

Copying but a Fragment

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the beauty of diversity among Christians as they strive to reflect different aspects of Christ's character in their lives.

Scripture: Romans 12:4, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Imitating Christ", "Diversity in the Body of Christ"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the diversity of character among Christians, noting that while all strive to imitate Christ, each individual reflects different aspects of His likeness. He explains that this variety arises from God's design, as He endows each person with unique gifts and traits, allowing for a multitude of expressions of faith. Miller illustrates that just as artists capture different views of the same landscape, Christians each highlight different features of Christ's character in their lives. He encourages believers to appreciate the unique paths and services of others, recognizing that all are valuable in their own right. Ultimately, he calls for unity in diversity, urging Christians to honor one another's distinct contributions to the body of Christ.

Transcript

Nothing is more striking to a close observer of human life, than the almost infinite variety of character which exists among those who profess to be Christians. No two are alike. Even those who are alike revered for their saintliness, who alike seem to wear the image of their Lord, whose lives are alike attractive in their beauty--show the widest diversity in individual traits, and in the cast and mold of their character. Yet all are sitting before the same model; all are striving after the same ideal; all are imitators of the same blessed life.

There is but one standard of true Christian character--likeness to Christ. It is into His image--that we are to be transformed; and it is toward His holy beauty--that we are always to strive. We are to live as He lived. We are to copy His features into our lives. Wherever, in all the world, true disciples of Christ are found--they are all trying to reproduce the likeness of their Master in themselves. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." 1 John 2:6

Why is it, then, that there is such variety of character and disposition among those who aim to follow the same example? Why are not all just alike? If a thousand artists were to paint the picture of the same person--their pictures, if faithful, would show the same features. But a thousand people seek to copy into their own lives the likeness of Christ, and the result is a thousand different representations of that likeness,

no two the same. Why is there this strange diversity in Christian lives, when all have before them the same original type?

One reason for this, is that God does not bestow upon all his children the same gifts, or the same natural qualities. The Creator loves variety, as all his works attest. No two animals are precisely alike in every feature; no two plants are exactly similar in their structure; no two human lives in all the race are identical in all respects; and divine grace does not recast all dispositions in the same mold.

When gold is minted, each coin of a kind is stamped by the same die; and a million coins of the same value will all be precisely alike. But life is not minted as gold is. Grace does not transform Peter into a John, nor Paul into a Barnabas, nor Luther into a Calvin. Regeneration does not make busy, bustling Martha quiet and reposeful, like her sister Mary. Nor does grace change Mary's calm, restful spirit into the anxious and distracted activity of Martha. It makes them both friends of Jesus, devoted to him in love and loyalty and service; but it leaves each of them herself in all her individual characteristics. It makes them both like Christ in holiness, in consecration, in heavenly longings; but it does not touch those features which give to each one her personal identity.

You drop twenty different seeds in the same garden-bed, and they spring up into twenty different kinds of plants, from the delicate mignonette to the flaunting sunflower. No skill of gardening can make all the plants alike. The fuchsia will always be a fuchsia, the rose will always be a rose, the geranium will always be a geranium. In the same soil, with the same sunshine and rain, and the same culture, each grows up after its kind. In like manner, divine grace does not make all Christian women either Marys or Marthas, or Dorcas or Priscillas, nor all Christian men either Johns or Peters, or Barnabases or Aquilas; but each believer grows up into his own peculiar self. Regeneration neither adds to nor takes from our natural gifts; and since there is infinite variety in the endowments and qualities originally bestowed upon different individuals, there is the same variety in the company of Christ's followers.

Another reason for this diversity among Christians--is because even the best and holiest saints realize but a little of the image of Christ, and have only one little fraction and fragment of his likeness in their souls. In one of his followers, there is some one feature of Christ's blessed life which appears; in another, there is another feature; in a third, still a different feature. One seeks to copy Christ's gentleness, another his patience, another his sympathy, another his meekness. A thousand believers may all, in a certain sense, be like Christ--and yet no two of them have, or consciously strive after, just the same features of Christ in their souls. The reason is, that the character of Christ is so great, so majestic, so glorious--that it is impossible to copy all of it into any one little human life; and again, each human character is so imperfect and limited, that it cannot reach out in all directions after the boundless and infinite character of Christ.

It is as if a great company of artists were sent to paint each one a picture of the Alps. Each chooses his own point of observation, and selects the particular feature of the Alps he desires to paint. They all bring back their pictures; but alas! no two of them are alike. One canvas presents a sweet valley-scene, with its quiet stream and bright flowers; another has for its central figure, a wild crag among the clouds; another a snow-crowned peak, glittering in the sunshine; another a rushing torrent leaping over the rocks; another a mighty glacier. Yet none of the artists can say that the pictures of the others are not true. They are probably as true as his own--but there is not one of them, who has painted the whole Alps. Each one has put upon his canvas only the little part of the magnificent scene which he saw.

So it is with those who are striving to reproduce the likeness of Christ in their own lives. A thousand Christians, earnest and sincere, begin to follow him and to imitate him. One seizes upon one feature which to him seems to be the central beauty of Christ's character. Another Christian, looking upon the same glorious person with different eyes, or from the view-point of different experiences, sees another feature altogether, and calls it Christ. Each one strives to copy the particular elements of Christly character which he sees. No two reproductions are precisely the same; no two have the same conception of Christ-likeness. Yet no one can say that the others are not true Christians, that they have not also seen the Lord, and have not faithfully copied into their own lives what they saw of him.

The truth is, the Alps as a whole are too varied, too vast--for any one artist to take into his perspective, and fully paint upon his canvas. The best he can do is to portray some one or two features--the features his eye can see from where he stands. And just in the same way, Christ is too great in his infinite perfections, in the majestic sweep of his character, in the many-sidedness of his beauty, for any one of his finite followers to copy the whole of his image into his own little life! The most that any of us can do--is to get into our own soul, a few little fragments of the wonderful likeness of our Lord.

Thus it is, that there is such variety in the individual dispositions of Christians, while all seek to follow the same copy, and while all may be equally faithful in their noble endeavors. The practical lesson from this fact is, that no one follower of Christ should condemn another, because the other's spiritual life is not of the same stamp as his own. Let not Martha, busied with her much serving, running everywhere to missionary meetings, or to visit the sick and the poor--find fault with Mary in her quiet devotion, peaceful, thoughtful, gentle, loving--because she does not abound in the same activities. Nor let Mary in her turn judge Martha, and call her piety superficial. Let her honor it rather as the copy of another and different feature of the infinite loveliness of Christ.

There is the greatest diversity in the modes of service rendered by different followers of Christ. All may be alike loyal and acceptable, and yet no two be precisely the same. Each follows Christ along his own path, and does his work in his own way. Whatever we may say about the sweetness and beauty of Mary, as we see her sitting in such peaceful attitude at the feet of her Lord--we must not forget that it was not Martha's service which Jesus reprov'd--but her anxious, fretful worry. Her service was important, was even essential to our Lord's own comfort--and to her true and hospitable entertainment of him in her home. The Marys are very lovely; and every woman should have the Mary-spirit of peace, and should sit much, Mary-like, at the Master's feet to hear his words, in order to be fitted for the best service. But Martha's work must be done too--no true Christian woman will neglect her duties of service in her privileges of devotion.

Let each of these good women follow the Master closely, see as much as possible of the infinite loveliness of his character, and copy into her own life all she can see; yet let her not imagine that she has seen or copied all of Christ--but let her look at every other Christian woman's life with reverence, as bearing another little fragment of the same divine likeness.

Let every Christian do earnestly and well, the particular work which he is fitted and called to do--but let him not imagine that he is doing the only kind of work which God wants to have done in this world; rather let him look upon every faithful servant who does a different work as doing a part equally important and equally acceptable to the Master.

The bird praises God by singing; the flower pays its tribute in fragrant incense as its censer swings in the breeze; the tree shakes down fruits from its bending boughs; the stars pour out their silver beams to

gladden the earth; the clouds give their blessing in gentle rain. Yet all with equal faithfulness fulfill their mission.

Just so among Christ's redeemed servants: one serves by incessant toil in the home, caring for a large family; another by silent example as a sufferer, patient and uncomplaining; another with the pen, sending forth words that inspire, help, cheer, and bless; another by the living voice, whose eloquence moves men, and starts impulses to better, grander holy living; another by the ministry of sweet song; another by sitting in quiet peace at Jesus' feet, drinking in his spirit, and then shining as a gentle and silent light, or pouring out the fragrance of love like a lowly and unconscious flower. Yet each and all of these may be serving Christ acceptably, hearing at the close of each day the whispered word, "Well done! My good and faithful servant!"

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