

TOPIC: LIVING AS AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS TO IMITATE

INTRODUCTION:

With this first mark of maturity we come to a study of the qualities that describe what Christ-like maturity looks like. Since becoming Christ-like makes one an example to follow, we will begin here. A mature Christian is someone who is a model, a pacesetter; someone who influences others in positive ways according to biblical standards! Modeling Christian virtues, virtues of true spirituality, is crucial to effective ministry in the world. Without biblical and godly models we are cast into a restless sea that can only toss up refuse and mud (**Isa. 57:20**). William J. Bennett recently said, “We—all of us, but especially the young—need around us individuals who possess a certain nobility, a largeness of soul, and qualities of human experience worth imitating and striving for.”¹⁹

People can never be biblical leaders and truly mature until they come to realize that God has called them to be examples to others. As the Lord Jesus pointed out, “A disciple is not greater than his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher” (**Luke 6:40**), In this context, the Lord was showing that one’s true spirituality, or godliness (or lack thereof) is revealed in our actions and that such actions will of necessity influence others either for good or for evil. Students, sons, daughters, and the flock, tend to emulate their leaders, parents, guardians, teachers, or heroes. The tendency is for us to shy away from this responsibility and reality, but in order to be truly mature and a leader; one must accept this as a reality of leadership.

Principles Related to Being Examples

In regard to being examples to others, it is helpful to consider the following principles:

1. Being a godly example is not an option, it is commanded in Scripture. Several passages dealing with this issue will be considered later in this study.

2. We have no choice in being an example of some kind and having an impact on those around us, but we do have a choice in the kind of witness and impact we provide. Someone is going to follow us and be influenced by us. The questions are: Do we know where we are going? Are we providing the kind of example that will enhance their lives, or are we like the blind leading the blind?
3. We need Christian maturity that provides people with real honest-to-God examples of authentic Christ-like living. Effective ministry to others is often equated with such things as dynamic personalities, with talent, giftedness, training, enthusiasm, and with charisma. But these things alone are inadequate, as is so evident by the leadership we have seen in the top government positions in our country the last few years. Much more is needed. In the Bible, the qualities that lead to effective ministry are found in the elements of spiritual character, in the character of Christ reproduced in us by the ministry of the Spirit (**see Eph. 4:12f.; Gal. 5:22ff**).
4. Mature Christians and leaders have a responsibility to maintain a consistent example. This is a constant theme of the Bible. Other than the raw power of the Word itself, nothing is so determinative for spiritual change in the lives of others as one's own example. This truth is strongly taught in **1 Thessalonians 2:1ff** where Paul recalls his manner of life and that of his team to the **Thessalonians.20**

Problems We Face in Being Examples

1. **The problem of distinctiveness or manifesting biblical character:** This relates to the issue of living so we truly show that what we are, our character is distinctively the result of knowing and walking with Christ. But, sometimes what Christians speak so loudly that it completely turns people off or puts them in reverse. If our lives are not what they should be, others not only will not want to follow us, they will become repelled by what we are. When a Christian's life is contrary to what he or she says, it indicates either we are unreal or what we advocate and believe isn't true and doesn't work.
2. **The problem of direction or the wrong example:** Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Some people will follow us. In this case, not so much in what we say,

but in the way we live—in our priorities, values, and attitudes as well as our actions. If our lives are not what they should be, we become inverted examples who take people away from the Lord and the life He has called them to. I have heard, and perhaps you have also, of children who have said, “Daddy, if the President can lie, why can’t I?”

If we teach our children about the priority of the Lord, of loving others, of the Word, and the importance of assembling ourselves with others believer to worship, grow, and minister to others (**Heb. 10:24-25**), do we demonstrate the reality of this by following the right priorities ourselves? Or do we find every possible excuse to stay home? Do we consistently allow our family to engage in pursuits that keep us and our families away from church or fellowship with believers? This sets a model that says these other pursuits are more important than the Lord or the assembling together with the body of Christ for Bible Study, prayer, or worship. Actions speak so much louder than words!

Do we teach our children the principles of being on time, of doing all things decently and in order? Then are we consistently late? Do our children often miss Sunday school or church because we are so disorganized that we are unable to make it? Again, Actions speak so much louder than words!

3. **The problem of definition.** By definition we mean giving a clear reason for the way we live or the clear distinctive of our lives. As Christians, if our lives are different, as they should be, and we never let others know why we are different, we may have still failed in being examples. “But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess” (**1 Peter 3:15**).

Passages on Being Examples

Because of the power of our example and the way one’s life either negatively or positively influences others, the Scripture repeatedly addresses this vital responsibility. Leaders and Christians as a whole are to be models for others to imitate. In truth, every believer’s life is to become a source of motivation and

direction for others. We are to be a picture of reality, a proof that Jesus Christ saves and changes lives so we can become a powerful magnet that draws others to Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 AND 1 THESSALONIANS 1:6

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1)

“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, when you received the message with joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, despite great affliction” (**1 Thess. 1:6**),

3:17 Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example. 3:18 For many live (about whom I often told you, and now say even with tears) as enemies of the cross of Christ.

In the context of this passage, one clear sign of maturity is the pursuit of holiness, a heart set on heavenly treasures and divine objectives (**see 3:8-14, 19-20**). We might note two things here:

- (a) the mature man (and there are varying degrees of maturity) will aim at letting go of the past and his previous pursuits and treasures, and he will set his sight on reaching forth to the goal of growth in Christ-likeness.
- (b) If he thinks he has already arrived, or if his standards are different, then God will seek to expose this error in his life because anything else is contrary to the purpose of God.

In this pursuit, one must have his course fixed on the right beacon or have his radio tuned in to the right frequency, or he will arrive at the wrong destination. In other words he needs the right example and standard. He needs those who stir him on to higher and higher standards.

In this believers have a two-fold responsibility: (a) They must find mature believers, those who are truly following Christ and His Word, and use them as examples and seek to become imitators of them (vs. 17). But (b) they must also be on alert to the fact that there are those who are not walking after the pattern of godliness found in scripture as seen in the lives of Paul and his

cohorts (cf. **Phil. 3:18, 19** and **Rom. 16:17-18**).

Naturally, the Lord Jesus is our supreme example, goal, and authority, but Scripture does authorize the legitimacy of following godly people as examples. We need godly examples. Such people demonstrate the possibility and reality of following the Lord and of progress in Christ-like growth. They provide us with godly incentives. It is motivational to find men and women who have truly grown in their walk through the power of the Spirit of God.

In this pursuit and according to the emphasis of this passage in Philippians, the crucial test for being a biblical example and one for others to follow is found in one's perspective of the person and work of Christ as epitomized by the cross. A biblical view and understanding of the finished work of the Savior on the cross and the believer's union with Christ does three things:

(1) It provides a proper foundation and motivation for godly living and service. It provides a protection against legalism and works done either to gain salvation or to keep it or to gain merit with God (**Phil. 3:4-8**).

(2) It promotes a commitment to God's standards of behavior (**Phil. 3:9**). It recognizes that freedom does not mean license, but provides the power to serve God according to His standards through faith in a living Savior who has made us acceptable to God and provides us with the motivation and means for change (**1 John 3:1f**).

(3) It gives an eternal perspective. Understanding the finished work of Christ on the cross and our union with Him provides assurance of eternity. This reality of eternity should lead to an eternal perspective which in essence means a new set of values, controls, and pursuits (cf. **3:20-21** with **1 Pet. 1:17f**; **2 Cor. 4:15-18**; **1 John 2:28-3:3**).

In essence, then, a proper grasp of the person and work of Christ should produce a personal reevaluation that leads to a denunciation of our old attitudes, values, and priorities (see **Phil. 3:3ff**). But what we need in the church are men and women who demonstrate this as examples to their families and others.

In order for mature Christians and leaders to become examples for others (i.e.,

a living evidence of the power of Jesus Christ to change lives), they must develop a number of Christ-like qualities that mark them out as examples to follow. Thus, the marks discussed in this study are the kind of qualities that enable one to become a biblical example of Christ-like maturity and leadership whether at home or in the office or in the church.

In summary, the biblical plan and order of modeling and following is as follows:

(1) With Christ and the heavenly Father as their own personal model (**John 15:13; 1 Pet. 2:21; Eph. 5:1**), mature Christian leaders need to recognize they have a vital responsibility to model the reality and character of Christ to those whom they teach and minister (**1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3**).

(2) Leaders may even encourage others to imitate or follow their example as long as they take heed to their own walk (**1 Tim. 4:12-16**) and are sure they are seeking to follow the example of the Savior themselves (**1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9**).

(3) The ultimate goal of the leader must always be to help others become imitators of Christ. At first, disciples become imitators of their spiritual parents or teachers, which is the normal and natural pattern. But teacher and student alike must recognize that the ultimate goal is to become like the Savior who is our perfect model and objective (**1 Pet. 2:21**). Since Paul's objective was to be like Christ, he could encourage his disciples to imitate his walk, but always with the goal in mind of imitating the character of Christ (**cf. 1 Cor. 11:1**)

(4) The basic order or process is: (a) Leaders are to imitate Christ (**1 Cor. 11:1**) that they might be models for others (**1 Pet. 5:3**); (b) new converts and the flock as a whole are to imitate their leaders, assuming of course their leaders are following Christ (**Heb. 13:7**); (c) other churches are to recognize their responsibility to be a model of godliness or Christ-likeness as the Thessalonians were to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (**1 Thess. 1:7**); (d) All believers are to become imitators of God who is revealed to us in Christ (**Eph. 5:1**).

Following the example of others has nothing to do with imitating the style or charismatic personalities of certain Christian leaders. What we are to provide as

a model for others and imitate in others is Christian character as illustrated in the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**) or in Paul's attitude and behavior as it pertained to some of the doubtful issues like eating meat offered to idols. Paul's pattern was that of love, putting the needs of others above himself as Christ did for us. It is this Paul had in mind contextually in **1 Corinthians 11:1** when he said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (**for the immediate context see 1 Cor. 10:31**). The same principle is seen in the context of **2 Thessalonians 3:9** as it pertained to working to support one's self and one's family (**see 3:6-15**).

Thanks and God bless you all and have a wonderful week ahead.