

March 1, 2026 (Lesson 13)

IMITATING OUR FATHER

1. **Love Like Our Heavenly Father** (Luke 6:27-36)
2. **Paul Exemplifies a Spiritual Father** (1 Corinthians 4:14-21)
3. **Holiness Resembles Our Heavenly Father** (1 John 2:28—3:9)

Central Truth: We are called to lead holy and loving lives.

Focus: Consider that, as Christians, we are called to imitate our heavenly Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelism Emphasis: This testimony of a faithful Christian life can reverberate through many generations.

Golden Text: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

It has been said that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” According to *writingexplained.org*, the idea behind it has existed for centuries in one form or another, but this exact phrase was popularized by Charles Caleb Colton in a publication in 1820. Its meaning is that one imitates someone else out of admiration, or a high regard for what that person is doing. It is an acknowledgment, whether directly or indirectly, that one finds value in the person they are imitating.

Children naturally learn to imitate their parents in speech and behavior. Babies imitate the sounds their parents make while coaxing conversation from them. Little girls attempt to walk in their mother’s shoes and little boys deepen their voices to sound like their father. In my childhood, my siblings and I would often spend a Sunday afternoon re-creating the worship service from church. We would mimic everything from the songs to the prayers and sermons, and even the passionate worship.

As regards our heavenly Father, imitation of His ways is recommended in the Scriptures. It is made possible through our relationship with Him in salvation. It is enabled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It reveals our love for who He is and appreciation for what He has done. Like Jesus, who revealed the Father, believers are to reflect the nature and character of God. English poet John Milton said, “The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate Him.”

1. LOVE LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

A. Blessing Instead of Cursing (Luke 6:27-31)

²⁷ But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. ²⁸ Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. ²⁹ And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. ³⁰ Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. ³¹ And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

The first few verses of Luke 6 reveal Jesus teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath, ascending a mountain to pray, and choosing the twelve disciples. The remainder of the chapter features Him teaching the multitudes in what is referred to as the “Sermon on the Plain.” This teaching includes four beatitudes, four woes, and practical instructions for living as children of God. Verses 27-31 challenge the normal and expected reactions toward those who antagonize or try to manipulate us. Jesus presents a set of behaviors that do not come naturally to anyone but urge the expression of an unconditional love like that of the Father.

The Law of Moses allowed for retribution when wronged (Lev. 24:17-22) and the destruction of Israel’s enemies (Deut. 7:2). Under the old covenant, individuals could seek revenge against their adversaries. Jesus’ teaching revealed a new law of love and mercy toward one’s enemy. Love in response to hatred, a blessing in response to a curse, and prayer in return for spiteful behavior was what God now expected of those who would inhabit His kingdom. Blessing offenders would reflect God’s grace.

Hillel and Philo were Jewish scholars of the first century who espoused a negative form of the Golden Rule: “Do not do to others what you would not like done to yourselves.” Jesus taught it in its positive form in Luke 6:31, taking a proactive approach. Instead of a focus on the avoidance of cruel behavior, the Lord commended showing benevolence toward others. J. C. Penney adopted this

principle in the establishment of his stores, which were often referred to as “Golden Rule stores.” He believed success would come by workers treating customers as they would want to be treated.

§ *Explain the radical responses Jesus calls for regarding a piece of clothing and stolen goods (vv. 29-30).*

B. Being Merciful (Luke 6:32-36)

³² For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. ³³ And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. ³⁴ And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. ³⁶ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

The law of mercy is further developed by relating three significant actions: *loving*, *doing good*, and *lending*. Those behaviors are customary and expected in relationships where there is reciprocity. It requires little effort or convincing to love, treat kindly, and assist those with whom we enjoy good fellowship. Consequently, there is nothing significant or praiseworthy about those behaviors when demonstrated in that context. Even those far from God will usually honor those who honor them in turn. Children of the Kingdom are called to a higher standard of thinking and behaving. Our first instinct should be to love, be kind, and lend regardless of the quality of our interaction with others. We should be prepared to respond to others not “because of” but “in spite of.” It mimics the Father’s way of loving us.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that God treats everyone equally (Matt. 5:45). The sun rises “on the evil and on the good,” and rain falls “on the just and on the unjust.” The Father’s nature is seen in His willingness to love us regardless of our response to His Word, will, or way. Psalm 145:8-9 affirms He is a compassionate God whose goodness and mercy are available to all. His law of love and mercy is embedded in His character and becomes the obligation of those who

are under His domain. We are to love, do good, and lend freely, knowing it pleases the Father who will reward us.

Jesus commands us to be merciful like the Father is merciful. Our obedience will offer proof of our connection to God and validate our commitment to living according to His standards. The kindness, generosity, and compassion He shows to the ungrateful and immoral flow from His heart of love. By loving others in the same manner, we honor God and fulfill His expectations. To disregard the command to show mercy would expose our selfishness and disprove any claim to the kingdom of God. His children strive to behave like Him and reveal the Father's character.

Godly Endurance

A weary traveler was welcomed into the home of a rabbi for a night of rest. As they conversed, the rabbi learned his guest was almost a hundred years old and inquired about the man's religious beliefs. "I'm an atheist," the man responded. The rabbi became angry and told the man to leave, claiming, "I cannot keep an atheist in my house."

The elderly man left silently and disappeared into the dark night. As the rabbi later read the Scriptures, he heard the voice of God, "Son, why did you throw that old man out?" The rabbi answered, "Because He is an atheist, and I cannot endure him overnight." God replied, "I have endured him for almost a hundred years."

Convicted, the rabbi rushed out into the night in search of the man. When he found him, he took him back to his home and treated him with kindness (*sermoncentral.com*).

2. PAUL EXEMPLIFIES A SPIRITUAL FATHER

A. Paul's Example (1 Corinthians 4:14-16)

¹⁴ I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. ¹⁵ For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶ Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

The church at Corinth was established by Paul during his second ministry journey. The city was a major trading hub in the Roman Empire and was multicultural in its makeup. It was a fitting city for the preaching of the Gospel, and the ministry was fruitful in conversions, miracles, and influence. Consequently, both Jews and Gentiles comprised its membership, and Paul's two letters to the congregation provide us with insight into the members' attitudes and behaviors. Paul's response to disturbing reports about some of the issues facing the church is found in 1 Corinthians. As the founder of the church, he was viewed by many as a spiritual father who possessed the authority and wisdom to provide them with direction and godly wisdom.

In chapter 4, the apostle addressed the issue of pride some had displayed, thinking themselves superior to others. Even Paul was looked down on by some in comparison to leaders like Apollos and Peter (1:11-12). Paul challenged this behavior with sarcasm, reproof, and a reminder of his apostolic authority, considering himself as a father providing corrective caution to his sons (4:14). His words were not intended to embarrass them but to edify them. Like a good spiritual father, his desire was to raise good spiritual children.

The instruction of teachers is beneficial to our development, for they impart knowledge that guides our growth. The Corinthians were not lacking in Christian instruction, according to Paul, but what they needed was fatherhood (v. 15). He was their father in Christ who established them in Christ. As a spiritual parent, he possessed an influential relationship that would inform and inspire their growth and maturity. Imitation of Paul's Christian walk would enable the Corinthians to express a lifestyle indicative of Kingdom citizenship.

In addition to the believers at Corinth, Paul was a spiritual father to several other churches. Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica are among the other cities where the apostle established a witness for Jesus Christ. As a spiritual parent, he wrote letters to those congregations. Additionally,

individuals including Silas, Timothy, Titus, and John Mark were Paul's spiritual sons. They traveled with him and were guided in the development of their Christian faith. His words and example served to inspire devotion and fidelity to Christ.

§ *Why are spiritual mentors vitally important?*

B. Paul's Warning (1 Corinthians 4:17-21)

¹⁷ For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. ¹⁸ Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. ²¹ What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

Spiritual maturity is a concern and objective of the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children. As earthly parents anticipate the physical growth of their children, spiritual parents look for the spiritual development, and our heavenly Father has purposed our maturity (Matt. 5:48). Our growth as believers will be a journey of learning, developing, and adapting. In addition to receiving counsel, instruction, and affirmation, the process of spiritual growth necessitates occasional admonition, caution, and correction.

Paul's concern for the Corinthians was further demonstrated by sending Timothy on a mission to remind them of his example. That example included the faithfulness revealed in Timothy, Paul's spiritual son, and in the apostle's consistent message to the Corinthians and churches in other cities (Acts 20:17-21). Paul's conversations, teachings, and conduct were faithful to his beliefs and calling in Christ. As he demonstrated fidelity to God in his life, he desired and encouraged the Corinthians to do the same. Spiritual children should be predisposed to following the example of their spiritual father.

The impact of spiritual example cannot be refuted. There are those along our journey who will inspire our walk with God and cause us to adopt a lifestyle that mimics theirs. As a boy, I often listened to Evangelist R. W. Schambach's radio program, *The Voice of Power*. His sermons and testimonies of miracles fascinated my young mind and encouraged my faith. Schambach's ministry had been inspired by other evangelists. Like his mentors, Schambach saw blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, and the lame leave his crusades walking.

Timothy also brought a message of warning from Paul to the Corinthian church. To those who questioned his apostolic authority and pridefully asserted he would be afraid to come, Paul declared his intention to visit Corinth to test if there was any power behind their words (1 Cor. 4:18-19). They used words to amplify and verify their supposed authority. As a representative of the kingdom of God, the apostle functioned with godly power and authority (v. 20). As a spiritual father, he was prepared to visit Corinth in one of two ways: bearing loving correction or stern discipline (v. 21). They would have to choose.

Christian Authority

The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.

3. HOLINESS RESEMBLES OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

A. Purifying Hope (1 John 2:28-29; 3:1-3)

2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. ² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not

yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ³
And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The Apostle John consistently referred to the believer's relationship with God through the lens of sonship in his writings. It is the result of faith in Jesus (John 1:12), and we see our responsibility in his letters (1 John 2:23-24). Verses 28 and 29 confirm our connection with God and remind us practical righteousness validates our position. The born-again experience makes us true children of God, having the capacity to reproduce His character and traits in our lives. Whatever He requires or expects of us is possible because we bear His image and are filled with His Spirit. His righteous nature beckons and anticipates our righteous behavior.

John marvels that the Father's love has enabled us to be called "the sons of God" (3:1). His love is outstanding and superior in its expression and power. It provides for the forgiveness of sins and the removal of guilt. It exempts us from wrath and judgment. It purposes our right standing with God through justification. In Galatians 4:5, Paul said we "receive the adoption as sons," which makes us "heir[s] of God through Christ" (v. 7). The world may be ignorant of our designation as God's children, but we are known in the heavenly realms.

The full revelation of our sonship is yet to be seen (1 John 3:2), while the new birth confirms our status (John 3:3). We are called to mature as we await a future wherein the totality of our sonship will be seen. John links it to the appearance of Christ, likely His second coming, when we shall be able to fully comprehend all that Jesus is ("see Him as He is"). As a member of the Godhead, Jesus is connected to the Father, and He reveals the Father (John 14:9). On the day we see Him as He is, we will become like Him and, thereby, fully reflect the Father as well.

The "hope" of which John speaks (1 John 3:3) is becoming like Christ and fully displaying the character of God. It is a hope all believers possess upon conversion. This hope elicits our faithful

devotion and obedience to the Scriptures and the ways of God. It leads to the self-purification of those who are pure. Adam Clarke observed, “The apostle does not here speak of any man purifying his own heart, because this is impossible; but of his persevering in the state of purity into which the Lord hath brought him.”

The avoidance of evil, guarding against the lusts of the flesh, living by the Spirit’s leading, and obeying Christ’s commands are ways that purification takes place and holiness is revealed. Since we are destined to be like Him, we are driven to pursue a lifestyle that pleases Him and demonstrates we are children of our heavenly Father.

New Status

As believers in Christ, we have been forgiven, redeemed, restored, and now we are the children of God. Granted to us are all the privileges of God’s household—access to the Father, freedom to come to the throne of grace, and confidence that He works all things for the good of His children.—French Arrington

B. Born of God (1 John 3:7-9)

⁷ Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. ⁸ He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Those who are connected to God in sonship will inevitably reveal the fact in the way they live. “Righteousness” is both a position we possess in Christ and the practice or behavior that marks us as God’s “little children” (v. 7). Salvation gave us a new identity in Christ, a new nature, and a new way of life. As children of the Father, we follow His instructions and live according to His guidance. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables us to demonstrate righteousness in the way we regard God, relate to others, and conduct ourselves.

While righteousness reveals the believers' sonship, a sinful lifestyle marks those who are still under Satan's power. They are under the influence of one whom John describes as having sinned "from the beginning" (v. 8). The Scriptures indicate Satan once dwelt among the angelic company in God's presence until his pride caused him to rebel against God and be expelled from Heaven (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:16). His deception of Adam and Eve resulted in all of humanity being held captive to sin's power. Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection were purposed to bring an end to Satan's manipulation.

In 1 John 3:9, the apostle made an emphatic declaration that has been a source of debate. He said if one is "born of God," that person "cannot sin" or "does not sin" (NKJV). How are we to reconcile this with the knowledge of other believers' imperfections and our own occasional missteps? The new birth changes one's nature, position, and lifestyle. Observable differences from the old ways of living are revealed in those who have experienced salvation in Christ. Their lives are now oriented around God and His Word. New ways of thinking and acting emerge and confirm the transformation that has taken place. John's declaration (in the original Greek in which it was written) speaks of the habitual practice of sin, in which genuine believers do not engage. They are repulsed by sin, and whenever it is occasioned, they are convicted and repent of it. Their habit is now righteousness and the relentless pursuit of holiness.

The Holy Spirit within us will produce godly fruit (Gal. 5:22-23) and empower us to function with spiritual authority (vv. 24-25). As children of God, we will habitually think, act, and become more like our Father.

§ *What are "the works of the devil," and how did Jesus "destroy" them (1 John 3:8)?*

INFLUENCING OTHERS TO FOLLOW CHRIST

Christians are called to follow and be like Christ. Essentially, this causes us to be like the Father as well since Christ revealed the Father. The admonitions of the Biblical writers urge us to live in a way that demonstrates our connection with the Father and the Son. In so doing, we please our Father and attract others to His kingdom. Many individuals have been won to Christ and adopted by God through the faithful living of devoted believers.

The Christian walk of Will Houghton, a preacher who became the president of Moody Bible Institute during the 1940s, played a large role in the conversion of an agnostic who was contemplating suicide. The skeptic hired a private detective to watch Houghton, and the detective's report said this preacher's life was above reproach. The agnostic went to Houghton's church and accepted Christ (*bible.org*).

Daily Devotions

- M. Noah Reflects Righteousness and Justice (Genesis 6:6-9)
- T. Josiah's Heart for God (2 Kings 23:21-25)
- W. Daniel's Wisdom and Integrity (Daniel 1:8-16)
- T. Simeon—Just and Devout (Luke 2:25-35)
- F. Women Support Jesus (Luke 8:1-3)
- S. Paul's Spiritual Son Timothy (1 Timothy 1:1-3)