

Being an Example

You and I are examples. Each of us is setting examples for good or bad for those around us, whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we accept that responsibility or not.

What is an example? It is a pattern, like a set of blueprints of one's life. Others can see our lives; they can hear our speech and watch our relationships. They can observe our attitudes and reactions to people and things. They will be impressed for good or bad by what they see and hear. Onlookers, then, often will be influenced to some degree to do as we are doing. When we think about it like that, we can see the great and eternal importance of the example we are setting.

If we are to be a good pattern for others, we need a good example to follow ourselves. Again, the people closest to us are likely to influence us strongly. If our lives are to be worthwhile, we need to stay away from bad company, but to whom can we look to as a good pattern for our lives? To answer that question, if we are familiar with the Scriptures, is to point to Jesus as being the best and greatest example of all, for me, for you and for all people. The apostle Peter said, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Christ came from God, but was subjected to every temptation, even as we are, yet He did not sin. Speaking of Him, the Hebrew writer said, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Christ was godly, pure, unselfish, humble, patient, served his Father and had love for all people.

At any time in our lives when we are not sure as to what we should do, it would be good to ask, "What would Jesus do?" If we will ask that question and then follow His example on that point, we will surely do the right thing. We call ourselves "Christians." That name means "Christ-like." According to 2 Corinthians 5:20, we live in this world as representatives of Christ: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

If I sent someone on a mission in my name, I would expect that person to talk, think and behave as I would do in any given situation. If, instead, the person lied in my name, cheated in my name and behaved in ways that were in total contradiction to what I stood for, all in my name, I would feel betrayed.

Our Lord has entrusted us with the wearing of His name, a name that has never been besmirched by sin or evil. Because we say we are following Him, we who are Christians should be the best examples of all. People are observing what we say and do; they weigh our attitudes toward them and others. This may very well determine how they will define Christianity. We may bring them to Christ, or we may drive them away, depending on the definition they see in us of "Christ-like." We may say that we are Christians, and we may be quick to preach to those around us, but they will be influenced more by the way we live than by what we say. The question is, "Are we practicing what we preach?"

Remember, we have a vast audience watching us every day. There are the people of the world, but also there are our friends, relatives and even our own children. What are their impressions of Christ in us? Do they see us as being honest and sincere, the Christians that we say we are? Or, do they see us as fakes, impostors, actors, pretenders?

There are members of the church who never attend worship. Others do not bring their children to Bible Study, or study with them at home. Still others have money for themselves but never have anything for the Lord. Some have no compassion for the hurting and the destitute. If you are guilty of such things, do you think that your children will continue to have an interest in the Lord as they grow up, and will obey Him and be faithful to Him? If you think so, you are sadly mistaken. Such an example is a betrayal of the very name of Christ, and it will not lead people to Him, but away from Him.

Think seriously about what you are doing and make the necessary corrections before it is too late for you and for those who are watching you. Paul said to the young preacher, Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). He was saying that even as a young man, and especially as a young believer, Timothy should so conduct his life that no one could find fault with him on the basis of his age. Paul mentioned specific areas to be concerned about, areas in which young people often have problems. He said that Timothy should be serious about handling the Lord's Word correctly, that he should guard his speech, that he should be aware of his manner of life in expressing his love, humility and faith.

Young men or women, with these positive qualities in their lives, can make a great impression for good on their young friends, and also on older generations. Not only will their examples have a good influence on others, but also it will bring many rich rewards, even in this world.

We are blessed, as God's children, to wear His name. When Israel wore His name, God said of them that, "...wherever they went, they profaned My holy name — when they said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.'" Then He said, "...I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes" (Ezekiel 36:20, 23).

We must remember that we have the same privilege and the same responsibility. There is no life like the Christian life. Christ said that He was the light of the world (John 8:12), but He also said of His disciples that they were lights of the world (Matthew 5:14). That is, they were to reflect the light of Christ, and they could do that only as they followed Him and His example. Jesus illustrated the importance of one's light by saying they were like lights of a city set on a hill that could not be hidden. He also pointed out that the purpose of a candle is to give light, not that it should be put under something and hidden. Likewise, one becomes a Christian to show Christ is his life, not to hide Him by sin, improper attitudes, etc.

Jesus then said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). One's good works are not for his own glory, but rather that others might see his life and know that it is the result of following Christ, to the honor and glory of the Lord Himself.

What kind of an example are you setting? Is it good or bad? It can be good if you will follow the greatest example of all, Jesus Christ. What better thing could you do in this world than to live the kind of life that will help to ensure eternal salvation for your friends and loved ones?

By: J.C. Choate