poor and come and follow me and you realize what Jesus was doing, you know this guy said I've obeyed all ten of the Ten Commandments and he says well go give away your possessions and he can't do it, why? Jesus is trying to get him to see he never got past command number one, so you don't have any other gods before the Lord, you see this rich young ruler had been staring at money, at stuff his whole life and that's why he's named rich young ruler, his name is wealth, his name is stuff, his name is material, you see he had let the mirror of his heart stand in front of stuff for so long he had become stuff and Jesus is trying to say you don't see your need, you never got past commandment number one, now look here's the way to grow into imitating God, you've got to be a realist, you've got to say tonight the first thing the Ten Commandments do is show me I never got past commandment number one, I never did, you show I've looked at things in this life, I've pointed my heart at stuff, at creaturely things and I've they've become my God, I never got past commandment number one at all, I know I have a need, I can't imitate God, I never did, I never did, you've got to be a realist, one theologian talks about this, he says that you know the modern person looks and he says Jesus is a really great example and then he says you know the modern person says Jesus I read the

[22 : 26] Gospels I see what a great example Jesus is, this is what it looks like to obey the Ten Commandments, this is who I want to be and the theologian says go and try it, give it a shot, try to go and imitate Jesus and you'll immediately become a realist about yourself and he goes on he says Jesus Christ felt his emotions deeper than the rest of us, his intellect was stronger than ours, his will was unshaken in the face of all temptation and he says to see Jesus truly is to experience judgment on our conscience, to know our powerlessness, to truly imitate him indeed if he is only an example to you he comes to judge you and not to save you, only when we know him as redeemer or do we dare look at him, do we ever dare look at him and consider him our example, he says that when you really look at Jesus and you say oh I want to imitate him you become a realist, you know that in that moment you're judged that that's the first thing the Ten Commandments come to teach you, what does Paul say here? Paul says

Jesus Christ came to give himself up in verse 2 as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, now let's just put it plainly as this theologian did, he says there is no way you are ever gonna become what you were truly made to be an imitator of God, an imitator of Jesus unless tonight you know Jesus Christ as your redeemer first, you have to come to him tonight as your redeemer no matter how many times you have tonight is the night to come to him and say Jesus you're my redeemer if you want to step out tomorrow and become he be your living example, Jesus Christ gave himself up as a fragrant offering for you that means Jesus Christ was judged in your place, when you when you look at his life you say I deserve judgment, when you look at the Ten Commandments you have to say I deserve judgment I'm a realist I never got past commandment number one and only then can you see that the judge who was judged in your place has come to be your redeemer, have you ever been to camera obscura across the way here I took the kids to camera obscura last Christmas time and you know you go in there and they have all these funhouse mirrors and they're all they're all curved right and you they they show you you know they show you who you really are no well actually yes right a funhouse mirror are you a realist about yourself your heart is a funhouse mirror it's meant to reflect the living God and it's all curved and bent and curved in on itself and pointing back at you you've replaced them with looking at all sorts of your heart as a tune to all sorts of other things and you've become them we're made to be perfectly flat beautiful mirrors images of God and we're funhouse mirrors Jesus Christ came to be judged in your place for the fact that you are bent in on yourself curved in facing the wrong direction now that means lastly and we'll close with this that means that if you know Jesus Christ is your redeemer tonight you can move forward from here growing in this idea of the imitation of God with an adopted self-understanding here's the very last thing you see this in verses in verse one he says be imitator of God verse one imitate Jesus verse two and right in between there's that little clause as beloved children so he reframes this idea of imitation this is what the three models of imitation martyr monk and modern rationalists all missed and that's this idea that in order to truly imitate God imitate Christ you've got to know yourself to be adopted adopted into his family a son or a daughter of the living King and here's the last thing the only way that you can imitate God is if he is your father not your judge and that means when you come to Christ as redeemer here's the big idea you now have access to God how do you grow in the imitation of God the imitation of

Christ and it's all about this you now redeemed by Jesus have access to God access think about the way a child has access to their father you know sometimes sometimes in the middle of the night children get thirsty they forgot to bring water to their bedside and they wake up in the middle of the night and their mouth is parched and they want a drink I've had that happen once or twice and you know what happens you're asleep and a child comes and they said they wake you up and say I'm so thirsty now imagine the access that a child has to their dad to their mom you know when a little child comes and says I'm thirsty a mom and a dad say you know they might do it slightly reluctantly but they get up and they go and they get that child water now if you're if your colleague if your employer if your employee at 3 a.m. knocked on your front door and said you know what I woke up in the middle of the night and I was so thirsty and I just thought maybe you could help me get some water you know you might do it because it's such a strange encounter at 3 a.m. you might go to the kitchen and bring this one but you say what are you doing here you know status is everything you say you do not have the status to come to my house at 3 a.m. and ask me for water the there's only a few little creep little people that can do that in all the world right and that's my children nobody else can do that you see when when you look at the Jesus Christ and He's your Redeemer you're adopted you have access you can come to God like a little child thirsty in the middle of the night for

water now look let's put it together Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 17 and 18 this is what he says the spirit of the Lord is freedom spirit of the Lord when you have the spirit of the Lord you have freedom and then he says this you can come and behold God with an unveiled face you have access and you will be transformed into the image of the Lord from glory to glory by degree you see what he says he says when you have when you know yourself adopted you have access and when you have access you can come behold God face-to-face and this is then you will be transformed by degree in this life you want to imitate God you want to become like Jesus it says come and behold the God that has given you access like a son like a daughter daughter here's the secret you want to become like God you want to imitate God become the one you were made to be like to imitate Jesus it says come and behold him approach him be face-to-face with him with God quantity time really is quality time spending time with the living God beholding him face-to-face it's worship that's the secret beholding God coming to him face-to-face I had two illustrations to close only have time for one let me give you one there's a wonderful story a true story about I told this about a year ago but this you'll we're gonna keep hearing this illustration it's too good not to use on an annual basis a story of a man named Joseph Merrick you know the story he was called he was called the elephant man in his time he lived in the 1880s and 90s and he was an Englishman and he was born in the south of England and he was born with a disease that really disfigured his body in many ways he was born with tumors growths all over his body and he ended up being sold into a carnival show a traveling carnival you'd pay money to observe him in that 19th century all very true a movie's been made about him with Anthony Hopkins and one of the things that happened is later in Joseph's life he got treated he was nearly beat to death by his carnival master and he got treated by a doctor in a hospital in London and the doctor eventually forms a relationship with Joseph and takes Joseph into his home and invites him over with his wife the doctor and his wife hosted Joseph for afternoon tea and Joseph Merrick the elephant man comes to afternoon tea and he's there and he shows the doctor and his wife a picture of his mother and it's his only possession he's got it the clothes on his back he's got a little picture of his mom and he says the doctors you know he's very curious he wants to see Joseph's mother he wants to know you know is this disease something he inherited by genetics or is it just him and his mother did not have the same disease and the doctor says you know she's a she's a wonderful woman I'm sure and Joseph says well if only she could see me now amongst all these friends these friends the doctor and his wife he says maybe she would want me and so you see his mother had abandoned him because of his disease and he said in this moment you know he had a friend he had a he had a couple that loved him and he said if only she could see me now you know if only she could see me now listen he needed a mother he did he needed a mother his mother if she would have stuck with him that would have that would have helped him so much but let me say this even his mother even his mother even the best of circumstances even the dearest of friendships could not fully and finally make him whole all right you were created let's come back to the beginning you were created to image the God who made you and that means you were made above all else to behold the living God face to face you were made for God and that means no matter what you faced in life and boy did Joseph have a hard life the most important thing that we all need is to hear God say to you you're my son you're my daughter Joseph needed that above all else he needed he needed to hear my son God the father say that to him my he needs you need more than anything tonight just to hear God say to you my son my daughter and for you to behold him face to face and when you behold him you will take on his character the very thing you were made for let's pray together Lord we asked tonight that you would make us conformed to the image of the son which is just means to imitate Jesus and we give thanks tonight that no matter what our life situation and no matter how broken it's been that we can have tonight the thing we need above all and that's to be named adopted a status a status so precious to be able to come before you with total and utter access all because of our Redeemer Jesus and so as we close this Ten Commandment series we don't want to walk away thinking Lord that the Ten Commandments are all about our morality or our goodness or anything like that or even earning our way to heaven far be it we want to come tonight and know that the Ten Commandments exist to show us what it looks like to be conformed to the image of the one we were made who we were made for and by and unto and so we asked tonight Lord that you would give us your character only because you've given us redemption and the Son so I pray tonight for somebody that they would find redemption and hope tonight in Jesus Christ judged in their place in the way they failed to image you Lord he did and yet he died so we pray tonight for somebody that they would find hope and redemption in Jesus Christ and further for

all of us Lord that you would teach us what it means to imitate Jesus Christ and his character and we pray these things in Christ's name Amen