

IMITATION

Introduction

1. Image.

2. Need.

- a. Why do children mimic the speech and mannerisms of their parents?
- b. Who do people imitate in our culture?
- c. Who do you want to be like?
- d. Does anyone want to be like you?

Biblical Principles of Imitation

1. God designed us to be imitators.

- a. As human beings, we are God's image-bearers, created to rule as God rules.
 - (1) **Ge 1:26-27** 26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.
- b. We are creatures of imitation. We cannot help but imitate.
 - (1) Children naturally imitate their parents.
 - (2) We imitate our friends (i.e., Josh Burt).
 - (3) We imitate our spouse.
 - (4) We imitate movie stars, sports figures, and TV personalities.
 - (5) Young pastors imitate "successful" pastors.
- c. We are always an example to those whom we are teaching and training, whether we like it or not. We cannot stop being an example.¹

2. Imitation involves a τύπος, a μιμητής, and the act of μιμέομαι.

- a. A τύπος is "an archetype serving as a model, *type, pattern, model...technically design, pattern...in the moral life example, pattern*" (BDAG, 1020).
 - (1) The Thessalonians became a τύπος to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - (a) **1 Th 1:7** 7 ...So that you became an example (τύπος) to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
 - (2) Paul gave himself as a τύπος for the Thessalonians to imitate (2 Th 3:9).
 - (a) **2 Th 3:9** 9 ...To give you in ourselves an example (τύπος) to imitate.
 - (3) Paul commanded the Philippians to keep their eyes on those who walk according to his τύπος.
 - (a) **Php 3:17** 17 Brothers and sister, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example (τύπος) you have in us.
 - (4) Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to be τύποι.
 - (a) **1 Ti 4:12** 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an

¹ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 74.

example (τύπος) in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

- (b) **Tt 2:7** 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model (τύπος) of good works....
- (5) Peter commands elders to be τύποι.
- (a) **1 Pe 5:3** 3 ...Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.
- (6) An ideal “is a mental conception of character, around which we desire to conform our lives. It may have been suggested by some tong and noble figure on the page of history, by a public character of our own time, or by the glimpse which has been afforded through biography or by a brief interview into the inner life of a man, with whom we ourselves have had some dealings.”²
- b. A μιμητής is an “imitator” (*BDAG*, 652).
- (1) Paul tells the Corinthians to be his μιμηταί. He is a μιμητής of Jesus.
- (a) **1 Co 4:16** 16 ...I exhort you, be imitators (μιμητής) of me.
- (b) **1 Co 11:1** 1 Be imitators (μιμητής) of me, just as I also am of Messiah.
- (2) Paul instructs the Ephesians to be μιμηταί of God.
- (a) **Eph 5:1** 1 ...Be imitators (μιμητής) of God, as beloved children.
- (3) Paul commands the Philippians to be his co-imitators (συμμιμητής).
- (a) **Php 3:17** 17 Brothers and sisters, join in following my example (συμμιμητής), and observe those who walk according to the pattern [τύπος] you have in us.
- (4) Paul commends the Thessalonians for becoming μιμηταί of himself, Jesus, and the churches in Judea.
- (a) **1 Th 1:6** 6 You also became imitators [μιμητής] of us and of the Lord [Jesus], having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) **1 Th 2:14** 14 You, brothers and sisters, became imitators [μιμητής] of the churches of God in Messiah Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they from the Jews.
- (5) The author of Hebrews urges his readers to be μιμηταί of the faithful, patient believers of the past.
- (a) **Heb 6:12** 12 ...So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators [μιμητής] of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
- c. Το μιμέομαι is “to use as a model, imitate, emulate, follow” (*BDAG*, 651).
- (1) Paul asked the Thessalonians to μιμέομαι him and his associates.
- (a) **2 Th 3:7-9** 7 You yourselves know how you ought to imitate (μιμέομαι) us, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have the right, but in order to offer ourselves as a model (τύπος) for you, so that you would imitate (μιμέομαι) us.
- (2) The author of Hebrews told his readers to μιμέομαι the faith of their leaders.
- (a) **Heb 13:7** 7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you. And considering the result of their conduct, imitate [μιμέομαι] their faith.

² F. B. Meyer, *Religion in Homespun*, 153.

(3) Clearly, we are not creating clones or a cult of personality.³

3. We are responsible for who we imitate.

- a. We may imitate what is evil or what is good. It's our choice.
 - (1) **3 Jn 11** 11 Beloved, do not imitate [μιμείομαι] what is evil, but what is good. Whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God.
- b. We can't choose our parents, but we can choose who we imitate.
- c. By God's grace we can break loose from the bad examples of our parents.
- d. Too often, the church imitates the world, and believers imitate unbelievers.
- e. Good examples are always out there.
 - (1) If our parents failed in a certain areas, we can look to our grandparents.
 - (2) If we can't look to our grandparents, we can look to families in our local church.
- f. Read lots of Christian biographies. Church history provides hundreds of examples of Jesus in many times and places.
- g. If you want to imitate someone, spend a lot of time with them.
 - (1) Training is inescapably personal.⁴
 - (2) The best training occurs informally, not formally.⁵

4. Imitation is essential to sanctification and discipleship.

- a. Jesus said a fully trained disciple will be like his or her disciple-maker.
 - (1) **Lk 6:40** 40 ...Everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher.
- b. Paul urged the Corinthians to imitate him, just as he imitated Jesus.
 - (1) **1 Co 11:1** 1 Be imitators of me [Paul], just as I also am of Messiah.
- c. He urged the Philippians to imitate him and those like him.
 - (1) **Php 3:17** 17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.
- d. "Imitation is the key to becoming a great author, or a great artist. Imitation is the key to becoming a great anything."⁶
- e. "Every man who is worth anything sets before himself a higher standard of accomplishment than he can ever attain."⁷

5. We need flesh and blood examples of Jesus today.

- a. We benefit from learning about the lives of Christian heroes from the Bible and church history.
 - (1) "Consider now the lively examples of the holy fathers, in whom shone forth real perfectness and religion, and thou shalt see how little, even as nothing, is all that we do. Ah! What is our life when compared to theirs? They, saints and friends of Christ as they were, served the Lord in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labour and weariness, in watchings and fastings, in prayer and holy

³ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 75.

⁴ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 75.

⁵ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 76.

⁶ L. Bortins, *The Core*, 128.

⁷ Dr. Conwell, quoted in F. B. Meyer, *Religion in Homespun*, 167.

meditations, in persecutions and much rebuke.”⁸

- b. However, living, flesh and blood examples of Jesus are best.
 - (1) **Php 4:9** 9 The things you [Philippians] have learned and received and heard and seen in me [Paul], practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
 - (2) How do we live godly lives today, in 2019?
- c. Jesus, God the Son, was a flesh and blood *τύπος* for the disciples.
 - (1) **Jn 1:14** 14 ...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - (2) **Jn 13:14-15** 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.
 - (3) The chain of imitation flows from the Lord Jesus himself.⁹
- d. New Zealand desperately needs more flesh and blood examples of Jesus.

6. We are to imitate:

- a. God the Father.
 - (1) Paul urged the Ephesians to imitate God.
 - (a) **Eph 5:1** 1 ...Be imitators of God, as beloved children.
 - (2) An early Christian letter, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, offers insight how we may imitate God:
 - (a) “By loving [God] you will be an imitator of his goodness. And do not be surprised that a person can become an imitator of God; he can, if God is willing. For happiness is not a matter of lording it over one’s neighbors, or desiring to have more than weaker men, or possessing wealth and using force against one’s inferiors. No one is able to imitate God in these matters; on the contrary, these things are alien to his greatness. But whoever takes upon himself his neighbour’s burden, whoever wishes to benefit another who is worse off in something in which he himself is better off, whoever provides to those in need things that he has received from God, and thus becomes a god to those who receive them, this one is an imitator of God. Then you will see that though your lot is on earth, God lives in heaven, then you will begin to declare the mysteries of God, then you will both love and admire those who are punished because they refuse to deny God, then you will condemn the deceit and the error of the world, when you realise what the true life in heaven is, when you despise the apparent death here on earth...”¹⁰
- b. Jesus.
 - (1) Paul asked the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Jesus.
 - (a) **1 Co 11:1** 1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Messiah.
 - (2) By imitating Paul and Jesus, the Thessalonians became a *τύπος* to others.
 - (a) **1 Th 1:6-7** 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

⁸ T. A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*.

⁹ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 73.

¹⁰ *Epistle to Diognetus* 10.4-8.

- (3) A primary purpose of the incarnation was for Jesus to provide a flesh and blood example of how human beings ought to live. He lived the prototype life. He is the ultimate τύπος.
 - (4) We are to imitate both the internal and external life of Jesus.
 - (a) **Php 2:5** 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Messiah Jesus....
 - (b) **1 Co 2:16** 16 ... We have the mind of Messiah.
 - (5) We cannot walk with Jesus as the disciples did, which is why we need Scripture. Bible study is the primary way we spend time with Jesus today.
- c. Paul.
- (1) Paul praises the Thessalonians for imitating him, his associates, and Jesus.
 - (a) **1 Th 1:6-7** 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
 - (2) Paul gave himself to the Thessalonians as an example to imitate.
 - (a) **2 Th 3:7-9** 7 ... You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. 9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.
 - (3) Paul exhorts the Corinthians to imitate him.
 - (a) **1 Co 4:15-16** 15 ... If you [Corinthians] were to have countless tutors in Messiah, yet not many fathers, for in Messiah Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.
 - (b) **1 Co 11:1** 1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Messiah.
 - (4) Paul instructs the Philippians to think like him and be like him.
 - (a) **Php 3:15** 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way [like Paul], and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.
 - (b) **Php 3:17** 17 Brothers and sisters, join in following my example.
 - (c) **Php 4:9** 9 The things you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
- d. Those who follow Paul's example.
- (1) **Php 3:17** 17 ... Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.
- e. Certain churches.
- (1) The churches in Judea.
 - (a) **1 Th 2:14** 14 ... You, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Messiah Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews....
 - (2) The Thessalonian church.
 - (a) **1 Th 1:6-7** 7 ... You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
- f. Church leaders who speak the word of God.
- (1) **He 13:7** 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- g. Believers who are faithful and patient.

- (1) **He 6:12** 12 ...So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
- h. Heroes of church history.
 - (1) The idea of moulding one's character according the example of outstanding men and women from history or legend prevailed until recent times.¹¹

7. Church leaders must be models worthy of imitation.

- a. Paul instructed Timothy to be an example to believers, despite his youth.
 - (1) **1 Ti 4:12** 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
- b. He instructed Titus to be a model of good works.
 - (1) **Ti 2:7** 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works....
- c. Peter commanded elders to be examples to the flock.
 - (1) **1 Pe 5:3** 3 ...Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.
- d. Those who lead and speak the word of God must live in such a way that they are worthy of imitation.
 - (1) **He 13:7** 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

8. The characteristics of a godly example are:

- a. Hard work.
 - (1) **Ac 20:34-35** 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - (2) **2 Th 3:7-9** 7 ... You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. 9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.
- b. Godly speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.
 - (1) **1 Ti 4:12** 12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but in speech, conduct, love, faith, purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.
- c. Good deeds, doctrinal purity, dignity.
 - (1) **Tt 2:7** 7 In all things show yourself to be an example (τύπος) of good deeds, purity in doctrine, dignified.
- d. Faith and patience.
 - (1) **Heb 6:12** 12 So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators [μιμητής] of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
- e. Humility.
 - (1) **1 Pe 5:3** 3 Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

¹¹ William Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong* (1992).

9. We are to imitate in the areas of conviction, character, and competence.

- a. Conviction.
 - (1) **2 Ti 2:2** 2 ... What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.
- b. Character.
 - (1) **1 Th 1:6-7** 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
- c. Competence.
 - (1) **2 Ti 2:2** 2 ... What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

10. The results of imitating godly examples are:

- a. The God of peace is with us.
 - (1) **Php 4:9** 9 The things you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
- b. We inherit promised rewards.
 - (1) **Heb 6:12** 12 So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators [μιμητής] of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
- c. We become a godly example ourselves.
 - (1) **1 Th 1:6-7** 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

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Notes

IgnMagn 9.1-2; IgnEph 1.2, 10.3; IgnRom 4.2-3, 6.3; IgnTrall 1.2; MartPol