

Lesson 13

March 1, 2026

Imitating Our Heavenly Father: We are called to lead holy and loving lives.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson draws from the heavenly Father's unconditional love, the example of Apostle Paul as a spiritual father, and Biblical teaching from First John to explore Christ-like living. God the Father, who is holy, just, and true, sets the standard for Christians. Through faith in Jesus, we are called to embody the Father's love and holiness. God's desire for His family is to love others as He does and to reflect His holiness, serving as a beacon of light and hope in a dark world. As His children, we are called to bear a family resemblance to the Father by following the example of His only begotten Son.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jesus revealed the heavenly Father's love and holiness through His teachings, compassion, and sacrifice. He expressed God's love by healing the sick, forgiving sins, reaching out to the outcasts, and living out grace and mercy. Through His teaching, Jesus expressed and illustrated the Father's moral perfection, calling humanity to embrace humility and holy living. Ultimately, His sacrifice on the cross demonstrated the depth of God's love and His longing for reconciliation with creation. In every aspect of His life, Jesus mirrored the Father's perfect character, inviting all to follow His example.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. LOVE LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER: Luke 6:27-36.

- A. Love your Enemies, (27-29)
- B. Do Good and Show Mercy, (30-36)

2. PAUL EXEMPLIFIES A SPIRITUAL FATHER: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21.

- A. Spiritual Imitation, (14-17)
- B. Spiritual Power and Authority, (18-21)

3. HOLINESS RESEMBLES OUR HEAVENLY FATHER: 1 John 2:28 through 3:9.

- A. Children of God, (2:28 – 3:3)
- B. Sin Is Forbidden, (3:4-9)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. LOVE LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER: Luke 6:27-36.

A. Love Your Enemies, Luke 6:27-29

Jesus instructs His followers to take the radical stance of loving our enemies and doing good to people who hate us. This runs contrary to fallen human nature and requires more than willpower to accomplish. Yet, this is to be the ethic of citizens of the kingdom of God. This teaching reveals our need for the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. In verse 27, Jesus said our enemies are to be objects of our love. More than just avoiding conflict or being passive, Jesus calls His disciples to love the very people who oppose them. The word “love” comes from the Greek word *agape*, which was used by the early church to reflect the sacrificial love of Jesus. In verse 28, Jesus further commends us to bless those who curse us, meaning to respond with kind words to those spewing hateful words.

In verse 29, Jesus commanded His disciples not to react with violence to those who insult or even assault us. Striking another person on the right cheek with the back of the right hand was a painful insult. Therefore, offering the other cheek would have been a surprising response, distinguishing the people of God from the world. It is not that the followers of Jesus are to be passive victims, pushed around by unbelievers, but real strength is revealed through restraint, not a violent response. Our duty to those who wrong or insult us is not to retaliate but to reveal Christ’s character.

B. Do Good and Show Mercy, Luke 6:30-36.

As sons and daughters of God, we are to demonstrate His goodness and mercy to others, as we have received this from Him. We are to love as God loves. In verses 30-33, Jesus points out that anyone can love those who love them. Jesus asks how we are any different from the world if this is all we do. Sinners, tax collectors, and Gentiles love like this. The despised tax collectors were considered extortioners and traitors, and the Gentiles were pagan idol worshippers, so surely the Jewish religious people, hearing Jesus, wanted their righteousness to exceed that of these people.

In verses 34-35, Jesus teaches that giving to those in need should be done with a generous attitude, without expecting anything in return. By giving with such a generous spirit, Jesus promises that our reward will be great. He further said such giving is characteristic of the children of the Most High. God’s goodness knows no bounds; therefore, in verse 36, we are called to extend mercy like our heavenly Father.

As genuine followers of Jesus, we will draw strength from hearts led by the Holy Spirit, staying aligned with His teachings. We will prioritize eternal goals, recognizing our role in God’s kingdom and not clutching at fleeting worldly desires. By living according to Jesus’ divine standards, we will adopt values that are distinct from worldly norms. Built on revolutionary principles, His kingdom challenges societal norms, focusing on ethics rooted in love and mercy. Living this way invites others to experience a nurturing community of compassion and support.

2. PAUL EXEMPLIFIES A SPIRITUAL FATHER: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21.

A. Spiritual Imitation, 1 Corinthians 4:14-17.

The Corinthian church was experiencing numerous problems, including pride, carnality, and complacency. Paul had to be stern in dealing with these issues, yet he appealed to them as a caring father. In verse 14, he called them his “beloved children” (NKJV). It was not Paul’s intention to “shame” them but to “warn” them. He reproved them as a father will correct his children when

necessary. In verse 15, he noted that though they had many “instructors in Christ,” they did “not have many fathers.” The Greek word for instructors can be translated as “guardians.” This word referred to slaves who were tasked with overseeing the education of their master’s sons.

Regardless of how many instructors a child had, they only had one father, and spiritually, Paul was saying he was like a father to them. Therefore, he urged them to “imitate” him (v. 16). Paul was an example for them as a follower of Christ. For this reason, Paul was sending Timothy to them. Timothy was a spiritual son of Paul, and in the apostle’s absence, Timothy would faithfully express Paul’s instructions and intentions.

B. Spiritual Power and Authority, 1 Corinthians 4:18-21.

One of the primary problems of the Corinthian church was carnality, which led to various divisions. Some were arrogant and prideful, or as Paul called them, “puffed up” (v. 18). Some of these prideful people did not believe Paul would come to confront them, but Paul said he would come soon if the Lord willed (v. 19). Those who were puffed up were full of words but void of action. However, Paul assured the church that the kingdom of God “is not in word but in power” (v. 20). Earlier in the letter, Paul said, “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:4 NKJV).

In 4:21, Paul asked, “What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” He left the decision to them. Should he come to them with a rod of discipline, or should he come to them in a spirit of love and gentleness? The evidence of Paul’s love for the Corinthians was that he treated them as his children. He knew that a loving father, at times, had to exercise discipline, but Paul’s preference was to approach them with love and a gentle spirit, though he would not shy away from direct confrontation and correction when needed.

In his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul addressed various challenges facing the church. This letter served as both instruction and correction, demonstrating Paul’s apostolic authority to handle the issues at hand while maintaining love and concern. Despite opposition from some who sought to elevate themselves, Paul’s approach remained beautifully balanced between stern discipline and compassion. His genuine care for the Corinthians shone through, reflecting the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. Just as a family is characterized by love, mercy, commitment, correction, and discipline, so too is the church, which represents the family of God. Throughout this letter, Paul highlights the importance of these dynamics in fostering a healthy and harmonious community.

3. HOLINESS RESEMBLES OUR HEAVENLY FATHER: 1 John 2:28 – 3:9.

A. Children of God, 1 John 2:28 – 3:3.

The Apostle John calls the saints “little children” (v. 28), an endearing term that expresses the Father’s unspeakable love for His dear children. In this verse, John expresses the belief that Jesus will return, and those who have continued to abide in Him will not be ashamed “when He shall appear.” However, it also indicates that those who have failed to abide in Him will be ashamed and will realize that they have abandoned the truth. The evidence or proof that someone has been born again and is abiding in Christ is that they practice righteousness through Him.

Chapter 3 opens with the words, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (v. 1a NKJV). John was amazed at God’s intensely

personal love for each of us, which is the source of the blessings, privileges, rights, and gifts God has given His children. The Bible uses both the terms “sons of God” and “children of God.” When Paul referred to Christians as “sons,” he had in mind the concept of adoption under Roman law, emphasizing the legal privileges and right associated with it. However, John typically used the Greek word meaning “children,” which emphasizes the intimate relationship that all Christians have with the Father. Sonship emphasizes rights as followers of Christ, while children emphasizes relationship. Together, these terms provided a full Biblical picture of what it means to be “born of Him” (2:29). John continued, saying, “Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (3:1b NKJV). The world does not understand us because it does not understand Jesus. A sinful world cried out to crucify Jesus, and He warned His followers that as they hated Him, they would also hate His disciples (see John 15:18-19).

In 1 John 3:2, Jesus emphasizes believers are “now” the children of God. The moment one receives Christ into their hearts, they become a child of God, marking the first step in a journey of holiness and purity. The process of salvation is intended to perfect the likeness of Christ in us. We are “now” the children of God, but “we shall be like Him” at His return. Therefore, all who possess this hope in Christ will pursue purity (v. 3). Through the indwelling Spirit of God, the child of God resists sin, consecrates, disciplines, and separates themselves so they might be pure “even as He is pure.” The hope that John refers to is not just waiting for a future event. It is an active and present hope that is demonstrated through faith in God. It trusts Christ is coming, so it pursues holiness now.

B. Sin Is Forbidden, 1 John 3:4-9.

John offers a profound perspective on sin and the life-changing impact of Christ in our lives as Christians. John starts by defining sin as the violation of God’s law, pointing out that sin is more than just an error or a misstep but constitutes a willful disregard of God’s Word and His will (v. 4). This definition helps us grasp the seriousness of sin, acknowledging it is a direct challenge to God’s holiness or living to please Him. It is crucial to understand that acknowledging our sins is essential for true repentance and being born of God.

The passage continues by explaining the purpose of Jesus Christ’s earthly mission, which was to remove our sins (v. 5). There is no sin in Jesus, highlighting His divine nature and complete obedience to the Father’s will. As disciples of Christ, we are called to remain in Him, which empowers us to triumph over sin (v. 6). The Scripture provides confidence that those who dwell in Christ will not persist in sin because His presence renews our hearts and desires to be like His. John acknowledges that we may occasionally fall short in fighting sin (see 1 John 2:10; still, our lives should consistently demonstrate evidence of sanctification. Through Christ, we are equipped to withstand temptation and pursue purity, righteousness, and holiness.

In 1 John 3:4-9, John draws a clear distinction between those who practice righteousness and those who practice sin. He explains that all who are born of God will refrain from continuing in sin because God’s divine seed resides in them. The concept of God’s seed implies a spiritual rebirth and a new identity bestowed upon believers through faith in Jesus. The message of the New Testament is that by being born again, a Christian embodies God’s love and righteousness. Such changes are observable in our actions and attitudes as we strive to fulfill God’s purpose.

John prompts us to examine whether our faith genuinely guides us to live as children of God, radiating His light within the world.

John contrasts the lifestyles of Christians with those of sinners. The people of who willingly transgress the Word of God are of the devil. The children of God, on the other hand, pursue purity and righteousness. For John, the distinctions between the child of God and transgressors are as clear as light and dark. There is no “gray area” where a person can wander around in an uncertain state between right and wrong. Jesus is the standard, the mark toward which we press, and His standard is sinless living. This is the goal, and God’s grace is sufficient to empower us to move consistently toward that mark. But if we sin, God does not abandon us: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ” (1 John 2:1). God’s goal is not to punish us, but to perfect us.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

The Holy Spirit empowers us and enables us to be all that God has called us to be. We are called to love like God and lead holy lives because God our Father is holy.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Pray that the heavenly Father will be reflected in the lives you and your students over the next week as you interact with those around you.

WORKSHEET

The Fatherhood of God in Holy Scripture:

The Doctrine of The Fatherhood of God is found in the Old Testament, but it is preeminently found in the New Testament. Jesus' emphasis on the Fatherhood of God is the reason for the very large place given in the New Testament to the doctrine that God is our Father in Heaven.

In The Old Testament, God is identified as a Father to Israel (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:19; and Hosea 1:10). God is also identified as a Father to Solomon (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 28:6); a Father to orphans (Psalm 68:5); and being like a Father to all who have reverence for Him (Psalm 103:13).

As told in The Four Gospels and Acts 1:4, 7, Jesus ascribed to God the title "Father" 175 times. In the rest of the New Testament, others ascribed to God the title "Father" 76 times, for a total of 251 times in the whole New Testament.

This major Emphasis in the New Testament on the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is attributable directly to Jesus Christ for His teaching and many statements in which He spoke of God as Father.

The First Confession of Faith for the Christian Is: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth" (The Apostles' Creed). Next, after that, is confession of faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, whom God the Father sent into the world to save us from sin and give us eternal life (John 17:3).

The Word "family" Occurs 122 Times in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, family is found only once, and that one time in relation to the fatherhood of God: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family [of God] in heaven and earth is names" (Ephesians 3:14-156 NKJV). As the family of a human father is names after him, so the whole family of God the Father in Heaven and earth is name after Him. Blessed we are to be the children of God (1 John 3:1).

Counter-Cultural Living

“Love you enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your good do not ask them back” vv. 27-30 NKJV.

- 1. In the verse above, underline six ways that we as Christians might be mistreated.**
- 2. In those same verses, circle six ways Jesus says a Christian should respond.**
- 3. What should motivate us to live this way (v. 36)?**
- 4. If we lead this kind of life, what does Jesus say we can expect (v. 35)?**
- 5. Read the questions posed in verses 32-34. What one answer works for all three questions?**
- 6. Why do you suppose the statement in verse 31 is often referred to as the “golden rule”?**