



Who Are You Becoming?

1 Thessalonians 4, Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 1

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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WHO ARE YOU BECOMING?

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Last Sunday, I asked the question, *why are you the way you are?* Family background and how you were raised has a lot to do with it. So does your personality. And so do life experiences, both good and bad. But if we're honest, it's hard to answer the question because we all have blind spots. And, by definition, a blind spot is the inability to see the truth about yourself which is so obvious to everyone else.

Jesus had something to say about blind spots in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3, NAS). Self-awareness is hard. It's impossible to be objective about ourselves. That's why we need the Holy Spirit. To take an honest look in the mirror we must invite the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about us and allow Him to sand our rough edges.

This morning, we're going to take another look in the mirror, asking the question, *Who are you becoming?*

When it comes to change, we're tempted to say, "That's just the way I am." Or resigned to say, "I'm too old to change now." But the Bible refuses to allow us to say that.

Romans 8:29 says, He "predestined us to be *conformed* to the image of his Son" (ESV). To the Colossians, Paul said, "We proclaim Him (Jesus), admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone *complete* in Christ" (Colossians 1:28, NAS). And Paul prayed for the church in Thessalonica, "May the God of peace himself *sanctify* you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23, ESV).

When it comes to who we are becoming, the theological word is sanctification. It's a big word meaning set apart for God. It's being fully devoted to God. It's being morally purified and living a holy life. The best way to understand it is that *sanctification is becoming more and more like Jesus every day and in every way*.

This is a sacred calling. To become more like Jesus. To become more like the one who sacrificed His life for us. Who, although we did not deserve it, showed us such amazing grace.

And if we want to be more like Jesus, and if we truly want to honor Him with who we are and how we live, we will invite the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about us, to expose our blind spots, and to confront our sin. We will invite the Holy Spirit to sand the rough edges of our character and *make us more and more like Jesus every day and in every way*.

THE CALL TO SANCTIFICATION – 1 THESSALONIANS 4

First Thessalonians 4 calls us into the process of sanctification, of becoming more and more like Jesus. Paul writes, "We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how

you ought to walk and please God, just as you are doing, that you excel still more” (1 Thessalonians 4:1, ESV).

“We urge you in the Lord Jesus,” Paul said. May Jesus be your inspiration. May His love, His sacrifice, and His grace inspire you. If you believe in Jesus, if you love Jesus, then let that propel you to “walk and please God ... (and) excel still more.”

Paul used the word sanctification three times in this chapter.¹ “For this is the will of God, your **sanctification** ... that each of you know how to control your own body in **sanctification** and honor ... For God has not called us for impurity, but in **sanctification**” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7).

Sanctification means set apart for God, fully devoted to God, and living a holy life for Him. It is the process of being changed and transformed into the likeness of Jesus. It is the on-going process of breaking down bad habits and creating new habits. Sanctification is the renovation of the soul, changing us from the inside out.

Yet several verses in the New Testament state that we are already sanctified. In the greeting of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:2, NAS). Later in 1 Corinthians, Paul said, “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 6:11, ESV). The book of Hebrews says the same thing. “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 10:10, NAS). These verses refer to our positional sanctification, to the moment of our salvation.

In this sense, sanctification is used interchangeably with the word justification. But most of the time, justification is the dominant and preferred word to refer to what at the moment of salvation. The moment we believe, we are justified, fully forgiven, acquitted of our sin, born again, and immediately become children of God. Justification is like the birth of a baby. It happens in a moment in time. Sanctification is like a child growing into adulthood. Sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming **more and more like Jesus every day and in every way**.²

To repeat Max Lucado from last week, “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.”³

This is the “will of God,” Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:3. God’s plan for us and desire for us is to be “conformed to image of His Son” (Romans 8:29, NAS). That’s why Paul urged the Thessalonians, and urges us, to “walk and please God” and “excel still more.”⁴

If we believe in Jesus, if we want to be more like Jesus, and if we truly want to honor Him with who we are and how we live, we will invite the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about us, to expose our blind spots, and to confront our sin. We will invite the Holy Spirit to sand the rough edges of our character and **make us more and more like Jesus every day and in every way**.

THE CALL TO CHRISTLIKENESS – EPHESIANS 5

Paul repeated this sacred calling in Ephesians 5. “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, *just as Christ* also loved you and gave Himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:1-2, NAS).

Paul used the word “therefore” ten times in his letter to the Ephesians. He used the word “walk” seven times.⁵ It’s obvious he was calling for a response. “Therefore,” in light of God’s amazing grace, “walk in love, just as Christ.” Notice how Paul appealed to the sacrifice of Jesus, who “loved” and “gave Himself up for us.”⁶ The inspiration and the motivation to live like Christ is the cross. Walking with Jesus and living like Jesus is cross-motivated and grace-motivated. Because Jesus gave His life for us, we should live our lives for Him.

“Be imitators of God,” Paul said. Again, what a sacred calling. What a daunting calling. We derive our English word mimic from this Greek word, and it simply means doing what you see someone else doing.⁷ Elsewhere, Paul said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV). John summed it up best when he said, “Whoever says he abides in Him” – whoever claims to be a Christian – “ought to walk in the same way in which He walked” (1 John 2:6, ESV).⁸

But what does Christlikeness look like?

- It looks like Jesus when He loved the lowly and the outcast. When He loved the guilty and ashamed. Like the prostitute caught in the act, when He said to her, “I do not condemn you. Now go and sin no more.”⁹ Jesus loved those that no one else loved.
- What does Christlikeness look like? It’s the compassion of Jesus for the distressed and downcast.¹⁰ His words lifted spirits and gave hope.
- What does Christlikeness look like? It looks like the humility of Jesus. The greatest step of humility ever taken was taken by Jesus, when He stepped down from heaven to earth, from majesty to a manger, from glory to a cross. And the Bible says, “Have this attitude (of humility) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”¹¹
- What does Christlikeness look like? We see it in the garden just hours before His arrest. Knowing what was coming He prayed in agony, yet submitted to His Father, and said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done.”¹²
- What does Christlikeness look like? It’s when Jesus was being mocked and crucified by the soldiers. As the nails pierced His hands, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”¹³ To be like Christ is to forgive.

What does Christlikeness look like? It looks like His love, His compassion, His humility, His obedience, His forgiveness, and so much more. What is Christlikeness? Whatever we see in Jesus, others should see in us.

Notice the phrase “as beloved children.” What’s the motivation, what’s the inspiration, for saying yes to the sacred call to Christlikeness? Because we have been loved so much! Because we are His “beloved children,” and He is our Father. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,” John writes, “that we should be called children of God! And that is who we are!” (1 John 3:1, NIV). In light of His great love for us, in response to His amazing grace, we love Him and honor Him by imitating Him, by reflecting His character, by inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about us, to sand the rough edges, and to shape us to become more and more like Jesus every day and in every way.

THE CALL TO HOLINESS – 1 PETER 1

With respect to sanctification, to Christlikeness, and to becoming more like Jesus, Peter wrote about holiness.¹⁴ “Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16, NAS).¹⁵

Holiness and sanctification are the same word and mean the same thing. It means set apart for God. Fully devoted to God. Being morally purified and living a holy life. It’s becoming more and more like Jesus every day and in every way.

So, when pressured by the culture, or when alone with the opportunity to sin in secret, character says, “I’m not going to do that because it’s not the holy thing to do, not the godly or Christlike thing to do. I’m not going to do that because it does not reflect or respect the character of God.” That’s an attitude of holiness.

“Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Peter 1:15).

One of the most prolific writers on discipleship was Jerry Bridges, and he warns us about deceiving ourselves when it comes to sanctification. “It is possible,” he writes, “to be very orthodox in one’s doctrine and very upright in one’s behavior and still not be godly.”¹⁶ Theological knowledge does not guarantee sanctification. Sanctification – becoming more like Jesus – requires a holy desire. A desire to please God more than pleasing, pleasuring, or indulging self. Sanctification is when He is the greater pleasure, when He is the greater desire.

Jerry Bridges also writes about the “aura of godliness.”¹⁷ What does aura mean? It’s the essence of something that everyone can see. It’s what radiates from something that makes it attractive. Do you have the “aura of godliness”? Another spiritual saint, Oswald Sanders, adds, “Spirituality is not easy to define but its presence or absence can be easily discerned.”¹⁸ Godliness, holiness, Christlikeness – you know it when you see it and you know when you don’t. Jesus said, “A good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit ... So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:17, 20, NAS).

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

So how do we grow in Christlikeness, holiness, and sanctification?

In Philippians 2, Paul said, “**Work out** your salvation with fear and trembling,” and then it says, “for it is God who is at **work in** you” (Philippians 2:12-13, NAS). Yes, God is at “work in” us ... and we are to “work out” our salvation. We are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Again, how do we do that? With spiritual disciplines. Paul said, “Train yourself to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7, NIV). Hebrews says, “Make every effort ... to be holy” (Hebrews 12:14, NIV). Don’t be confused. Growing in Christ is not about trying harder. It’s not about doing it in our own strength. It’s about cooperating with the Holy Spirit. And our part includes the following spiritual disciplines.

1 – *Begin your day yielding to the Holy Spirit* and asking Him to make you more like Jesus. It’s inviting Him to reveal the truth about you, to expose your blind spots, to confront your sin. Invite Him to sand the rough edges of your character. And ask Him to fill you in a fresh way, every day, with His power and His help. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to produce Christlikeness in us. And what’s our part? To yield our heart to the Holy Spirit.

2 – *Walk with Jesus. Sit with Jesus. Stay close to Jesus.* To be like Jesus we must live in close, personal, intimate, moment-by-moment relationship with Him. Jesus said, “Abide in Me” (John 15:4). It’s like sitting by a campfire. The closer you sit and the longer you sit, the warmer you get. In the same way, the closer you sit and the longer you sit with Jesus, and the longer you walk with Him, the more you will be like Him.

3 – *Fill your mind with the word of God.* God’s word is truth, and His truth exposes the lies we hear. The lies of the culture. The lies of Satan. His word points to what is right and to what is best. Psalm 119 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word ... Your word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against You” (Psalm 119:9, 11, NAS). What fills your mind and what fills your heart determines your steps.¹⁹ So fill your mind and your heart with the word of God, with the truth of God.

4 – *Make up your mind.* Make up your mind that you are going to say yes to Christlikeness and say no to anything that is contrary to the character of Christ. Paul urged Timothy to “flee” and “pursue.” To flee temptation and foolish desires and to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11, NIV). Hear the intensity of that. “Flee” and “pursue.” Make up your mind that you are going to say yes to Christlikeness and say no to anything that is contrary to the character of Christ.

5 – And to repeat what I said last week, ***pray the prayer of David.*** “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me ... Point out anything in me that offends you” (Psalm 139:23-24, NLT). Why would we pray that prayer? For the same reason we want a doctor to find out what’s wrong, what’s making us sick, what’s threatening our life. We pray, “Search me, O God,” for the Lord to reveal the truth about us. And when He does, He does not condemn us or say, “Gotcha!” When the Holy Spirit confronts us, it is always with grace. David was willing to pray, “Search me, O

God.” And so must we. Inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about us, to expose our blind spots, and to confront our sin.

CONCLUSION

Look in the mirror. Why are you the way you are? Look in the mirror. Who are you becoming? When it comes to change, we’re tempted to say, “That’s just the way I am.” Or resigned to say, “I’m too old to change now.” But the Bible refuses to allow us to say that.

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NOTES

¹ The Greek word for “sanctification” is ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*). The NIV and ESV use the word “holiness” interchangeably with “sanctification” in this passage, while the NASB 2020 consistently translates the word as “sanctification.”

² Other verses in the New Testament refer to progressive sanctification, to the on-going process of becoming more like Jesus. “Put off the old self ... and put on the new self,” Paul wrote to the Colossians. “You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you” (Colossians 3:9-10, NCV). In Philippians 1:6, Paul says, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, ESV).

³ Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), page 3, 9).

⁴ The Greek phrase is περισσευετε μαλλον (*perisseuete mallov*), “excel still more.”

⁵ Ten times Paul used the word “therefore” (2:11, 3:13, 4:1, 4:8, 4:17, 4:25, 5:1, 5:7, 5:15, 6:13, 6:14), and seven times he used the word “walk” (2:2, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15).

⁶ Jesus gave His life as an “offering,” as a sin offering to satisfy the holy wrath of His Father. His life was a “sacrifice,” paying the penalty for our sin, dying in our place, as our substitute. His death was a “fragrant aroma,” like incense in worship, a pleasing act of worship and obedience to His Father.

⁷ The Greek word for “imitators” is μιμητής (*mimetes*), from which we derive our English word mimic.

⁸ Paul wrote to the Colossians, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” (Colossians 2:6, ESV).

⁹ See John 8:3-11.

¹⁰ See Matthew 9:36.

¹¹ See Philippians 2:5-8.

¹² See Luke 22:42.

¹³ See Luke 23:34.

¹⁴ Helpful resources include Henry Blackaby’s book *Holiness* and Jerry Bridges book *The Practice of Godliness*.

¹⁵ Moses found that out when he approached a burning bush in the desert, and he heard the voice of God say, “Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5, NIV). And Isaiah found that out when he was allowed a peek into heaven. “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, and the train of His robe was filling the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah saw God sitting on His throne. He got a glimpse of the majesty and royalty and beauty of God. And Isaiah heard angels shouting over and over again, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of heaven trembled. Isaiah was allowed a glimpse of the holiness of God.

¹⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1983, 1996, 2008), page 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 5.

¹⁸ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1967), page 25.

¹⁹ Jerry Bridges writes about the importance of filling our mind with the word of God, when he writes, “If we do not actively seek to come under the influence of God’s word, we will come under the influence of sinful society around us. The impact of our culture with its heavy emphasis on materialism, living for one’s self, and instant gratification is simply too strong and pervasive for us not to be influenced by it.” [Jerry Bridges, *Growing Your Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2004), page 75.]