

#213 “The Ultimate Role Model”
by Brent Barnett
www.relevantbibleteaching.com

From early childhood on, we by nature are imitators. We see the people around us and tend to copy them for good or for evil. The blessing of God-honoring role models to imitate is of great eternal value because it is a highly potent means of passing on God’s truth and ways from generation to generation. Children need parents, friends, and caregivers who demonstrate what it is to love Jesus. Youth are strongly benefited by seeing real faith demonstrated by those whom they look up to in the church. Even adults should be able to have those who have gone ahead of them whose example they can imitate and draw inspiration from. Paul says in Hebrews 13:7, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Paul does not give a blanket endorsement of those who led these people in the Lord and taught them the Word of God. He says that the believers should first consider the result of their conduct. Conduct matters in terms of being a godly example and testimony, but so do the results. There will be good and lasting spiritual fruit generated by the Holy Spirit working in spiritual men and women. What people say in relation to gospel truth matters, how they behave themselves matters, and how God uses them to change lives matters. Inasmuch as the example of godly men and women is indeed godly, we ought to imitate them in word and deed.

Paul said of himself in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” The believers at Corinth remembered his life and testimony before them and what he had taught them about Christ (1 Corinthians 11:2). He praised them for this, and he wanted them to continue to follow his lead and heed his teaching inasmuch as he was a faithful imitator of Christ. Should Paul veer from his own teaching and principles, the believers were to follow Christ, not Paul. Yet Paul testifies that he was faithful to the gospel (2 Timothy 1:3), and he served as a godly role model for his generation and even for ours. He was not perfect, being but a man, but still there was and is much to imitate.

When we look for human beings to imitate, we must always evaluate who they are and what they do based upon the revealed Word of God and the Person of Christ. Jesus alone is the ultimate role model because He alone is perfect, never making a mistake, never veering off course, never changing, and never erring. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). No human can make this claim, for even believers are undergoing the process of sanctification as God gradually works within us over the span of our lifetimes to continue to teach us His Word and conform our desires to His. We are all works in progress, no matter what status we might have in Christian circles. Even our favorite pastors on the radio or our favorite Christian authors need to always be evaluated against the ultimate role model of Christ (Hebrews 12:1-2). Inasmuch as their lives imitate Him, we ought to rejoice and be thankful for their testimonies and examples.

Christians get in trouble when they start associating themselves with a person with greater allegiance and fervor than with our Lord Himself. This causes spiritual blindness,

and it opens the door to deception, the fruit of which is disobedience and corruption. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:11-13,

“For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

In verse 10, Paul was adamant that there would be no divisions in the body of Christ, and he was amazed, as verses 11-13 demonstrate, at how the believers at Corinth began to parcel themselves up in bitterness as they aligned themselves with various spiritual leaders at the time. Some decided that they were “of Paul,” others were “of Peter,” while others were “of Apollos.” Some claimed to be “of Christ,” which is good given that only Christ is Lord, and only Christ, as Paul stated, has all authority because only He was crucified and raised from the dead. He is the head of the church, and when we follow Him as imitators, the church can be of the same mind and in the same judgment (v. 10). In 1 Corinthians 3:7, speaking again concerning the division in the church over some claiming allegiance to mere men rather than Christ, Paul says, “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.” If only the church of today could understand this simple, simple truth. Some are of “John Calvin,” some of “John Wesley,” some of “Martin Luther,” some of “Bill Hybels,” some of “John MacArthur,” and on and on we go. Surely, some men are more in line with Christ’s gospel than others, but we dare not make ourselves “of _____” (you fill in the blank) ahead of being “of Christ.” The church’s only hope of unity, maturity, and purity is as it chooses to imitate Christ by following His Word above all other human voices. Insomuch as these voices speak truth, we can imitate Christ as we imitate these mere mortals. But let us remember that the one who plants and the one who waters are nothing; rather, it is all about God Who gives the growth.

We as believers have a great responsibility to show Christ to the world, so let us make sure people see Jesus in us and not some fleshly impersonation, interpretation, or impostor. Let us be careful to be good testimonies so that others will experience the blessing of godly role models, being always careful to fix our eyes on Christ, the only perfect role model.