

To Become Like Christ

Becoming sons of God is our goal. This means that we are to become like God's Son Jesus Christ. In order to do that, we must ask the questions: "What is Christ like? How does He behave toward His Father, and toward His Father's work?"

The first thing we notice about Jesus is His everlasting obedience to the Father's will. The Gospel of John says, 49 times in 49 different ways, words that mean simply that the Son can do nothing of Himself and that He does only what He sees the Father doing: "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38, NKJV).

So to become perfectly Christlike means to become perfectly obedient to the will of God.

This is what Christ asks us to do. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:10-14).

Experience has taught us that such total obedience is impossible if we have to do it in our own strength. If that is the price of sonship we are defeated from the start. Much of the time our wills refuse even to want to be so submissive.

If we force our wills to a reluctant obedience we shall be far below the obedience of Jesus. So, at first glance, there seems to be an impossible gulf fixed between us and Jesus.

But Jesus promises that His Holy Spirit will enter us and give us the will to do God's will. Then we will obey, not because duty is the "stern daughter of the Voice of God," but because there is nothing in the universe we want so much to do.

When we love somebody enough, our supreme joy is to do what he

wants done. So the Holy Spirit makes us love God so much that we yearn with no desire except to please Him. Such perfect love transforms every hard task and even death itself into joy.

Jesus' incredible, never-ending listening and saying "Yes" made it possible for God to trust Him with literally everything. The Bible says that God has "put everything into His hands, everything in the universe," because He found that He could depend on Him so completely.

It is not sacrilegious to say that Jesus earned the confidence of the Father by being trustworthy every moment, under every trial, in every detail. The Son and the Father have no disputes because the Son never disagrees. The Son knows that the Father is always right. The Father never finds it necessary to persuade a reluctant Son.

We too are becoming sons of God, and we must learn this unflinching loyalty that never falters when a cross lies ahead. This is the first Christlike quality.

Perfect in Love

The second supreme quality in Jesus Christ was that He was perfect in love. In what way was He perfect in love?

I think, in the first place, that His love reached out farther than ours. We love our family most, then our intimate friends, and then our school, then our club, and then our nation. The farther from ourselves we go, the weaker our love becomes. But Christ's love reaches all the way around the world.

In the second place, it is a warm love, always warm, no matter how far it reaches. It is like the sun. Compared to His bright sun, our love is like twinkling stars. His healing power was so much greater than ours because His love was so much greater than ours, and what we find impossible He found easy.

Jesus' love had a healing quality. It healed and cured instantly all that it touched. It turned disease into health and sin into saintliness.

His love was contagious. It flowed into others and then flowed out from others who came under His spell. Indeed, it was so contagious that we can see it in people's eyes and faces and hear it in their voices today, after 2,000 years. People of every climate and every tongue fall under His spell and catch that strange kind of love that He had. It was a compassionate love that reached down to the depths.

It was not an easy-going affability. It was a mighty force. It wasn't a gentle breeze; it was a terrific, powerful wind.

When He was around, people felt His love pulling them and rushed to Him as a piece of iron rushes to a magnet. Rulers and oppressors felt it and trembled with fear. It wasn't personal magnetism. It wasn't willpower. It was pure, strong, resistless love.

The cross is the great symbol of the extent to which Christ will go in His love for us. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

But on the cross He went further than dying for His friends. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). He did not die for good people; He died for people who did not deserve it and did not appreciate His death.

His passion to help was so powerful that He died for us, not because we were lovable but because we were hateful. Every angel in the universe would loathe such creatures as we were, so He died to change our hatefulness into loveliness.

We were helplessly caught in sin. He helped us because we could not help ourselves. He died not only for sinners but

also for His enemies. He died to save those who crucified Him. On the cross He could cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This kind of love, so intense and so selfless, is what He depends on to save the world.

There are three ways to treat enemies that we find advocated in the world today: First, kill them. Second, get as far away from them as you can. Third, try to make them your friends.

But Jesus went beyond all three of these. He tried a fourth way. His plan was, "Let them kill you and keep on loving them. After you are dead they will realize how you loved them and it will break their hearts and redeem them." He could have killed His enemies, but He let them kill Him.

Jesus expected that such love, set free in deeds of compassion and self-sacrifice, could save the world. I think that there we see behind the veil into the very heart of God.

Here we catch, for a moment, the stupendous adventure on which God has started. He has let us try every other method under the sun for making a good world. At last we discover that love as selfless and as intense as the love of Jesus is our only hope of saving the world.

If Jesus loves like that, then we, as other sons of God, are to love like that.

We see, then, that to become like Jesus our present nature must be transformed by Him into an intense passion to help those in need. This is what He means when He says, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

Perfect in Faith

In the third place, Jesus was perfect in faith. This is extremely difficult for an educated man to understand. Our scientific training insists upon testing everything, not in

believing what we cannot prove. The Christian life takes the opposite view, emphasizing that we believe the best about God even when we cannot prove it.

Jesus had to fight a terrific battle for His faith. There had come to Him this inner conviction that He was the Son of God. He felt it, but He also pondered: "I am the only one who feels this way about myself. Am I right?" He struggled 40 days in the wilderness with that question, and when He was very hungry the voice of Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, then turn that stone into bread and eat it. If ..."

Again the voice of Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, compromise and you can have the world." It would have been a shortcut to world conquest. He could have done it. He had powers above any civil official or any military commander of His time.

He could have overthrown Caesar. Compromise would have been a good shortcut. But it would have been the devil's victory over faith.

Our age and every age before us have been caught in the great doubt; we are in the midst of it now. We are saying, "Trust God and pick up your hydrogen bombs." We trust love and hate at the same time.

We are compromisers. We can't trust love, and we do not trust God alone as Jesus did. We believe (more or less) in Jesus, but we cannot be uncompromising in following love as He was.

The temptation of Jesus to compromise was sharpened by the fact that the Old Testament had prophesied two kinds of Messiahs. One was to suffer like the Messiah of Isaiah 53; the other was to come like King David. David trusted God and killed his enemies. Jesus trusted God and refused to lift a finger to harm anybody. He suffered but He never made others suffer.

To be a son of God involves faith in love and goodness. To be like Jesus we too will have to refuse to compromise with the idea of killing our enemies. We too must put our faith wholly in love, the kind of love Christ had.

To me, the Gospel of John is the most precious book in the world. I believe it reveals better than all the other books the intimate love and family relationship of Jesus and His Father.

As we see that tender family tie we begin to realize what an incredible glory it will be to become a son of God. It will mean that we too are to join that household of the Father and the Son.

If we are becoming sons of God, then the most beautiful thing through all eternity will be to share the living, loving intimacy that the Father and the Son have. They live in perfect harmony, two wills as one, in a relationship that no words can describe: They have perfect faith in each other, perfect love for one another, such a oneness in their planning that Jesus could say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

Into that wonderful family He invites us. Jesus prays this wonderful prayer:

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me" and "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:24, 21).

The religion of the Old Testament and all the other religions kept God at a distance. He was holy and dangerous; the people trembled in His presence; they could not look into His face. But when at last we achieve sonship and become sons of God, "we shall be like Him"—intimate with the Father, and members of His family.

Frank Laubach (1884-1970) was best known as a pioneer in the adult literacy movement. He helped poor people around the world better themselves by teaching them to read and write. He was also a prolific author and accomplished speaker. Adapted from Channels of Spiritual Power by Frank Laubach, copyright © 1955. Published by Lutterworth Press (London). Used by permission of Baker Book House Company.