

Look to the Rock
What Makes Covenant, Covenant
Part Four. Our Primary Posture

October 3, 2021

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This morning is the last message in our series called *Look to the Rock*, in which we've been walking through the things that make Covenant Covenant

Isaiah 51.1 says

Look to the rock from which you were cut
 and to the quarry from which you were hewn.

Three weeks ago I began our sermon series by showing you some video clips I took up at the Kentland Quarry. I brought you up there to remind you that every rock cut from the same quarry will have the same quality, the same texture, the same look and feel as the rock from which it was cut.

That's true for us as a church family. Every person in our church is unique. At the same time, every man, woman, and young person who is part of our church is marked by a certain quality that we all share in common. And it's our shared beliefs, our shared calling, our shared values, and our shared posture that make that true of us.

You were each been handed a summary of those as you came in this morning

We began three weeks ago with **Our Essential Beliefs**

We believe Jesus Christ alone is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
 Jesus is the only way to the Father, and he reconciles us to God through his death on the cross.
 We believe the Bible is fully trustworthy and authoritative.
 We believe the Church exists to proclaim and live out the love of God.

The way we articulate and affirm our beliefs as a church is informed by the spirit of our denominational motto

In essentials, unity.
 In non-essentials, liberty.
 In all things, charity.

Then we spent some time two weeks ago exploring **Our Calling**

Our defining starting point: Jesus is king.
 Our identity and purpose: We are his people who exist for his Kingdom and his glory.
 Our call: know Jesus, grow with His people, and go to the world.

And God's invitation to us in this season is to become a church known for our love.

Last Sunday we walked through **Our Values**, which are the lived implications of our beliefs and our calling, capturing the way we do things in our family

Covenant's Values

Toward God

Expectant and Yielded

Toward Scripture and the Christian life

Thoughtful

Toward others

Intentional and Gracious

This morning we come to what I am calling **Our Primary Posture**

It captures the most basic way we are oriented toward God and one another. And that is the posture of **Christ-like humility**.

In some ways I suppose you could think of it as the chief virtue that crowns our beliefs, our calling, our values, our life together. And it has been held up as the chief Christian virtue for the entire life of the church.

In about the year 400 Augustine wrote:

"If you should ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is still humility. Not that there are no other precepts to give, but if humility does not precede all that we do, our efforts are fruitless."

Outside of the gracious intervention of Jesus in my life, my posture toward others will inevitably be one of self-importance, and my posture toward God will be one of self-reliance.

But when Jesus collides with us, something fundamental shifts in us as human beings, and a new posture, a new orientation, is formed in us – a posture of humility that mirrors his own.

* * *

Let me take you back up with me to the Kentland Quarry for a moment this morning. Some of you already know what makes that quarry unique.

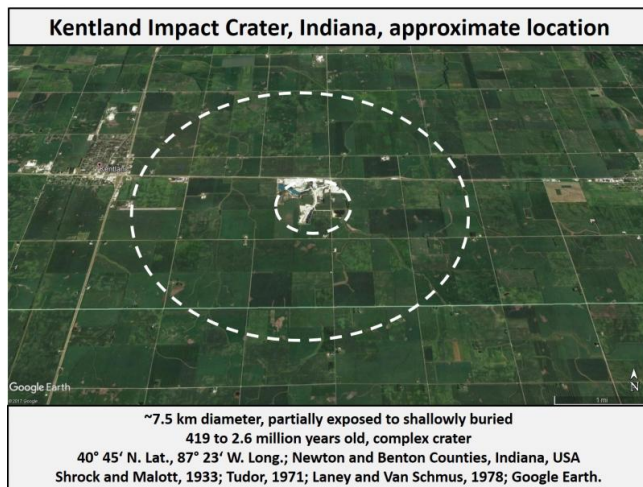
It is the site of the fourth largest meteorite strike within the United States.

At some point millions of years ago a meteorite that some scientists think was a half a mile across slammed into the ground about forty miles northwest of here.

Some scientists believe the meteor was traveling sixty miles per second – that’s from here to Indianapolis in a single second. It was going so fast that it vaporized when it hit the ground.

When it hit, it struck the earth with up to four million pounds of pressure *per square inch*. That’s the equivalent of two full supertanker cargo ships pressing down on one square inch.

Aerial View of Kentland Impact Crater Site



The meteorite strike left a crater that was twelve miles in diameter, with a central impact zone that is more than four miles across.

Kentland Quarry Video (Travis is providing this)



The forces involved were overwhelming. First the meteorite shoved the solid limestone rock bed down 2000 feet, which then rebounded back up, creating a solid rock dome that was a thousand feet high, which was eventually sheared off by glaciers that came along later. The rock strata in the quarry are at all kinds of crazy angles, including lots of places where the horizontal rock layers are turned completely vertical.

But here's the thing that's really striking about this. The impact of the meteorite not only shoved the rock down, it transformed it. When it hit, it sent shock waves through the rock that altered the structure of the rock itself, creating a new kind of rock.

It was actually at Kentland quarry that geologists first identified and named this rare kind of rock, called a *shattercone*. They are a type of rock that only forms under the incredible pressure that comes from a meteorite strike or a nuclear blast.

This beautiful rock up here on the platform is a shattercone from Kentland Quarry.

I'll put a close-up picture of it up on the screens so you can see what it looks like.

Shattercone from Kentland Quarry



Listen to this description of a shattercone:

Shatter cones form when the shock wave from a meteorite impact travels down into the rock layers below. The intense pressure cracks the rock in a branching pattern, leaving cone-shaped chunks pointing toward the center of the impact. The tiny ridgelines radiating from the tip of the cone are imprints of the shattering shock wave frozen into the rock's surface.

Isn't that incredibly cool?

Okay, here's the point of all this geology. When we have a life-saving collision with Jesus, everything in us changes. Our very nature is altered. Our entire life reorients toward him, and points to him.

In John 8.23 Jesus says to the unbelievers in the crowd,
You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

But then in John 15.13 he says to his followers:

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

And in John 17.14-17 he prays for them:

They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. . . . ¹⁷ Make them distinctive by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Humility may be the least definable but the most discernible quality that marks us as followers of Jesus. It is the quality of being not of this world just as Jesus is not of this world.

Last fall I called the city to have someone come look at an erosion issue we had around a storm drain in our ravine. They sent out a project engineer named Jeffrey Kuhn. Within three minutes I knew that he was a fellow follower of Jesus. He just had this unique humility about him. It came through in the way he looked at you, the way he listened to you when you spoke, the gentleness of his soul, and his go-out-of-his-way follow-up after he stopped by.

There is a counterfeit version of Christianity out there that says that being a Christian is about trying hard to imitate Jesus and live a life that pleases God. It's a life of exertion. But that's completely wrong. That's not what it means to follow Jesus.

At the heart of following Jesus is the offering and opening of our lives to him, and inviting and allowing him by his Spirit to transform us from the inside.

As Paul says in Romans 12.1-2

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Transformation, not exertion, is what lies at the heart of any biblical understanding of the Christian faith.

Transformed into what? We don't have to guess. We are told the again and again in Scripture.

Becoming like Christ

conformed to the image of his Son Romans 8.29
 created after the likeness of God Ephesians 4.22-24
 being changed into his likeness II Corinthians 3.18
 you have put on Christ Galatians 3.27
 Christ is formed in you Galatians 4.19

Transformed into what? Into the likeness of Jesus.

Jesus is doing nothing less than forming his likeness in the lives of his followers.

But we can get even more specific than that. What is the core quality that Jesus intends to replicate in us? Again, we don't have to guess.

I've pointed out before that there are only two words that Jesus uses to describe his own heart posture. You see them in

Matthew 11.29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for **I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls.

Let's take a minute to remind ourselves what those two words mean.

The first of these words, translated "gentle" (*praus*), is about what we do with the whole collection of self-concerned needs, desires, and ambitions that rise up within us. Does God have the last word, or do they? The word was used in the ancient world to describe tame animals rather than wild ones and benevolent rulers instead of despotic ones.

It means laying down whatever has us scheming and scrambling to serve ourselves; releasing, yielding, acquiescing, rather than taking things into our own hands and insisting things go our way. It is the opposite of that ugly Black Friday spirit of competitive elbowing and clambering that has shoppers grabbing and shoving to get what they want.

Intimately related to this quality of gentleness – carried in its pocket, in a sense – is my confidence that my heavenly Father knows and will meet my every need. So I don't need to clamber, taking the meeting of my needs or desires into my own hands. Gentleness is the peace and self-control that remain after I have laid down, offered up, my self-serving desire, trusting God to be the one who meets my needs.

The other word Jesus uses to describe himself, "humble of heart" (*tapeinophrosune*), is about perspective, how we see. Specifically, it means seeing God and others rightly – God in his glory and others in his image – and then seeing ourselves in our right place and true proportion alongside them.

This spirit of humility or lowliness results not from seeing ourselves as worthless but from seeing God as glorious and worthy of our worship, and others as splendid bearers of his image and deserving of our honor and service.

In the end, this quality of humility is really about looking past ourselves. The eyes of the humble of heart are not on the self at all. Humility of heart is the self-forgetfulness that

remains after I lay down my self-importance and turn my eyes up to God and out to others.

“The primary thing, I believe, that will be of use,” writes Evelyn Underhill, “is a conception, as clear and rich and deep as you are able to get it, first of the Splendour of God; and next of your own souls over against that Splendour of God; and last of the sort of interior life which your election [to] His service demands.”

The attitude of Jesus captured in these two words is remarkable, especially given his divine nature. As God-with-us, he had every right and every reason to elevate himself, insisting on his own rights, pushing his needs forward and putting himself first. With what self-constraint and self-forgetfulness God in our midst loved us!

I’m awed and challenged and unsettled to discover that God means for the same two qualities that marked Jesus to shape the posture of my own heart.

The Bible is unequivocal in this. Using the very same two words that Jesus used to describe himself, Paul writes:

Ephesians 4.1-3

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **Be completely humble and gentle**; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Jesus’s humble attitude, his inner orientation of descent, his outward orientation toward God and others, is to be ours as well. Our attitude is to mirror his.

This same invitation, this same expectation, is communicated everywhere you turn in the New Testament. Here are just a few key examples

Paul in Colossians 3.12-14

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, **humility, gentleness** and patience. ...¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

James in James 3.13-17

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the **humility** that comes from wisdom.

Peter in I Peter 5.5

All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

If we are his followers, Jesus's project is to replicate his humility in us. I'm incapable of forming that heart attitude in myself. But God can do what I can't – if I invite him, and if I let him.

* * *

For all of us, even the most godly among us, humility will only be partially formed in us in this life.

I love this line from Robert Murray M'Cheyne journal: "Oh, but for true, unfeigned humility! I know I have cause to be humble; and yet I do not know one half of that cause. I know that I am proud; and yet I do not know the half of that pride."

If we are honest with ourselves, there is often as large a part of us that resists God's work of forming humility in us as there is that invites that work and cooperates with it.

It is painful to lay down our self-concern and think of others first. It is difficult for us to lay down our version of how life should look and embrace the one that God has for us.

But God's desire is that the men and women and young people who bear the name of Jesus would also be marked by his humility. And the way we pursue Christ-like humility is not to try to muster it up in ourselves, but to admit our lack of it, and even our desire for it, and then to invite God by his spirit to form this quality in us.

* * *

One of the things that can make it especially difficult to follow Jesus into a life of humility is that we live in a world that doesn't know what to make of humility, and that prizes self-important rights and freedoms instead.

Humility was held in contempt by the ancient Greeks and Romans. For them, the greatest virtue was its opposite, *megalopsychia*, literally "the great self," thinking highly of yourself, taking pride in your personal honors, achievements and successes.

Our surrounding world is no different. The Greco-Roman elevation of self is the reigning outlook in western culture. It is in the very water we drink. And into this view of self the Christian faith runs headlong.

As one New Testament scholar put it, "In accordance with its mission, the gospel dethroned the heathen virtue of the great-self (*megalopsychia*) and replaced it with humility (*tapeinophrosyne*), the despised Christian virtue."

But because of how we've been so shaped by the world – disciplined really – sometimes we can hop the rails as Christians, and begin to run along tracks that aren't in the likeness of Jesus at all, and not even be aware of it.

Let me risk sharing an observation here. I recently finished reading Jeff Shaara's wonderful two volume narrative of the birth of our nation.

I think it would be accurate to sum up the birth narrative of the United States in this way. It began when a burden was placed on the shoulders of the colonists that they didn't think was fair. So they went to those in charge and insisted that their rights be represented in the governing bodies. When they were refused, they rebelled against the government over them, declared themselves independent, and fought for their rights and freedoms against the British, whose claims over them they rejected.

It's a narrative that centers on our rights and freedoms. Contrast that with the birth narrative of the Christian church. It's captured in

Philippians 2.3-5

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

The New Living Version says:

He did not hold to His rights as God.

⁷ Rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

His was a different sort of revolution. Revolting against the rights-and-freedoms-based, self-at-the-center way of life that comes naturally to us as fallen human beings, Jesus laid down his rights and freedoms, considering others more important than himself, and putting others first at cost to himself, and then he invited us Christians, us "little Christs", to pattern our lives after his.

As we've walked through this long covid season I've found myself watching people's responses and wondering: which birth narrative are we living out of?

Travis brought a helpful phrase to our lead team: "Don't hear what I'm not saying."

I'm not calling into question any aspect of our country, or its origin, or what it means to be a faithful American citizen.

But I am asking which narrative has the greatest hold on our imaginations, which narrative is most determinative of our root identity, which narrative has the most shaping power in our lives?

How would you answer that question in your own life?

Here's what's true. Whether we're from the US or elsewhere, all of us have places in our lives where we are still more concerned with our own rights and freedoms than we are with the call of God or the need of a neighbor.

To me, one of the most moving pieces of poetry in the English language is the sonnet written by John Donne in which, knowing he so often resists the very thing he most deeply desires, he invites God to lay siege to his own independent and rebellious heart and to bring it back under God's loving rule. I've found it's a wonderful prayer to pray when I know I'm holding parts of my life back from God.

Here's how it goes. I invite you to pray it with me this morning.

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
 That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
 I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
 Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
 But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
 But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
 Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Conclusion

I began this message by describing one metaphor for how a life is transformed by Jesus, like a rock from heaven that alters the very nature of rocks it collides with here on earth.

I want to close with another metaphor for how our lives are transformed by Jesus, one that is much more relational and personal.

You may remember that a few years ago I invited Gail Johnston, an artist from our congregation, to bring her potter's wheel up on the platform and fashion a pitcher from a lump of clay during my message. At the end of the message I interviewed Gail and

asked her to describe what she was doing. That was when she described the ideas of the wheel, the well, and the wall.

She explained that a potter begins by centering the clay on the wheel – a crucial and rather difficult task, one that, if not done right, will cause the potter to have to fight with the piece from that point on.

Once centered, two tasks remain: the well and the wall. The well is the hollowed out center of the piece, without which, of course, it is worthless as a cup or bowl or dish, because it is incapable of holding anything. Gail empties the clay of itself, spreading it out, opening it up, pressing the base out into a shape designed to receive and hold.

Then she starts pulling up the wall. Tugging the low, thick, hollow of clay with her fingertips, she begins to raise it up into usefulness, forming the sides. “I start to pull up the wall by putting pressure on the inside and the outside of the wall at the same time, pressing the outside lower than the inside so the clay is pinched between my fingertips and stretched upwards.” Again and again she stretches the wall up until it finally takes the desired shape.

It is still the same lump of clay. Nothing has been added or subtracted. But it is transformed by the potter’s touch into a vessel suited to the master’s use.

Isaiah 64.8 says

You, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Think of the many passages that describe the parallel work of new creation that God does in us – how he takes hold of us when we are spiritually inert lumps of clay, centers our lives on Christ, and then – in an act that makes us both beautiful and useful – presses down the well and pulls up the wall, emptying us of Self and filling us with Himself . . . that we might be of use to him.

Could this be *the* central work of God in a Christian’s soul? Centering our lives on him, hollowing out the center to make room for him, then raising us up into a Jesus-shaped life that pleases him, reflects his touch, and serves his ends? I think so.

Jesus, gentle and humble in heart, form your heart of humility in us.

Family Celebration

This morning we thought it could be a powerful experience for us to wrap up our Look to the Rock sermon series, by inviting the Covenant family to share in a sentence or two a word of gratitude for the church.

You have in your hand a summary of those things that we think most define us as a church. But those things find expression out in all kinds of tangible and beautiful ways as we do our life and ministry together.

What do you love about our church family?

How have you experienced God's love and care through your brothers and sisters at Covenant?

I invite you now to express a brief word of thanks to God in the form of a prayer or to one another in the form of a word of encouragement as we celebrate the gift God gave us in one another.

What do you love about Covenant? How has God used the Covenant family in your life?

Please come and share.

End with *Holy Spirit*

Announcements

This Wednesday we'll be meeting here in the sanctuary at 7 to discuss the book *A Gentle Answer*, by Scott Sauls, our summer read. In many ways that discussion will be a continuation of our discussion this morning.

And next Sunday we'll begin both services by giving you an exciting glimpse of the building improvement projects we're embarking on, and some thoughts on how you can be part of that. Then each service will be followed by an information meeting if you have more questions or input for those projects.

Stay and linger
I'll be outside. If you're new, come join me.

Notes

Traveling 10 to 72 miles per second

From meteor that causes 300,000 to 4 million pounds per square inch of pressure from impact

Changes the structure of the rock itself

Shatter cone first identified with meteor strike here (until 1959, when the first underground nuclear explosions took place)

Cones point upward and toward the center of the impact site

Oriented toward the impact point

Conical shape radiating down from the top

Fan or cone shaped rock with lines radiating outward like a horsetail

Caused by the shock wave of the impact

We are transformed by the impact

Radiating fracture lines from high pressure, high velocity shock waves

He lived as Son submitted to Father, saying and doing only what he was directed to say and do by his father.

In John 5.19 he says

The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

And in John 12.49 he says

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has told me what to say and what to speak.

X: Rich at Hyundai

Talking with him about how he used his experience from all his years in the auto business to help his niece find a great deal on a car, and I said something about how good it feels to use what has been entrusted to us not just to serve ourselves but to serve the people who have put in our life.

He literally stopped in his tracks, turned to me, and said, “Okay, what church are you from? Cause you guys all talk the same.”

He went on to tell me about a boss who’d been sharing his faith with him.

In some ways this is a sixth value, in other ways the overarching value

The opening line of *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren

“It’s not about you.”

As a new humanity being formed into Christ's likeness, the heart posture we are called to adopt in our relationships with one another is one of humility that leads to unity. This is captured powerfully in Ephesians 4.1-2 which calls us to live worthy lives marked by humility, gentleness of soul, patience, forbearance, love, and unity.

We also see it in Colossians 3.12-17: to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, peace, and love. James 3.13-18, advocating the kingdom qualities of peace, consideration, submission, and mercy, is another passage that communicates the same kingdom posture of humility fostering unity. Peter I Peter 2 his example

Our Posture

Christ-like Humility

What lies behind this – look at how our essential beliefs and calling lead us to this

Jesus is king, I'm his subject, that leads to humility as subject

Jesus rescued me with grace undeserved, that leads to humility as rescued and forgiven

The Bible reveals truth and my knowledge understanding is finite, that leads to humility as a student

I am part of something larger than myself, the church, the family of God

And our calling

He is king

I am his subject. I exist for him – for his kingdom and his glory.

Called to know him, grow with his people, go to the world.

Two parts to this

Christ-like

Not just following his example, patterning ourselves after him, acting like him

Luke 6.40

everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

I Corinthians 11.1

be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

I John 2.6

walk as Jesus did

Ephesians 5.1-2

be imitators of God and walk in love as Christ loved us

But being *transformed* into his likeness – becoming like him

A new birth into a new life

Transformation – Romans 12.1-2

Becoming like Christ

Romans 8.29
conformed to the image of his Son

Ephesians 4.22-24
created after the likeness of God

II Corinthians 3.18
being changed into his likeness

Galatians 3.27
you have put on Christ.

Galatians 4.19
Christ is formed in you

humility

What you do with a belief? Believe it. Put the weight of your life on it.

What do you do with a calling? Say yes to it. Commit to it. Obey it.

What do you do with a value? Be informed by it. Be shaped by it. Aspire to it. Cultivate it. Embody it. Live it out.

What do you do with a posture? Conform yourself to it. Adopt it.

X: fencing, marching, tennis (at the net)

Why? The wisdom of those who've come before you

Just yesterday my wife was readying to leave for a retreat. It was a Sunday, and I got home tired and hungry after a full morning of serving. I was ready to plunk on the couch and settle in to watch the Colts play.

But how many of our arguments and disagreements have their root right here, because I let my needs control me, and because I think I should come first? I am not only informed by Jesus' attitude and invited into it. I am exposed by it.

This leads to the second fixed point by which we are called to orient ourselves as spiritual leaders: **the example of Jesus**. It is directly connected to the first. Just as a seam of underground magma will eventually burst above ground and change the topography, so what defined Jesus' heart came to the surface and showed in his every word and deed. From his smallest acts of service to his greatest act of sacrifice, his inner attitude molded his external actions.

How Jesus lived lays out a "like this" path for us to follow. As Jesus himself says,

The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. (Matthew 10.24-25)

Isn't this at the heart of what it means when we call ourselves "followers" of Jesus? More than merely believing in his redemptive sacrifice, we are called to walk – as best we can, God helping us – in his footsteps. As John reminds us:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (I John 2.6)

Imitating Jesus is the heart of all virtue.

Becoming like Christ

Romans 8.29

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Ephesians 4.22-24

To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

II Corinthians 3.18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Galatians 2.20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

Galatians 3.27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 4.19

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

I Corinthians 11.1

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Luke 6.40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Ephesians 5.1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.