

Imitate Christ—Be An Example

Marlin Fannin—May 16, 2009

Several years ago someone told me that they would rather see a sermon anytime than to hear a sermon, because people hear what we say, but they also see what we do in our daily lives. We're also familiar with the saying, 'practice what you preach,' which is very important as well. People see and will they want to imitate us, or will our action turn them away?

Philippians 3:17: "Brethren, be imitators together of me, and bear in mind those who walk in this way... [a way of life] ...as **you have us for an example.**"

An example mean *model for imitation*. So, when we are actually striving to live God's way, striving to be an example, we should strive to be a model for imitation to others, just as Paul was saying. Paul is talking about brethren waling in this way of life, this way of Truth.

James 3:1: "My brethren, do not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive more severe judgment." I think the *King James* says, 'Don't desire to be a teacher because we have the greater judgment or responsibility.'

Verse 2: "Because we **frequently offend, every one of us**. If anyone does not offend in what he says, this one *is* a perfect man *and is* able also to hold in check the whole body." He's kind of getting it out there in a sense, but also making it clear.

I was talking to another elder about what I was going to talk on, and he gave me some ideas and input. So, James is saying here that even as elders that we offend at times, and whether as ministers or lay members, we fall short. We need to realize that as elders we are *imperfect*. In times past I think we put ministers on a higher level, but we fight the same things that all brethren fight. We still have our human nature that we have to deal with, and we fall short, which is meaning to *miss the mark*. We fall short and sin, too.

We have to repent just like all brethren have to repent. I came to see years ago that repentance is one of the greatest blessings that we have, because it shows the conversion process, and we're still in the process of being converted. To the day that we die we're going to have to be overcoming this human nature.

Repentance is one of the greatest blessings that we have, because it is a part of conversion!

We have to carry our burdens and also we strive to help the brethren in carrying their burdens.

1-Corinthians 4: 6: "Now these things, brethren, **I have applied to Apollos and myself for your sakes**; that in us you may learn not to think *of men* beyond what is written, so that no one among you is puffed up on behalf of one *of us* against the other. For **what makes you superior to others?** And **what do you have that you did not receive?** ..." (vs 6-7).

Everything that we have it all comes from God! No matter what talent or ability that we may have or develop, it all comes from God. God certainly gives us talents and abilities that we might share with one another, as a body, as it edifies the different members! Edify one another. God has placed us elders in the Body as well.

Verse 7: "For **what makes you superior to others?** And **what do you have that you did not receive?** But if you also received *it*, why are you boasting as if you did not receive *it*?"

In our fellowship group, we strive to grow in grace and knowledge. A lot of the men there have an opportunity to speak. Not like in times past in some of the Church of God organizations where only certain ones—or they picked out certain ones that they wanted—were allowed to speak.

In our group, if they want to speak we allow them to speak one Sabbath out of the month. If we don't like what we hear, we 'stone them'! (much laughter). That's Biblical, too—right? Just kidding!

We're all, regardless if we're elders—whatever title that Paul said—that God has set in the Church with responsibilities to edify the Church so that we might all grow in grace and knowledge.

Verse 8: "Now you are satiated. Now you have been enriched. You have reigned without us. And I would that you did reign, so that we also might reign with you. For I suppose that God has made us apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. *We are* fools for the sake of Christ, but you *are* wise in Christ; we *are* weak, but you *are* strong; you *are* glorious, but we *are* without honor. To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own hands. When railed at, we bless; when persecuted, we bear *it*" (vs 8-12).

So, we do labor; most of the elders do work. Some are retired now or still work part time. We also labor (for the Church), most without pay. I know that Fred Coulter for many years labored and also worked (outside the work of the Church) until

the organization got to the point where he could take some funds. That's good, because it gives him full time to be able to do those things to help us. Most of us do labor and also work (outside the Church), and that's good and helps us know what's going on in this world. We're out here every day, most of us working in it.

Paul worked with his hands, he said, at times so that the people would not have an occasion that he would be indebted to them. It doesn't mean that he didn't have the authority to do that, but just meant that he wanted to set an example. That's what we're talking about here today.

Verse 13: "When reviled, we entreat; for unto this day we are as *the* refuse and *the* off-scouring of the world. I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but as my beloved children I warn *you*. For you might have ten thousand tutors in Christ, but *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I did beget you through the Gospel. Therefore, **I am exhorting you to be imitators of me**" (vs 13-16).

Paul was saying, he is striving to do the things that God has called him and showed him to do, and as he does those thing then he was trying to be an example. "Therefore, **I am exhorting...**" and instructing you to do.

Those that James said that have the greater responsibility, we are responsible for what we teach and say. It says:

Proverbs 25:11: "A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver."

I remember seeing a picture like that, and it showed beautiful apples in a frame with settings of silver. It was very beautiful. The picture of it brought this Proverbs even more to mind and what it means. Our words are very important, as well as our actions and examples.

Recently we're having some remodeling done, and we do set examples whether in the Church or not in the Church. This man asked his young son to go out to the truck to get a tool. My wife was there and said that he was about nine years of age and he came back in and said, 'Dad, I couldn't find it.' *Son, it's there, go back out and look again.* He came back and said, 'Dad, I can't find it.'

I can see probably myself getting mad and irritated at that point and running out and trying to look for it myself. But the dad said, 'Well, son, maybe you're right; I might have seen it in the barn this morning instead of in the truck. I'm sorry, son.'

That was a good example! Examples sometimes speak a lot louder than all the words that we can read. That was a good example. Reflecting

back and also toward the future on how I might handle things a little better, and also may help you to think about it, as well.

1-Thessalonians 1:1: "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the Church of *the* Thessalonians, *which is* in God *the* Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always concerning all of you, making mention of you in our prayers. Without fail, we remember your work of faith, and *your* labor of love, and *your* endurance in *the* hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; knowing your election, brethren, *as you are* beloved by God. For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in *the* Holy Spirit, and with great conviction; even as you know what sort of men we were among you for your sake. And **you became imitators of us and of the Lord**, having accepted the Word in much persecution with *the* joy of the Holy Spirit, so that **you became examples** to all those in Macedonia and Achaia who are believers" (vs 1-7). *By Paul's example, they also became examples!*

Verse 8: For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every *other* place also **your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that there is no need for us to say anything.** *By your examples and words, we don't have to say anything! You are paving the way and setting the example!*

Verse 9: "Because they themselves are relating how readily you received us when we *first* visited you, and how you turned from idols to God, **to serve the living and true God.**" What an example that was, to turn them away from idols to serve the *true God!*

Verse 10: "And to await His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from *the* dead—Jesus, Who is delivering us from the coming wrath." We read here that they were examples:

- of faith
- of love
- of endurance
- of hope

They became imitators or teachers, examples of their faith was spread abroad. The people turned from serving idols to serve the living and true God.

They weren't preaching, by their examples they were seeing a sermon. And the brethren have an active part in influencing and examples as well as those in the ministry. So, we see great examples of the brethren.

James 2:1: "My brethren, do not have the

faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. Now then, if a man comes into your synagogue wearing gold rings *and dressed* in splendid apparel, and *there* comes in also a poor man in lowly apparel, and you give preference to the one who is wearing the splendid apparel, and say to him, ‘Seat yourself here in the best place’; and you say to the poor man, ‘Stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit here under my footstool’; then **have you not passed judgment among yourselves, and have made yourselves judges with evil opinions?**” (vs 1-4).

Looking on the surface and making a judgment, not doing it with a right heart and Godly mind and attitude and having respect toward all. It says that ‘God called the lowborn of the earth to confound the highborn, the ‘wise’ of this world.’

Verse 5: “My beloved brethren, **listen**. Did not God Himself choose the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him?”

We need to, not only with the words that we say, but with our actions, be able to set a right example, especially to new people. There are new people that have come in and will be come in, who have no knowledge of the Worldwide Church of God, which a lot of us came out of; or some of the other Churches of God. We need to be very careful at times of what we do say, because we’re used to one another, kind of like a family.

When you get together with a big family and you’ve got almost anything and everything when you come from a big family. Sometimes we talk and we they may not understand. We understand because we been around each other for years and years, but some of the new people may take it as an offense. So, we do have an example both as the elders and brethren to make sure what we’re saying in our example.

That’s brought out very clearly in Matthew 18:6: “But whoever shall cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to offend, it would be better for him that a millstone be hung around his neck and he be sunk in the depths of the sea.”

Showing the importance that Christ is emphasizing here on offending people just new to what we’re learning whom God is calling. Remember, God does the calling. He’s opened their mind! It’s like if you have 10 children, when the last one is born you have all of these older siblings. He’s saying they have a responsibility how they treat those, and sometimes maybe not so well. It’s kind of like the ‘pecking order.’ When you get to the youngest, he gets it all! I’ve learned a lot from being the youngest. I also saw the example of the others, and learned some things not to do.

Christ reminds us of the ‘little ones’ and takes special heed that we don’t offend them.

1-Peter 1: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to *the* elect strangers scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; *who have been chosen* according to *the* predetermined knowledge of God *the* Father...” (vs 1-2). We see here that God did the calling; He is calling them and He calls whom He wills.

“...by sanctification through *the* Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of *the* blood of Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope through *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ from *the* dead” (vs 2-3).

1-Peter 5:1-3: “*The* elders who *are* among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed: Feed the flock of God *that is* among you, exercising oversight not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but *with an eager attitude*; not as exercising lordship over *your* possessions...” (vs 1-3).

In other words, not giving them the freedom to be able to choose, to be able to learn, to grow and develop. You can browbeat somebody or beat them with a stick, whip or whatever—you can keep them under control—but when you take it away then it’s going to an offense to them, a bitter remembrance, and they’re basically going to go do what they want. People have to be given—and God gives us that—the freedom *to choose* between good and evil. You can’t force character into someone. It has to be an individual choice, and then to exercise walking as we walk in this way with the help of God’s Holy Spirit to develop the very mind of Jesus Christ.

“...**but by being examples to the flock of God**. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall receive an unfading, *eternal* crown of glory” (vs 3-4). That’s what it’s all of about and why we’re here: *to have eternal life in the Kingdom of God!*

Verse 5: “In the same manner, *you* younger men be subject to *the* older men; and all *of you* be subject to one another, being clothed with humility because God sets Himself against *the* proud, but He gives grace to *the* humble.”

1-Timothy 4:10: “Now, it is for this *reason* *that* we are laboring, and we are personally suffering reproach because **we have hope in the living God**, Who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who are believers. These things command and teach. Do not allow anyone to despise your youth; but be

an example...” (vs 10-12).

Paul is saying not to let them despise you because you're a 'young whippersnapper' and maybe you're in your 20s and they're up in the 50s-70s. Win their hearts by being an example and how you treat them and what you do.

“...be an example to the believers—in ¹word, in ²conduct, in ³love, in ⁴Spirit, in ⁵faith and in ⁶purity” (v 12)—as you adhere to the laws and commandment and walk in them. That way you will be an example.

Verse 13: “Until I come, devote *yourself* to reading... [we must all be reading the Word of God on an individual basis and growing from that] ...to encouragement, and to doctrine”—true and sound doctrines that have been proven and are in God's Word, and to live by them and not turn from them.

We as elders and also as the congregation must be studying God's Word every day. Not just reading it, but studying, looking up Scriptures and begin able to reference different things so that we can have a better understanding of certain subjects that we don't understand but want to understand that may not be clear.

My wife and I do this basically every morning. I get up first and she gets up a little later. Before I go to work we have time where we both sit and read and we'll bring up things. We may not be reading the same chapters, or we may be studying the same thing. It's good if you can do it together.

We need to be studying the Word of God and adhering the sound doctrines that we have been taught and stand not to be changed by men, but are there because God has put them, but we have to understand them.

As children of God we represent God! A lot of times we don't think... I haven't thought that sometimes when people see me and they can tell... You don't have to tell them that you're going to church and striving to be a Christian. They can tell by your words, your actions, the things that you do that you're a little different. They'll ask you sometimes if you're a Christian.

So, we do have an example that we represent God as His children. Our examples have a great, great impact on how people view us and also how they view God and maybe the organization that we belong to or are a part of.

My wife told me just recently, and we'll be married 44 years... I came into the Church back early 1967, but it was about three years later that she started attending Church and was baptized. One of the things that she said that kind of convinced her was that she saw the people and they tended to

practice what they believed. This is something that she had not seen growing up as she attended church occasionally with her parents. She knew what the people were doing during church and sometimes during the week.

She saw these people in the Church of God were striving to practice what they believed and it was a great impression on her. I'm sure it helped with God working with her and God calling her and bringing her on in.

She had seen wrong examples and hypocrisy, and she was turned off. How about our youth today? Do we turn them off sometimes by our examples? They're watching and seeing! Believe it or not, teenagers can see hypocrisy and see through it very quickly.

How important it is that we set a right example for our children and others. I was thinking about Abraham, and God said, 'I know that he will teach his children and those after him.' We have that responsibility to teach our children, our grandchildren or maybe even great grandchildren. That is a big responsibility and we want to encourage them and steer them, even though not now, maybe someday they will look back upon that. That will be an influence their lives and maybe they'll become interested in God and He could start working with them and open their mind.

Examples of leadership are very important. I remember when I was in the service overseas, we had this one colonel and he cared for the troops. He was a strict guy. We would go into the field and when we came back he would always give us a day to clean up our gear and get it all straightened away.

He left and another colonel came in and he was a politician. All he was concerned about was striving to get that first star. When he was in the field he wouldn't dress properly like he should. He'd go around sometimes with the strap hanging from his helmet that was flapping back and forth. He didn't have sometimes his rubber boots that went over your shoes; they wouldn't be buckled up. And he always had a big cigar in his mouth.

Troops have a way of figuring things out and seeing things for what they are, and giving nicknames; just as Patton got the nickname 'old blood and guts.' His guts and our blood.

Well, this new colonel was Joe Boleno an guess what? He was nicknamed, 'Joe low Boleno' because he wasn't interested in the troops, he was just interested in furthering his career.

There was this captain and we had an inspection and I was kind of low on the totem pole, being new overseas, so it was my job to clean out the shower where everybody in the community

showered. Can you imagine what a bathtub looks like when one person, can you imagine what shower and a drain looks like after many, many people have been there. So, it was my job and sometimes you had to get down there with your hands and clean it out. You couldn't get it out any other way.

He was a good soldier, an airborne ranger and didn't have a big head as far as vanity and ego. I was cleaning that up and he came by and stuck his head in and said, 'How's it going Fannin?' and I just kind looked up, and he said, 'I guess I know how it's going,' and he just took off.

That said reams of words to me because of what he did. He's been there and done that. He knew what it was like. He didn't come in and say that I had missed a spot here or there and you can do a little better job here. Get with it soldier! Get with it trooper! *No!* What he did left a great impression on me, and still to this day.

Examples of others do leave a profound effect on us whether for good or negative.

John 13:13—Christ said: “You call Me the Teacher and the Lord, and you speak rightly, because I am. Therefore, if I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also are duty-bound to wash one another's feet; for **I have given you an example, to show that you also should do exactly as I have done to you**” (vs 13-15).

- He was Lord
- He was Master
- He was God in the flesh

Yet, He was willing to set an example that we could follow, and He did!

James 5:10: “My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of *the* Lord **as an example of endurance in afflictions and of steadfastness.**”

- ***endurance***—continuing on, not giving up
- ***afflictions***—the many, many things they suffered and went through
- ***steadfastness***—staying the course, not giving up

They were examples of those things!

1-Peter 2:21: “For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.”

Here was God in the flesh Who came to set the example for the apostles. They set examples for us and also hopefully we are setting examples for those who will come behind us.

‘Words fitly spoken are like apples of gold and pictures of silver’; they do have a lot of meaning. Examples that we can see can be captured

in our mind and can be registered in our thoughts. They can be brought up in an instant; examples that are either good or bad. When someone sees us, what comes to mind? Is it good? *or* Is it bad? Does it leave a good impression? *or* A bad impression? That may differ; sometimes we do and sometimes we don't.

James says that we have the greater responsibility and we do fall short. James says that we will offend. He didn't say that *if*, but we *will* offend, because we also are human and are not perfect. He also says that doesn't give us a way out. James goes on to say that as we put bits in horses' mouths and bridles to control them, that we have God's Holy Spirit, as a bit in our mouth to help control us.

Then hopefully we can look to examples and emulate the good examples, and we can be examples that others can emulate. ***Let us preach the Word of God, not only in words and deeds, but by our examples, as well.***

All Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version*

Scriptural References:

- 1) Philippians 3:17
- 2) James 3:1-2
- 3) 1 Corinthians 4:6-16
- 4) Proverbs 25:11
- 5) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
- 6) James 2:1-5
- 7) Matthew 18:6
- 8) 1 Peter 1:1-3
- 9) 1 Peter 5:1-5
- 10) 1 Timothy 4:10-13
- 11) John 13:13-15
- 12) James 5:10
- 13) 1 Peter 2:21

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