

Imitating Christ: It is the Christian's Responsibility

By: Bill Richardson Edited by: Fay Camp

In this study we will seriously consider and learn what is involved in being an imitator of whom we must imitate in order to be pleasing to God. To get us started (our mind working that is) let's look at the words of a song that we use when we worship in song. The song title is: "O to Be like Thee."

"O to be like Thee blessed Redeemer! This is my constant longing and prayer! Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus, thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee, full of compassion, loving, forgiving, tender and kind; Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting, seeking the wandering sinner to find.

O to be like Thee, lowly in spirit, Holy and harmless, patient, and brave; meekly enduring cruel reproaches, willing to suffer, others to save.

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art; Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness; Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart."

"O TO BE LIKE THEE"! What a beautiful prayer and we should take note of the admonishing words and how they benefit our hearts. My prayer is that this lesson on imitating God the Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and other great examples, will be inspiring to you and me and will cause our love to grow in strength of being like them as we walk in life hand-in-hand being faithful imitators.

The first seven verses of Ephesians 5, (let me call it a paragraph), having been labeled "Live in Love." It says, "*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma*" (Eph. 5:12). (See also Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36).

In putting off the "Old Man" as delineated in Ephesians 4:17-32, it is explained in v. 32 that we should be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave us. By using the word "therefore", what is said in v. 17 is the notice to us that we henceforth walk not as others and that we should, as explained in the rest of the verses, be imitators of God, "Imitators" of and in accordance to the teachings of the word, God's, Christ's and the Holy Spirit's words, and the inspired apostolic words.

We must, as Christians, show love for God and others. How do we do that? We must reflect in our life (imitate) in whole, a life patterned after Christ. Please notice Ephesians 5:2, there we are admonished to walk in love, as did Christ. Remember? Christ's love was so devotedly strong and dedicated that He gave His life for mankind's sins to save all of us (Romans 5:8). Christ's death was for the sins of all humankind, from

Adam to the present and for all who will be born until His second and final coming. His coming will be to bring His Bride to the Father in Heaven, and what a glorious day that will be. Amen! Will we, (you and I) be in the chosen group?

Two of the distinguishing marks of Christlike love is forgiveness (Eph. 4:32) and sacrifice (imitate by doing). Love is the Christian's standard for daily conduct. It requires sacrifice and self-denial to be Christlike (cf. Luke 9:32). *"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls (if you haven't...you should) for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart"* (1 Peter 1:22) (cf. John 13:34-35; See also 1 Thess. 4:9-10).

Make sure that you read those scriptures. Take note, especially how v. 10 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 admonishes us to excel still more. That's powerful admonishment! I suppose that's the time when we should give one hundred percent or even more. Can we? That could be credited to diligence. We please God by imitating His deeds toward all. His love in us must be active in doing good, thus compelling us to use our talents and energies in all kinds of works of love and mercy. That's Christlikeness.

Hear these words of Jesus. *"...love your enemies, do good, and lend (See Psalm 37:21, 36), hoping for nothing in return: and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful just as your Father also is merciful"* (Luke 6:35-36). One of the great blessings we receive for our generosity is: *"God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19).

It is such a beautiful story and wonderful blessing to study God's word of the creation. Can we imagine...you know what I mean? Just try and visualize how He did this? We know; He spoke it into existence. But it is still great joy for me/us (that's the way I think) to realize that God did all of this for His pleasure and glory and then He gave it all to us for our benefit, all of it in total, for the benefit of mankind...who is also a creation of God.

I'm sure that you have read the story in Genesis of the creation. Read it again and let's think together about God and His work as it is nearing completion (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:1-2) and God said in v. 26, *"Let us make man in OUR (Our the Godhead) image."* Image...Likeness; no distinction should be made between "image" and "likeness", which are synonyms. This is a blessing beyond measure. Thus every human being is worthy of honor and respect. God blessed us!

We must realize and ponder how much God did bless us. Let's read again Genesis 1:28-31. Can we see now a greater need to be imitators of God? My question now is, "Why would man ever, ever, rebel against his Creator?" What will it be...what will it be? What will your answer be? True believers are (must be) God's representatives, (imitators). Yes we must fulfill our entire obligation in faith and love with thankful hearts. If we don't note what James 2:10 says about it.

We are stewards of God's creation and blessings. We must not exploit, waste or plunder them, but to care and use them in the service of God and man. It was the Apostle Paul who by inspiration, said, *"Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the*

Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17). Paul spoke with authority (1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:11-12) and he taught the revealed knowledge in every church (1 Cor. 4:17). That is every congregation of the Lord’s Church, the ONE!

When we imitate Christ, and Paul by teaching truth, “you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 17). There is so much in the word, which we should be by example, “...for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all believers...” (1 Thess. 1:5-7).

In research and study of this section of scripture it was noted that the emphasis of the fact that the gospel came to us not only in word but also in power. Thus questions come to mind. How was this power to come? What was it to do? And what was the effect?

I am using a helpful paragraph from “The Layman’s Bible Encyclopedia” which offers brief definition/comments of power, quote: “Strength, might, force; the possessions of sway or controlling influence over others; also, a person, government, etc., invested with authority or influence or exercising control. In the KJV of the Bible, there is often little distinction made between ‘powers’ and ‘authority’, that they are quite closely related is seen in the fact that authority is valueless without the power to enforce it. Power is attributed primarily to God...” end quote.

The work of the Holy Spirit caused the conception of Jesus (Matthew 1:18). The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). The Spirit directed Jesus into the wilderness where He was tempted (Mark 1:12; Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1). The ministry of Jesus was under the direction and power of the Spirit (Matthew 12:18).

The Holy Spirit was to convict the world of sin. *“And He (Holy Spirit), when he is come, will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).* This was done through the word as He directed the apostles to preach (Acts 2:37). As imitators of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the apostles we are the continuators of the redemptive process in the world. JPS said, “This is our task! It is our duty, so that the work goes on perpetually accomplishing and fulfilling the will of God. This we must do through the use of the truth, the word of God, revealed and recorded, whether in the processes of conversion or of spiritual development” (Joel P Sanders).

“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Err/error is departure from the truth. We must rightly divide the truth (2 Timothy 2:15) that is to say, “we must know the scriptures.” We must be able to identify those evil men and imposters who will deceive us and who are growing worse and worse (See 2 Timothy 2:12-13). Faithful believers (Christians) do not (nor must not) imitate evil. The source of evil is Satan...the enemy of God and man.

The devil is the destroyer and we see him imitated by evil men on a daily basis. I am convinced, by their actions, that the most evil men today are those who were once obedient stewards of God's word but fell away and are back in the world of blasphemers. A "mega sinner" is how I would classify them. Some are known Church wide for their acts of evil and I'm sure you know of whom I am speaking. It is true, false teachers seek human approval, but the true teacher seeks God's approval. It's wrong, but false teachers twist meanings for their own purpose. We must "shun profane (godless) and idle (empty) babblings (talk), for they will increase (lead) to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer" (2 Timothy 16-17). Falsehood Begats falsehood! Note what is said in Mark 14:70-71); Imitator(s) are also identified or called examples (a pattern to follow) but as for, the word, "imitator" or "example", neither was used extensively in the Bible. The value of their meaning and use is the end result of the good and right of which we imitate to the edification and glory of God and in doing, there is the reflection of our light shining for Jesus.

The apostle Paul said, "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:1). (Christ is our supreme example). "*For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you (us), leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...*" (1 Peter 2:20-21). A great example of "Fruit of the Spirit": faithfulness...man's part, and "Faithful and Trustworthy" on the part of God...man's Faithful Creator." The word teaches that we are to be, and we must, examples of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity (love), in spirit, in faith, in purity. We must give attendance (diligence attention) to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine.

We must, in being imitators and examples, meditate upon these things: Giving ourselves wholly to them, (absorbed in them); that all will be blessed thereunto. We must take heed (pay close attention) unto the doctrine; continue in them: For doing this we shall both save ourselves, and them that hear us. 1 Timothy 4:12-16 are the scriptures where that admonishment comes from. Please let us read, study, accept, heed and exhort others in our imitating and examples, as we follow Christ and His Doctrine. Amen!

As an obedient child of God, a Christian has met the first obligations when by faith and love he or she believes, repents, confesses and is baptized for remission of sins and at that time one is added to the Church, the Body of Christ. In doing this, one begins a life wherein they are, because of love and obedience, imitates, become example, and grows. It is commanded; "...*but grow in the grace and knowledge (2 Peter 1:2) of our Lord (2 Peter 1:11) and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

We must be aware of the fact that knowledge of God's word must be prominent in our life, all our life; growing in the effective use of talents gained and developed (multiplied), using and imitating to the glory of God and servants of mankind.

Do we know the areas of life in which we are to concentrate, (give attention to)? Our efforts of “good works” in which we are to be identified must be known, certainly by us, and be emulated by honorable imitating. What does Matthew 6:33 admonish us to do? One of the responsibilities of which we are charged is to seek. What is involved in “to seek”? No delineated offering is forthcoming here on seek(ing), but I do say that we can learn, which is a blessing, when we analyze [genuinely] word meanings and or phrases in the context of which they are used in the Bible. Study it! And imitate its teachings!

Also look up and use akin words because much can be learned by their meaning and application of use. And to tell you what effects that process will have...well, it grows your faith and love. It's like the phrase of the old song, “Gimmie’ That Old Time Religion...It Makes You Love Every Body...Its Good enough for me.” It grows and grows! It shows as the imitating effects takes hold in developing the fruit of the Light. The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn (growth in knowledge) what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:9-10).

There is also “Fruit of the Spirit.” The fruit of the Spirit as named is, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). For other virtues and repeats of some already named see (2 Cor. 6:6-7; Eph. 4:2; 5:9; Col.3:12-15. Please read and ponder the admonishments of the named fruit and virtues in the cited scriptures. I am convinced that they are in our lives, that is; if we are imitating them and diligently trying and learn what is pleasing to the Lord. We learn from the Holy Word that if we do these, that is, if they are a part of our life we will not be unfruitful. You know what happens to unfruitful branches? Unfruitfulness will not get us on the straight-and-narrow! That is where we ought to be...and locked in on diligence.

The scriptures and commentary that have been set forth in this study have been of great benefit to me. These wonderful scriptures and principles, which we studied, have been motivating to my conscience, and it is my prayer that you who read and study, that you will accept all truth herein and that it will be a conscience server to you also.

The well-trained conscience is equal to the knowledge, abiding faith, and love that we expose or submit our mind to. With confidence I say that you are studying this lesson with faith and love, and that it will be of great benefit to you.

With confidence I also say, that you desire to be blessed, to gain more knowledge, (true abiding biblical knowledge), which is associated with responsibilities, which creates a desire to seek, to search diligently, to accept when found, to associate with, and be an active part of, and that you will abide faithfully in the Lord's Church until death.

The church that I am speaking of cost the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is His Body, His Kingdom, which is His Church. Please be an obedient dedicated part of the church of the Bible. Christ's church. The church we read about in the Bible. You cannot pass through Heaven's gate if you are not in His Body, (His Church), and it is the church that we read about in the New Testament. That is the truth. That is what the Bible teaches.

I invite you to view other writings on my Website www.geocities.com/dubbyt you may choose other studies along with this one. There is a writing posted that I am sure you will want to view and copy. The writing title is, "The Church of The Bible, Christ's Church." It has a two-page enclosure, which has the title, "What Must I Do To Be Saved." Please study both of these writings with an honest and receptive heart for truth and obedience. You will be blessed!

There are two lessons, which complement the overall lesson. Please accept the lessons therein.

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THE INFLUENCE OF A CHRISTIAN ON GOD'S WORD

By: Mark N. Posey –Minister, Austinville Church of Christ, Decatur, AL

QUESTION: Is it possible for a Christian to hurt the influence of God's Word?

ANSWER: Paul admonished the Thessalonians to "*quench not the Spirit*", (1 Thessalonians 5:19). He told the Ephesians, "*grieve not the Holy Spirit of God*", (Ephesians 4:30). The word "quenches" (abennumi, Gk., "to extinguish." Thayer, p. 572) is commonly used in the sense of extinguishing a fire, (Mark 9:48).

Just as water, sand, dirt or other things can extinguish a flame, so the influence of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) can be smothered in our lives by things such as laziness (2 Thessalonians 3:10), indifference (Revelation 3:15), worldliness (James 4:4), materialism (1 Timothy 6:10), evil companions (1 Corinthians 15:33) and false teachings (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Christians possess the will to allow the Spirit to be quenched or to not allow such to happen. We are taught to:

- Resist the devil (James 4:7).
- Be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).
- Be not weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9).
- Keep yourselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27).
- Be not conformed to this world (Romans 12:2).

All that become Christians (John 3:3-5) receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when immersed into Christ (Acts 2:38). Paul described the gift of the Spirit as the guarantee of our redemption in Heaven (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Spirit dwelling within Christians through God's Word is like a perpetual flame of light (Matthew 5:16; Phil. 2:15). As we increase in knowledge of God's Word, the flame grows stronger (2 Peter 3:18). However, if we drift away from that which the Spirit has revealed (Ephesians 3:1-5), we subtly extinguish that flame (Hebrews 2:1). Paul compared the Bible to a "sword" in Ephesians 6:7. The Bible is "alive and powerful", like a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). However, we must never quench (smother, hurt) the influence of God's Word by our words, thoughts or deeds, (Colossians 3:17).

OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATIONS

By: Mark N. Posey – Minister Austinville Church of Christ, Decatur, AL

QUESTION: How can I overcome procrastination?

ANSWER: Procrastination is a major cause of waste and failure. It means, "To defer action, delay, to procrastinate until an opportunity is lost."

The Bible has many examples of people who failed to act when they should have. Luke 14:15-24 contains the parable of God's invitation to man to partake of His blessings. However, the parable shows that many will not partake of God's feast.

Some will defer because they have "bought a piece of ground" (Luke 15:18). Another said, "*I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them*" (Luke 15:19). A third said, "*I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come*" (Luke 15:20). They each deferred action and missed out on a wonderful opportunity; they procrastinated.

One way to avoid wasteful procrastination is by having the right value system. As seen in the parable of the Great Supper, each had their own priorities that kept them from accepting the invitation from God. "I do not have time to serve God," simply means that people have priorities ahead of God.

We must first seek matters pertaining to God (Matt. 6:33). Successful people in the Bible were always people of immediacy; they did not defer (Acts 10:33; 16:33). It has been said that "tomorrow" is the busiest day of people alive. This is because many people defer until tomorrow what they should do today. Hence, they never really address and perform these tasks.

The emphasis of the scriptures is on "today," not tomorrow (Heb. 3:15). "For he saith," Paul wrote, "*I have heard thee in a time acceptable, and in the day of salvation have I succored helped) thee: behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Beloved, opportunities are missed, lives are ruined, and souls are lost because of procrastination.

Good questions and good answers Bro. Mark and we thank you. I love you and your love for the Lord, *Bill Richardson*, Hartselle Church of Christ.