

## Who Are You Imitating?

*Marshall Reid*

From a very early age, people are imitators. Babies naturally imitate their parents' facial expressions and behaviors. As they grow older and are around their parents even more, the more the children act like their parents. Unfortunately, they learn to imitate the bad behaviors as well as the good. Children also pick up behaviors from other children they are around, which every parent knows is not necessarily a good thing.

Our imitation of others doesn't stop once we reach adulthood. While we may not feel as inclined to go along with the crowd as we did when younger, we are still susceptible to peer pressure. Sometimes, we even seek out others to imitate, especially if they have been successful in their field. We know that if we want to be successful like they have been, then we must imitate what they did. And we understand that if we imitate what the failures of this world have done, then we will end up as failures also. This makes sense in the business world. But it's also a biblical principle.

Note some of the passages that speak of being careful who we imitate.

*"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God"* (3 John 11). In the verses immediately preceding, John gave an example of someone they were not to imitate—Diotrophes—who loved to have the preeminence and was guilty of excommunicating faithful brethren from the local church. And in the following verse, he gives an example of someone who was worth imitating—Demetrius—who had a good testimony from all who knew him as well as a testimony from the truth.

Twice in 1 Corinthians, Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate him, especially since they were being influenced in several negative ways by those who were speaking evil of Paul and making false accusations about him. Appealing to the fact that he was their spiritual father, Paul says, *"Therefore I urge you, imitate me"* (1 Cor. 4:16). And after spending 3 chapters discussing how the Corinthians should be willing to give up their liberties for the sake of their brethren (just as Paul himself had done in many ways), he says, *"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Paul gives two very good reasons in these verses for why the Corinthians should be imitating him. First, he was the one who brought them the gospel and helped to save them from their vain pagan traditions that would have led them to their spiritual death. Secondly, he was imitating Christ, so the behavior they were seeing in him was really the same behavior that Christ exhibited while on earth. Paul wasn't kidding when he said, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20).

In other words, Paul is saying, “Don’t listen to or imitate all those others who are contradicting what I’ve said to you. They’re not your spiritual father like I am, and they’re not imitating Christ like I am.”

In Ephesians, Paul encourages the brethren to “*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. 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. 4:32 - 5:1). Paul wants the Ephesians to treat each other with the same love, patience, and forgiveness that God demonstrated to them through Jesus. That’s an example worth imitating!

We’re all going to imitate someone. Nobody is truly an original but rather a product of various influences. Whom are we letting influence us? Whom are we imitating? Whose example are we following? There are individuals in the Bible that we would do well to imitate their example (such as Paul), as well as contemporary men and women that are letting Christ’s light shine through them. But remember, these are fallible men. They have made and will continue to make mistakes. Ultimately, Christ is the example to follow. “*...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21).

Are we living a life that is worth imitating? Can we truly say, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”? If we are following Christ’s example, then not only will we be pleasing to God, but we will then be able to better influence our spouse, our children, the church, and those in the world we are trying to teach. Let us ever strive to be such imitators of Christ that when people look at us, they don’t see us; they see Christ.