



Following a Good Example

In case you haven't noticed, no one is perfect. Shocker, right? So what model can believers use to gain and maintain a solid foundation of faith in a an evil world?

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. Philippians 3:17 NASB

As Paul had just told the Philippians to “*keep living by that same standard to which we have attained*” (v3:16), he now instructs them to ***join in following [his] example***. While Paul was human and not a perfect Christian (cf: Romans 7:18-20), he was a deeply mature believer. After all, he penned thirteen of the New Testament epistles, so not only was he mature but he was also uniquely indwelt with God's Holy Spirit to be an apostle and author of Scripture. I think it is safe to say that none of us are even remotely as mature a believer as our brother Paul was, so if we believe the Bible to be true, we can safely use Paul as an example of how to live our life as a Christian.

Paul also gave the same instruction to the church in Corinth, as we see in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16: ***“For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.”***

Contextually speaking for our verse today, Paul is referring to what he wrote in this epistle, and specifically this chapter of Philippians. Last time (vv 3:7-16) we outlined many of the critical attributes possessed by any true believer, and Paul is exhorting his readers to follow his example in each of these. We cannot deny the necessity for evidence of salvation in a Christian's life; saving faith produces good works (cf: James 2:26).

Paul also urged believers to ***“observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”*** Earlier in this letter, specifically Phil. 2:19 and 25, Paul mentioned Timothy and Epaphroditus as beloved brothers and faithful, trustworthy partners in the gospel. He is referring both to them and other strong, sincere believers who are humbly ministering to this young church.

And this echoed when you look again at 1 Corinthians 4:17, as Paul wrote, ***“for this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.”***



In essence: *use these godly men as examples of how to live. Follow the pattern of their lives. Do what they do, don't do what they don't do.* We are never instructed to follow or imitate any spiritual leader who does not practice what they preach.

Yet, even the best people are not perfect. So when good, Christ-led leaders fail us, we should lose not lose heart. Instead, we must look beyond them to the ultimate example of perfection.

We read in Ephesians 5:1, ***“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”*** Here, we are called to use the Father and Son as examples of how to live and walk in obedience as believers. While even the strongest believers will occasionally stumble in modeling these principles, God and Christ will not!

Next time we'll look at the stark contrast of the leaders Paul warns believers *not* to follow or mimic, and who they are might surprise you. Thankfully, inspired Scripture leaves no dark corners when it comes to the practical application of our faith, so if we remain diligent and watchful, and prudently scrutinize the teaching and practices of our spiritual leaders, we will be sure to remain on the narrow path of salvation.

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