

Our Identity, Call, and Power

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[0:00] Ephesians 4.17 They have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.

You, however, do not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

[1:41] He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands, so he may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[3:02] A set of train tracks runs 100 yards behind my house. It's not as bad as you think. Only once a day does the train go by, and it just brings a few cars.

They just use it to move a few cars from one set of tracks to another. Sometimes there's as many as six cars in the train, but a lot of times it's only one or two.

And so for a few seconds, every day, we have a train in our backyard, so to speak. Now, when we first moved in, that caused a lot of excitement.

Our girls used to run and look out the back window every time the train went by, and it was so exciting, and we used to think, boy, that train is loud.

We would stop everything that we were doing, and we'd listen to it as it went by, but something's happened as the years have gone by.

[4:06] The girls stopped running to the back window to look at the train, and we stopped hearing it. It goes by, and we don't think anything about it.

We don't hear it. It's become a part of the background noise of our life. You know, some of you live on roads, and you hear cars go by, or you don't hear them go by.

It's so common. Now, I want to read a verse to you, and I want to ask you, what do you hear when I read this verse? Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

It's a fairly common verse. Most of you have read it probably a hundred times. Many of you know it. So what came out to you? What did you hear? Was it the direction to be an imitator of God, to imitate God, or was it the gospel truth, as dearly loved children?

Both are amazing. Both are wonderful. We're going to talk about both. But I think if we're honest with ourselves, most of the time when we read that verse, when we hear it, we concentrate, our eyes focus on, our hearts focus on, the be imitators of God.

[5:28] But the gospel part of it has sort of become the train and the background of our life. We don't hear it anymore. We've quit running to see it. We've quit stopping what we're doing and listen to it.

And we're poor for it. So this morning, I just want to meditate with you on this one verse of Ephesians 5, verse 1. Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children.

And I'm praying and I'm hoping that this will excite you again with this wonderful truth. I have three points this morning. Our identity, our call, and then our strength.

And so first we're going to see our identity. Who does this verse say that we are? Who does this verse say that we are? Well, if you are in Christ, if you're a new creation in Christ Jesus, if God has forgiven you, if you've come with empty hands and you said, Lord, I am a sinner.

I cannot save myself. Oh, Jesus, save me. You're my only hope. If you've done that, then who does this verse say that you are?

[6 : 45] Well, it says that you are a loved child. You're God's child and he loves you. A beloved child, the ESB says.

Now let me ask you, is that the identity that you give to yourself? Is that how you think about yourself? Is that the first and the foremost way when you're thinking about who you are in this world?

Who you are in the big scheme of things? Is this how you think of yourself? Are you instead maybe the daughter? The daughter of a hard father?

Or maybe the son of a difficult mother? Are you the member of this or that family? And that's sort of your identity. You do and you don't do things because I'm a member of this family.

That's not how whoever acts. Or are you maybe the husband, the wife of a hard, difficult spouse?

[7 : 46] Maybe you think of yourself primarily as a victim. I'm the broken victim of someone else's abuse or someone else's unfairness. I'm a victim of life's unfairness or this person's abusiveness.

I'll never be whole because I'm broken. Or maybe you're the factory worker. You're just the cog in the wheels of commerce. You're just another machine to be used.

Maybe you're a winner or a loser. Or maybe you say, I'm popular. I'm unpopular. I'm good at sports. I'm a good student.

I'm somebody. I'm nobody. I'm wealthy. I'm poor. How do you think about yourself? What's the identity you give yourself?

God tells us something amazing in this passage. It's absolutely remarkable. And I want you to hear it again. I don't want it to become the train in the background of your life. If you're forgiven, if you're justified through the blood of Jesus Christ, then you are God's child.

[8 : 52] It doesn't matter what anyone else says about you. It doesn't even matter what you say about yourself. The God of heaven and earth, the one whose word defines everything, he says, you are my beloved, you're dearly, you're my dearly loved child.

And I pray that that would be wonderful to you. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, Paul wrote in Ephesians.

So how far back has your father's love gone? Well, from eternity, he predestined you. When God was making stars, when he was dividing the land from the ocean, and when he was speaking and bringing out birds and fish, and when he was taking a lump of clay and breathing into it the breath of life, you were in his heart, and he loved you.

When Father Adam fell, and when Mother Eve hid, and when God said, what have you done? What have you done?

When God saw sin and death enter into his children for the first time, and he saw where they were going, what their destiny was, he saw you. You were in his heart the whole time, dearly loved.

[10 : 34] And he said, well, I will save this one. I will turn this one back to me. This one will be mine again. This will be my child. In love, he predestined you to be adopted.

It was on his heart from the very beginning. You were on his heart from the very beginning. But there's a legal problem. There was, and there is, a legal problem standing between you and adoption.

If I've learned anything through the adoption process that we have gone through, it is this, that it just can't happen. That's the number one question. Well, why can't they just do this, this or that?

It just can't happen. There's always a legal problem. Just wishing it, just longing for it, just wanting it, doesn't make it so. There is a legal problem, and there was a legal problem for God.

When Adam fell, you fell. You became a sinner like him, and out of your sinful heart, you brought forth sin.

[11 : 39] Out of your wicked heart, that's what you did. The law said, love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and your strength. And you said, I will not. I will love money.

I will love sex. I will love comfort. The law said, love your neighbor as yourself, and you said, I will not. I will do this for my praise.

I will do this for my good. They will serve me. And so there you are, a future adopted child, a dearly loved child, guilty.

Guilty before God. Guilty before the law. The law is good. The law is righteous. It should be obeyed. You should have obeyed it, and you disobeyed, and so you fell into condemnation.

There was a legal problem. And it was God's legal problem. You were condemned, and you were sentenced. The soul that sins shall die.

[12 : 45] But God so loved the world, that he sent his one and only son, that whosoever should believe in him would not perish, but have everlasting life. And in the fullness of time, a baby was born in a manger.

A baby born under law. Born to obey the law. Born to save us. And Jesus came. And now there was red tape.

Red tape. The legal red tape that stood between you and your adoption. It wasn't cut with money. It wasn't done away with silver or gold.

It was done away with his blood. We have it in our passage. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

How much did he love you? What did he have to go through in order to cut the red tape to bring you into the status as a dearly loved child? Well, he gave up his son.

[13 : 46] Now, we love our son in Ethiopia. And we've paid a lot of money to cut through the red tape. But I have never sent my daughter A.

went over to Ethiopia to die. That's a kind of love that I don't even know the beginning of. But that's how much your father loves you.

You're dearly loved. And he's brought you through Jesus Christ into his family. Now, that struck me with new power this week.

I have a relationship with God. I'm his son. And that's so easy to forget. I have a relationship with God.

He wants me and him to know each other better and to love each other more. And he wants to spend time with me. He wants me to know him better and to grow in my love for him.

[14 : 49] because he's my father. And I don't know how that strikes you. For so long, I think that can, for so many of us, that can only sound as a command and not as an invitation.

It's just a command that you have to love me. And it becomes a burden. But God is inviting us, saying, you're my child. We're a family. God's wanting me.

He's telling me. He's inviting me to be with him, to enjoy him, to spend time with him. I'm his dearly loved child. And we don't expect our children to always be doing, doing, doing for us.

That's not the basis of our relationship. If you obey me, you get to be my child. You don't always insist on your children doing, doing, doing.

You expect them to obey. But sometimes, don't you just want to sit down with your children and just be with them? We're going to watch a movie tonight. We're not going to do anything.

[15 : 52] We're going to eat together. We're going to play a board game together. We're just going to do nothing except being with you. I'm just going to be with you. And that's the kind of relationship that you have with your father because he's your father and you're his child.

The obedience is for the sake of love. If you love me, you'll keep my commands. The obedience is an end of itself. The love is. The relationship is. The way we stay on good terms with our father.

The way we don't grieve the Holy Spirit. The way we keep the avenues and the roads open between us and our father is through obedience and through repentance and confession. And so, brothers and sisters, we are dearly loved.

And I'm praying that you'll hear that again as the wonderful thing that it is. That you are loved and that you are in a relationship with you, with him. He loves you.

He sent a son for you. And he brought you into his family. And he's given you an inheritance. He's given you an inheritance. The disciples worried a lot.

[16:57] And you can tell they worried a lot because Jesus was always having to tell them not to worry. And so, they were worrying one time. They were anxious. And Jesus goes to encourage them. And he says this, do not be afraid, little flock.

Don't be afraid. For your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Your father has been pleased. It's been his pleasure. It's been his joy. It's been his delight.

It's been his will to give you the kingdom. That's your inheritance, brother and sister. The kingdom of God. Now, what is that? Well, we've seen that several times in Daniel.

Repeatedly, actually, in Daniel. It's God's never-ending, ever-growing, filling the whole earth, everlasting dominion of God. That's your inheritance.

The kingdom of God. Now, the Proverbs say it's good for a parent to leave a child in inheritance. It's the good thing. It's the right thing to do for a parent to leave an inheritance to their children.

[17:57] So, what does God do? How does God do that? What does he do when he makes you his heir? Well, he makes you the heir of all things.

All things. So, the Corinthians are fighting among themselves. They're fighting. They're arguing. They're saying, well, I'm a part of Peter's tribe. No, I'm a part of Apollo's tribe.

No, I'm a part of, I'm a part of the Paul group. I'm a part of the Jesus group. And Paul says, in Corinthians, are you nuts? Have you gone crazy?

Don't you know all things are yours? Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours.

Why are you fighting about who you belong to when everything belongs to you? Doesn't make any sense. Just think of that. All things.

[18:55] That's our inheritance. So look around the world. Look at cities. Look at continents. Look at mountain ranges and rivers. Yours.

They belong to the children of God. So we can raise our eyes higher. All things. Look at the sun. Look at the moon. Yours.

Now get out a telescope. Get out a powerful telescope. And look into the depths of space. Look at galaxies far, far away.

I don't think God just made those for us to look at. They're ours. Heaven is a long, long time. And we're going to have a lot to do if we're going to stay busy.

And so, if we're dearly loved children, if God gave His own Son for us, what is a galaxy to Him? You are loved.

[19:57] What small, pathetic things the world wants to make us into? God in the gospel has made us His dearly loved children.

That's our identity. Now, Paul says, imitate God. Imitate God. That's our call. We've seen our identity, now our call.

And I hope you can see now exactly kind of what he's saying when he says imitate God. He's saying, do the things that your father has done.

And our father has been so kind and compassionate to us, hasn't he? If we've gone from the status of having nothing, of being paupers, to having all things and forgiven, now it's in those things, it's in those ways that we're called to imitate God.

And that's what he says in verse 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.

[20:57] Be imitators of God, therefore. Therefore. The therefore points back to verse 32. It's showing us in what way we're supposed to be an imitator of God.

when God calls us to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, we're imitating God, who is kind, compassionate, and forgiving, who has loved you so much.

He's saying, act like I've acted. Now, children are natural imitators, aren't they? It's the horror, it's the delight of parents to see your kids doing exactly what you've done.

to this day. It's the horror and delight of children. Actually, it's just the horror of children to find themselves acting like their parents acted. I find myself doing things on the tip, when I'm sitting and eating, I find myself doing things with my hands.

And they're the same thing that my dad does. And it's strange. It's, things aren't strange.

[22:05] It's strange that I'm doing them. It's kind of weird and like any normal son, I don't like it. Where did this thing come from? Why am I doing this? How does this work?

I didn't set out to be like my dad, but I am. Children are natural imitators and it absolutely works in our favor when we're being sanctified.

Because our Father in Heaven is showing us, doing all these things, and we're His children and we're looking and we're beginning to imitate. And Paul says, now make that conscious. Imitate Him. God is holy.

So we are holy, we're called to be holy like He is. We're natural imitators. So how do babies learn to talk? Well, they don't have a plan. You don't set out flashcards, you don't put them in front of the computer, they listen to their parents and they begin to talk.

How do they learn gestures and mannerisms by imitation? How do they learn even how to think about people, about situations, how to argue, how to listen, how to spend money, how to save money, how to think about politics and view people and talk about people?

[23:10] To a great degree, it's from their parents. It's through imitation. There's no list. There's no conscious planning. It just happens. And Paul says, now as dearly loved children, do what you see your Father doing.

How does he treat people? He's kind to them. He's forgiving. He's compassionate. How do I know all those things?

Because that's the way he's treated me. How do I know he's kind? Because he's kind to me. I was once a stranger and now I'm a son. I was once fatherless and poor and now I'm rich.

I used to be guilty, but I'm innocent. He's forgiving. He's forgiving me. And Paul says, now do what you see your Father doing.

Act that way towards others. So how can I be mean to other people when God is kind to me? How can I be impatient with other people when God is so clearly patient with me?

[24:18] How can I be not ready and willing to forgive when God has been so ready and willing to forgive me?

You see, the gospel worked out and imitated is the way relationships are built, the way community happens.

That's one of the things that Paul is very interested in in the book of Ephesians. This is all what this section is leading up to and talking about is how do we live with each other?

How does the body of Christ, how is it going to function best? And it's the gospel worked out, it's God imitated. When we imitate God, that's when fellowship and community happens. One of my favorite Christmas movies, and this is not a recommendation, I'm not saying go out and do this, it's not perfect, please don't hear it like that.

One of my favorite Christmas movies is Christmas with the Cranks. and maybe you've seen it, it's a story of a middle-aged couple who, for the first time, have an empty nest.

[25:22] Their daughter has gone down to South America somewhere to work with the Peace Corps and they're going to have an empty nest for Christmas. It's just going to be them. And they decide because their daughter's gone, they're going to skip Christmas, just all together skip it, and they're going to go on a cruise.

And so they set out to totally boycott Christmas. There's no Christmas trees, there's no office parties, no Frosty the Snowman on their roof, no Christmas Eve party.

It's a total boycott. Now along the way, they're into all sorts of arguments, they're facing all sorts of conflict from their neighbors because Christmas has always been this neighborhood thing and their neighbors are fighting against them, and they're resisting them all the way.

And the strings of this community, the strings of this little neighborhood are just being undone. Well, as it comes to a conclusion, Blair, the daughter, calls up on Christmas Eve and she says, Mom and Dad, I'm coming home for Christmas.

And she can't wait to have a true old-fashioned Christmas with the Christmas Eve party and the Christmas tree and the decorations and everyone there, family and friends and everything. And of course, this is terrible because they have nothing ready, nothing's prepared.

[26:40] And so in a few hours, they try to pull everything together and they're running around like mad and they're failing. It's impossible until they let their neighbors in on their problem.

And the turning point comes when the neighbors say, yes, the cranks have been bad. They've been bad neighbors. They've been acting horribly, but they have to be forgiven.

We have to forgive them and pull together and pull this party off. And so it ends, the community is brought together. And the only way it ever took place is through forgiveness.

And what is true in that movie is true in life. only in the gospel do we have the possibility of creating true community and fellowship with one another.

It's only as we imitate God that that's going to happen. It's only as we imitate God that we're kept from biting and devouring one another.

[27:47] And that is Paul's biggest concern. He wants to show them how different people with different backgrounds, different histories, who still sin, can live together as God's children, as the family.

And that's the key. It's only going to happen, brothers and sisters, here when we're imitating God. And God forgives and He's kind and exhibit A is me.

And so we go from our call to our third point, our strength. We've seen our identity, our call, now our strength. Here's the tricky part. Here's where we need to understand what Paul is saying.

And our strength is found in one word, one little word. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

So, what's the connection between our identity and our call? How do we find the strength to imitate God? Well, it's just here.

[29:00] It's as we think about, as we live in, as we settle down into our status as the children of God, as dearly loved children.

And so, where do we get the strength to imitate God? Where do we get the desire to say, I'm going to forgive my brother, I'm going to forgive my sister, I'm going to be kind and compassionate, I'm going to sacrifice for the good of the body.

Well, it's right here. It's as we believe. It's as we believe that we are dearly loved children. Now, we imitate God not to become children of God, but because we are children of God.

If, it's when we find and enjoy the graciousness of the gospel. It's when we are sinking ourselves down into this wonderful good news that we're dearly loved, that God gives us the strength, the grace, to imitate him, our Father.

And so, it happens when the gospel stops being the train in the background of our lives. It's, it's when we stop everything and look again with wonder and amazement at the gospel that we find the grace to actually imitate God.

[30:31] And so, God steps down and he looks us in the eye and he says, imitate me. Do what you see your dad doing. Be holy as I am holy.

You're my child. He isn't saying, if you do these sorts of things good enough and long enough, you'll get to be my child. No, he's loved us and he's brought us into the family.

He's accepted us unconditionally for Jesus' sake and now he says, watch what I do and do what I do. I'm your father. Pay attention to me and what you see me doing, you go and do it.

Act like your father. Act like your Abba. And so, you see, your faith in God's love is going to be the decisive thing that makes this command to imitate God either a burden that weighs you down or a delight and a pleasure and it's an amazing privilege that you get to act like your dad.

It's going to either be a dreaded duty or a delight. And whether it's one or the other, it depends on will you believe that you are God's dearly loved child?

[31:42] And if you're feeling that, that I am God's child and he loves me, then this command is not going to be just a command. It's going to be an invitation. It won't be a terrible burden that will sink you to the grave.

It will be something that brings you more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Now, maybe to help you understand this, I read this week of a little Chinese girl who was adopted.

When she was in the orphanage in China, she had to work and be obedient in order to make sure that she had a place to sleep, in order that the workers would give her food.

And that's something to think about if you're thinking about maybe you should adopt or not. That's how children live. That was her life. Well, she was finally adopted and she was brought back to the United States.

parents. And she had a hard time adjusting. She had a hard time believing that she was loved, dearly loved, apart from her work.

[32:54] So get this picture in your mind. Little girl, five or six years old. And she's always saying to her parents, I'm a hard worker. I'm a hard worker.

Her room was spotless and she was always asking for more to do. Let me ask you, do you think her parents were happy? The whole thing broke their hearts.

Yes, she was a good girl. Yes, she did lots of good things. But it was all out of fear. It was all out of insecurity. It was all done because she didn't feel like she belonged.

She was trying to earn her way into the family, earn her place, stay in her place. She didn't really believe that she was loved and it broke their hearts.

Now, God wants us to imitate him, to be kind, to be compassionate, to be forgiving, to love each other sacrificially where it hurts to love.

[34 : 02] But he doesn't want us to do it from a heart, from a position that wonders if he really loves us or not. That thinks, if I do these things, then he'll love me.

If I do these things, he'll let me be in the family. If I do these things, he'll let me stay in the family. The way into the family is not by doing what God does. It's by believing, simply believing, what God has done.

We have it in our passage. He sent Christ to be a sacrifice. for the sins of all of his people. He sent his son to be the sacrifice for anyone, for everyone, who would believe in him.

Who would simply believe this promise of grace that if you believe in Jesus Christ and what he has done, you'll be forgiven. And so, you get into the family not by acting like God, not by doing good things, but by believing what God has already done in Jesus Christ.

And so, on the cross, he demonstrated his great love for his family. So, Jesus came and he took all the sins of his brothers and sisters.

[35 : 18] He took all the sins of the prodigal, the elder brother, took all the payment, all the debt, and he paid their way into the family and he was crushed for their iniquities.

So, all of God's people stood in Christ that day. They were there. You were there in him. And God opened the doors of his wrath, all the wrath that was due you, all the payment that you had coming. And he, the wind and the fire leapt upon his own son and the hammer came down and the sword went through his heart. He was pierced for our transgressions.

He paid for our sin. It was a sacrifice of love. And it was the Father's will and pleasure to crush him. And so, if you will give up making your excuses, excuses for yourself, or coming up with good reasons why God should let you into his family, and you will simply say with all your heart because of Jesus.

[36 : 32] Just Jesus. Nothing about me. Just Jesus. His life. His death. Just Jesus. Nothing else I have to claim. God will bring you in.

He predestined you to be adopted through Jesus Christ. The only way that we are brought in, the only way that we are adopted is through Christ Jesus.

Jesus. And so, you come through Jesus or you don't come at all. Now, if you have heard and you have believed, then hear again this grace that you are dearly loved.

What a love. What a cost. If you have been loved, then go on your way with joy. Your Father loves you. Go on your way with peace.

Your Father loves you. Nothing can snatch you from His hands. Go with a new desire to do for others what He's done for you. You're rich. You can afford to be kind and compassionate and forgiving.

[37 : 37] So, imitate Him as dearly loved children. Don't let this message be the train in your backyard that you just don't hear anymore.

Open your ears. Hear and believe. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, this is a verse that is completely full of meaning.

How so much can be packed into such a little space is beyond us, but we know that forever and ever we shall be unpacking what it means that we are dearly loved children.

Thank you that it is our joy to confess that Jesus Christ is the way that we were brought in. Jesus Christ is the only way. It is our delight to honor Him.

It is our delight to sing His praises. It's our delight to confess and to rely completely on His life, on His death. Lord, we pray that Your gospel, the freeness of it, the goodness of it would come with power to a sinner's heart today and save them.

[38 : 53] Show them that it's nothing to do with them. It's just Jesus, His life, His death. Nothing, no part of their actions can earn their place, can win their place, can maintain their place.

It is all on Jesus. Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are our rock. You're the place that we can take our stand. That when doubts assail us and foes overwhelm us, we have a place, we have firm ground to know, to believe, to understand that we are dearly loved children.

I pray, Lord, that You would make us to go on our way rejoicing, make us go on our way imitating You, our Father. Give us open eyes, give us open hearts, to what You want from us, to what You've called us to, and give us grace that we would believe and so be strong.
Pray that You would do this for Your honor, for Your glory, for Your fame. In Jesus' name, Amen.
Amen. Amen. may!
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