

Follow me as I follow Christ

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TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

PAUL - A MODEL FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW

This is a call to all Christians to follow Paul. You may have some questions about the wisdom of following a man, even when we are talking about the apostle Paul, but the fact is that Paul urged his converts to follow him! Now if he had said this about Jesus we would have had no problems with the instruction. Jesus did call men and women to follow Him. Over and over again we hear Him calling men to Himself; even the rich young ruler was called by Jesus to follow Him. It is the greatest privilege of my life to be personally called by Jesus Christ. When you follow Him you are following the One who is truly a man in the context of His humanity but He is the **Son of God** in the context of His divine nature, so that there are certain ways in which He is not a model for us when it comes to following. We cannot follow Him in His deity. In contrast Paul was a human person like us and that is why we probably have some reserves about following him. My proposal is that we carefully examine each Scripture where Paul instructs his converts to follow him so that we can come to a correct understanding of what he means, and see where we can properly follow the apostle. Read the following Scriptures: **1Cor.4:15-17; 11:1; Gal.4:12; 1Thess.1:6; 2Thess. 3:9; Phil. 3:17; 1Tim.1:16.**

1) 1Cor. 4:16 “Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”

The entire chapter is important. The background to this entreaty is that Paul is grappling with a whole series of moral and spiritual problems at Corinth and not least of these is the personal animosity against him and the questions about his apostleship. From the outset we must determine the exact areas in which Paul is urging Christians to follow him. I do not believe we are to follow Paul in his ministry as an apostle because he never uses himself in this way as a model to follow, although he does demonstrate his apostolic life-style as authenticating his own authority (Act 20:18-27; 1Cor. 4:9-13). We are not all called to be apostles! Another area in which he is not a model is in his conversion experience – nowhere does he urge people to have a conversion experience like his, because his meeting with the risen Christ was unique (2 Cor.15:8); although we all need to be converted! He had a unique calling that is clearly outlined to him from the beginning (Acts 9:15-16; 14:15; 26:16-18). Paul does not expect us to follow him for this reason. Paul is a model for each one of us in his Christian experience of God, we call this

spirituality. Christian experience is also about how we relate to others in the family of God.

- Observe the realism and the humility of the apostle about himself “that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written” (1Cor.4:6).
- Read his description of his own life as an apostle (1Cor.4:9-13).
- His urging them to follow him was based on his unique relationship to them, they were his spiritual children. He had born them in Christ through the preaching of the gospel, and thus his appeal to them to: “*IMITATE ME*”. He told them that Timothy would remind them of “*my ways which be in Christ*” (v17).

2) 1 Cor. 11:1 “*Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ*”

Paul is not urging them to follow him because he is their spiritual father but he is urging them to copy him in his following of Christ, which was a pattern for them to follow. The Gospel’s portray Jesus as continually challenging the crowds and individuals to “*follow*” Him. All the disciples had been called to follow Him: “*Take up your cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk.9:23). Jesus’ last word to Peter was: “*You follow Me*” (Jn. 21:22). What did Jesus mean? He meant that the disciples were to embrace His teaching, His mission, and His core values and embrace a life-style that was costly in service to others and to become part of an intimate group of disciples who recognised the central figure of Jesus being the focus of their lives. Paul was not suggesting that he should replace that central Person but he was encouraging Christians to imitate his Christian life specifically in regard to the way in which he followed Christ and experienced the dynamic of His life. Can we take this a little further and discover what Paul means in the context in which he writes? When we go back to the situation at Corinth we see that Paul has been addressing the matter of idolatry. He had come out strongly and stated that behind the idols were demons (1Cor.10:20). In the light of this there were those believers who refused to eat meat that had been dedicated to idols out of sensitivity of conscience – all the meat in Corinth had been dedicated to idols! Paul also addressed those who were not at all sensitive but enjoyed a liberty that did not ask questions about the origins of such

meat but preferred to eat it asking no question – Paul was in this camp himself. He says elsewhere that *“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean”* (Rom.14:14). In the context of Romans Paul is dealing with a similar issue regarding conscience.

But the matter was not so simply resolved and Paul advocates sensitivity to those Christian brothers who seek to maintain their personal integrity by refusing to eat this meat. Christians are to imitate Paul in his selflessness and in his concern for the well being of the entire fellowship of God’s people and beyond that his concern for the salvation of those outside the family of God (10:33). Paul’s selfless regard for the conscience of the weaker brother for whom he is prepared to curtail his own Christian liberty stands in contrast to many Christians who despise those Christians whose scruples run counter to their own liberality of conscience. Paul’s freedom from himself also gave him the ability to identify with a wide spectrum of people, enabling him to transcend cultural, social, and ethnic barriers. He says, *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1Cor.9:19). In v22 he says *“to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”*

3) Gal. 4:12 *“Brethren, I urge you to become like me”*

What was Paul like? What is it that is so important about the change that had taken place in Paul’s life that they should follow him? He is not talking about the change that took place in his heart when he met Jesus, rather he is referring to the change in his attitude to the Law that he describes more fully in Philippians. Christian Jews who had been sent by James (Gal.2:12) had visited the churches in Galatia and told Paul’s converts that in order to be good Christians they must also keep the Law. Thus they had undermined the gospel that Paul had preached to them, but to do this they first had to discredit the messenger who had brought the gospel to them – by discrediting the messenger they were then able to undermine his gospel. This is the background to Paul’s urgent plea to be as he was. He was free from the Law as a means of justification before God and he was not required to keep the Law as a means of sanctification. In other words the keeping of the Law did not contribute to his spirituality, rather it undermined his gospel and bought new believers into the bondage of legality against which Paul was prepared to fight. His plea to the

Galatian Christians was to live in the true liberty of the children of God. His letter is an exposition of that liberation.

4) 1 Thess. 1:6 *“And you became followers of us and of the Lord”*

Paul by his own behaviour demonstrated what he taught. His life authenticates his gospel. In our previous reference it was noted how important the messenger was in the preaching of the gospel; making the gospel effective in people’s lives. This becomes clear as we read how Paul lived before the people in Thessalonica. Paul was clearly a model for them to emulate, and they followed his example. He gave a full description of how he preached and lived among them:

1. Boldness in preaching the gospel, despite conflict (1Thess. 2:2).
2. Integrity of heart (2: 3-6).
3. Gentle as a mother nursing her own child (2:7).
4. Strong affection and desire towards those they were winning to Christ (2:8).
5. Ceaseless labour and toil to provide their own needs rather than relying on new believers to meet their needs (2:9).
6. The life-style of the apostle was blameless and one of complete integrity (2:10).
7. Words of exhortation and comfort were given in a fatherly way for believers to walk worthy of God (2:11-12).

Their response to the gospel resulted in them becoming followers of Paul but in their response to persecution they became followers of the churches in Judea (2:14). In their response to the gospel they were also an example to other churches and they were so effective in their witness that they made Paul redundant! (1:7, 8). We can now see more clearly what Paul had in mind when he urged these new believers to follow his example – he was describing his behaviour towards them as

he had won them to Christ: behaviour that was characterised by gentleness, affection and integrity.

5) 2Thess. 3:7 *“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us.”*

V9 *“To make ourselves an example of how you should follow us” (read vv7-10).*

Again, Paul refers back to the time when they heard the gospel and observed the life-style of the messengers. Paul's pointed to his pattern of working manually to supply his own needs and those of his team. The believers were urged to work and not make themselves a burden on the church. It is important that Christian leaders provide a clear example to the flock as to how they work so that with integrity they can urge others to follow their example. We have one further Scripture that brings us to the very heart of Paul's experience as a Christian because I believe it is in regard to his Christian experience that he is also a model for us. As I said at the outset, it is not as an apostle that he urges Christians to follow him; nor does he ask them to follow him in his Damascus road experience, but he describes his personal experience of Jesus Christ and his inner experience with Him. This he does in Phil. Ch.3. We each have to meet Jesus face to face and to experience new life in Him, which is a unique experience for each one of us.

PAUL – A MODEL FOR CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW IN THE CONTEXT OF PHIL.CH.3

When Paul (Saul) met Jesus of Nazareth on the Damascus Road his entire values were overturned and everything he had believed and stood for was examined in the light of his encounter with the Lord Jesus. Those things that had been his core-values as a Jew he now viewed as *“refuse”* or garbage in comparison to the worth of Christ. Paul had quickly realised that the risen Jesus who met him was indeed the Christ because he immediately began to preach in the synagogues *“that He is the Son of God”* (Acts 9:20). The accounts that we have of Paul's conversion are all from Luke (Acts 9:1-19; 22:4-16; 26:9-19). In his letters Paul only refers to this event three times (Gal. 1:11-17; Phil. 3:2-11; Rom. 7:13-25). Luke also records the events that followed Paul's conversion, his filling with the Holy Spirit and his baptism. These verses could be entitled, *“What makes a man tick.”* It is the only occasion when Paul opens the window of his heart and shows us its inner workings.

Imagine a Grandfather clock, you are listening to the resonant sound of the clock ticking loudly and then you unlock and open the door behind the clock face to see the inner mechanisms of the clock – the movement of the wheels turning and the working of the gears that gain their momentum from the swinging motion of the weighted pendulum. (I have a secret ambition to make a Grandfather clock!). Paul opens the door of his heart to show us how it ticks with passion and drive for Christ.

6) Phil. 3:17 “Brethren, join in following my example and note those who so walk as you have us for a pattern”.

This key verse must be viewed in context of this chapter which gives us the clearest and fullest account of Paul’s Christian experience. He wrote from the context of his former roots in Judaism and from the background of those Christian Jews who wanted to incorporate vital elements of Judaism into Christianity. Paul addressed this issue in his letter to the Galatians. The pivotal issue regarding the gospel was justification by faith as opposed to justification by works (Gal.2:16; cf. Rom.Ch.4; 10:3; see also Rom.2:29). He spoke of his former life as a devout Jew,

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil.3:5-6).

In a society that has no concept of righteousness or real structures and Laws which promote and foster righteousness we may not have met a person who made such claims for himself. The standard testimony today seems to be the opposite – it is rather how bad I was! What he counted loss he continued to consider as worthless in comparison with *“the knowledge of Christ Jesus **my** Lord”* (Phil. 3:8). (I have emphasised the personal pronoun because throughout Paul is intensely personal as he is recounts his own living experience of Christ). The blamelessness he talks of here is “legal perfection” and is not the blamelessness he speaks of in Ephesians, *“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and **blameless** before Him in love” (Eph.1:4).* Here Paul is describing the blamelessness of perfect love, blamelessness *before* God and not man. If we give this word “blameless” (v6) the meaning of legal perfection then we have three

perfections described by Paul. The second perfection he has not yet attained to (v12) which refers to a future perfection; the third perfection he has attained (v15). This word sums up the totality of all that Paul describes in the context of his experience of Christ.

Luke puts the life of the apostle into the context of the early church, his meeting with Jesus and his subsequent missionary journeys. Paul gives further information about his trials in the context of his pursuit of mission (Acts Ch.20; 1Cor.Ch.11). The other autobiographical passage that reveals the heart of the apostle is Rom.Ch.7. It may not be difficult to understand Paul's struggle with the Law but it may be more difficult to place in the context of Paul's spiritual journey.

Our intention is to focus on the key verses where the apostle describes his experience of Christ in the present tense (vv8-21).

V7 There is a direct link with the previous verse where we read that Paul had "counted loss for Christ" the righteousness of the law. His evaluation had not changed since that time, ***"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus"*** (v8). Paul is speaking of that which is of primary important to him as a Christian, not only to have met Jesus "in the flesh" but also to understand the truth about Him. Paul revealed the truths about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the meaning of His cross for salvation. The truth of His return, and the nature of the church; Paul's teaching is contained in his *"apostle's doctrine"* (Eph.4:4-6) and was first expounded during his 12 months stay in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:26). It is truth that leads to salvation. This revelation of truth about Jesus came to Paul when he met Jesus and asked: *"Who are you Lord?"* His ignorance was replaced by the knowledge of Christ Jesus, *"I am Jesus who you are persecuting"* (Acts 9:5).

Further knowledge and revelation came to Paul as a result of his unique calling to be a preacher and teacher but also resulted from his great passion for Jesus (Eph.3:3-5; Gal.1:11-12). Paul prayed for the "holy ones" at Ephesus *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"* (Eph.1:17 and vv18-19). This reference to knowledge links directly with Phil.3:8. Paul's greatest contribution to the church in

subsequent generations was the letters he wrote which became a significant part of the New Testament Scriptures.

From vv9-11 Paul focuses on the positive side of his experience by presenting the three fundamental categories of salvation. In Rom.8:29-30 Paul speaks of those who have been justified, those who have been conformed to the image of Christ and those who have been glorified. Here Paul describes (1) those who have been **justified** “by the righteousness of God, which is by faith” (v9), (2) those who are **sanctified** (experiencing the resurrection power of Jesus as well as participating in His sufferings) (v10), and (3) those who are **glorified** who “attain to the resurrection of the dead” (v11). These three fundamental elements of salvation represent the past, present and future, we have been justified by God, we are being sanctified by the power of the risen Christ and we will be raised in glory at the return of Jesus. Each requires further exposition which Paul does not give at this point.

V9 “And be found in Him” Paul referred to the righteousness which he has found in Christ. This great truth of justification by faith was restored to the church at the time of the Reformation. Paul pointed to the faith of Jesus who believed God for our justification, reconciliation, and our living experience of Christ. Paul speaks of “*the righteousness of God*” which is by faith (v9b). The righteousness provided by Christ stands in stark contrast to the attainable righteousness of the Law that Paul had attained and subsequently rejected. The righteousness gained by Christ has been reckoned to Paul by faith (Rom.4:24; see also Rom.3:33; Gal.3:22). Paul proceeded from justification to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the heart. Reckoning by faith on the finished work of Christ he declared that the Christian has died with Christ, and has been raised with Him. He described this as God revealing His Son “*in me*” (Gal. 1:16, 24).

V10 “That I may know Him and the power of his resurrection” Paul speaks of three aspirations here, (1) to know Him, (2) to know His power and (3) to fellowship in His sufferings. Firstly, the knowledge he longs for is not intellectual but experimental. This is the knowledge gained by the disciples who followed Jesus day by day. They saw Jesus living among them, they saw Him in action. He didn’t hold seminars on

healing; rather He healed people and invited His disciples to participate by faith in His activity.

Secondly, the power of His resurrection is the indwelling Spirit of life that enables the Christian to triumph over adversity and sin. Paul is not talking about the power to perform miracles, but he is relating the resurrection and the cross to his own experience. This was a central truth for Paul (Rom.6:3-11); *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me”* (Gal. 2:20). It is significant that Paul speaks firstly about the resurrection before the cross, because we cannot embrace the sufferings that are part of discipleship until we have first experienced the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in our lives. Paul described *“the exceeding greatness of His power”* that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph.1:19-20; Rom.1:4). That same power is at work in those who believe who likewise have been raised by the power of God and are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Paul longs to know more of this power that raised Christ. Living in the heavenlies becomes possible by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

We must also account for the third part of Paul’s statement placing alongside his prayer for knowledge and power his desire to participate in the sufferings of Christ, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Phil.3:10). Like the previous two desires he does not engage in exposition but simply states these three fundamental matters that for Paul summed up his aspirations. He does not explain here what he means by the participating in Christ’s sufferings although we know from other Scriptures what this entailed for him as an apostle. The final statement is really complementary to the previous one, *“being made conformable to His death”* (v10). What does that mean for us today? An exposition of the cross life requires living examples of sacrificial living, those who “die daily” (1Cor.15:31) and take up their cross daily and follow the example/model of Jesus Christ (Lk.9:23; Phil.2:8). Just as genuine knowledge of God translates into knowing God in experience, so genuine identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection translates into living a crucified life of selflessness, summed up in the words of Paul, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gal.2:20).

Looking at Philippians as a whole the part of the letter that has been the focus of attention is the important Christological section (2:5-11). What is important for us is the reason for this focus on the humility of Christ. Jesus is presented to us as a model of humility with an exhortation to follow His example. It is not coincidental what follows in terms of Paul's experience. We recognise clear parallels between the life of Christ and that of the apostle particularly with regard to the cross, the resurrection and the exaltation/glorification. The parallels are quite striking.

Recognizing that Jesus Christ is employed by Paul as a model of spirituality and that Paul also is a secondary model of true spirituality where does that place us? Firstly it brings home to us the urgent need for us to be models of genuine godliness to others who know Christ and those who have not encountered Christ. But one further matter that I want to introduce into the picture is simply that we live our lives before HIM. Before Christ or Paul were "ensamples" to others they were ensamples to God (Phil.3:17; 1Thes.1:7; 2Thes.3:9). This is shown to us by Job when God boasted to Satan concerning His servant, *"Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"* (**Job 1:8**).

It does matter how we live, especially how we live before God. The same lesson could be drawn from the example of Noah, *"Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God"* (**Gen.6:9**). The Lord requires that we firstly live before Him, *"The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless"* (**Gen.17:1; Deut.10:12**). We are accountable to God, to each other and to the world to live godly lives that are well pleasing to God and a benediction to His people and to be salt and light to the world.

V11 "that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" This is the ultimate accomplishment of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. Paul does not separate these great events. The Christian has not only a part in Christ's death and resurrection but he has a part in the exaltation of Jesus. *"And (God) raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (**Eph. 2:6**). Nor does it end here – Paul saw our exaltation opening for us the great expanse of eternity, the future age for us has already begun when we received heaven's throne

gift in the Person of the Holy Spirit. God who is rich in mercy and love has shown to us His grace and kindness in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

God's ultimate purposes for us will not be realised in this life – they require eternity for their fulfilment. The “after life” ought to have a great attraction for us; Paul said: *“I have a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better”* (Phil. 1:23). The means of reaching this ultimate goal is not easy. Paul described the Christian life as a race in which the only winner is the person who disciplines himself in training; *“I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”* (1 Cor.9:27) and attains the goal. There is no question that the demands that Paul makes on himself are far greater than those he makes on others and that many of his sufferings were the result of his calling to preach the gospel (Acts 9:16).

V12 “Not that I have already attained or am already perfected” Paul has not yet arrived at the ultimate goal of perfection (Heb. 12:23). He speaks of this perfection when he teaches about the resurrection body (1Cor. 15:51-54; 2Cor. 5:1-4) and the ultimate attainment of immortality. It is the completion of our salvation in Christ. Paul is not content to view this life in the future as if it was something safe, he is stretching out with all his power and energy to “lay hold” of all that Christ has already stretched out for and obtained for him. This man is consumed by spiritual energy – Paul's is a purpose driven life! He is focused on Christ and all that is to be appropriated from/in Him. Paul said quite categorically that he has not yet appropriated all that there is for him in Christ but he is pressing on to the goal! This is the picture of the runner set on the prize (1Cor.9:24-27).

This picture of Paul focused and employing all his energies in the Christian race is the picture that he presented for us to follow and to imitate. The prize that Paul sought was the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This call came to him as to each of the disciples of Jesus who called them to follow Him. It was not only a call to discipleship but to fellowship with the risen Jesus that transcends life and takes us into eternity where Christ dwells in all His fullness. When we attain that ultimate perfection we will no longer be hindered by imperfections and weaknesses that hinder our pursuit and enjoyment of God (2 Cor.12:30).

Paul says, *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Cor.3:18 see also 4:6)*. Jesus has opened heaven for us, poured His grace upon us and made all the resources of the Holy Spirit accessible to us. We must not limit God but we must recognize that all these wonderful blessing from God are not only for our pleasure but for the purpose of mission and that we are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in *“the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil.3:10)*.

V15 “as many as are mature have this mind” The word “mature” is the same word that was translated “perfect” in v12 and shows the difficulty of translating this word. The Greek word here is *“teleioi”* which literally means “perfect ones” and we can translate the sentence: *“as many of us then as are perfect”*. I do not think that the word “maturity” gives us the meaning of Paul and perhaps a better word would be “completed”. I am concerned that we do not impose on the word ideas of our own; we must always allow the text to impose upon a word its own meaning. Paul uses this word twice in this passage to describe a perfection that he has **not** yet attained (v12); he is emphatic about this, and here he speaks of a perfection that he has attained too. Surely all that Paul has described about his own heart experience in these verses must contain the answer to the meaning of this word. Let us remind ourselves that we are not referring to those strong aspirations that Paul has expressed that focus on realities that will be ours in the future in Christ, but that which is our possession **now** in Christ.

I believe the answer is to be found in v9, where Paul speaks of: *“the righteousness which is of God by faith”*, which has been obtained for Paul by *“the faith of Christ”*. That is an attainment of Christ through the cross that requires nothing to be added to it, it is complete and through faith in Christ is now my possession as the gift of God. I rejoice in that completed work. Previously, Paul had sought for righteousness through keeping the Law, and he says that that he had attained to blamelessness. But in comparison, the blamelessness he now enjoys as the result of Christ’s righteousness he now views in comparison as refuse. The foundation of my Christian experience is the salvation won by Jesus Christ on my behalf. All that Christ has accomplished is now mine; it is my possession in Christ. All the benefits of

Christ's redemption become mine when I experience new birth. Certainly new birth is a completed work in our heart, on which we can build. Paul says that we *"have been saved"*, that we *"are being saved"*, and that we *"will be saved!"* Paul describes the work of new birth when he says "you are the workmanship of God, created in Him" (Eph.2:10). I will not immediately realize all that is mine in Christ. The full extent of Paul's understanding of Christian experience requires us to explore the meaning of being *"in Christ"*, as in the book of Ephesians and his other letters (the teaching does not originate with Paul but with Jesus – Jn.Ch.17).

Paul concludes this section of Ch.3 by urging Christians to follow his example (Phil.3:17). It is important to note that Paul's confident advocating of himself as an archetype/prototype is not because of himself but because of God's initiative and power in his life. Paul does not present himself as having attained the ultimate spirituality. Here in Philippians he says he has not yet attained to the ultimate perfection that is only attainable after death. He does speak of having attained *"perfection"* (translated in the KJV (A.V.) as "perfection"). Alongside these Scriptures we must take into account Paul's reference's to weakness and infirmity so that we do not end up with an example set before us that is unattainable and idealistic. This will only produce a false spirituality, an idealism and a legalism that is most unlike the great apostle who said *"that you might learn in us not to think of men above what is written"* (1 Cor.4:6; see also 2Cor. 11:30; 12:9-10).

Whatever may be the dangers of looking to others as models of spirituality there is no doubt that we need to see genuine models of spirituality and by that I mean Christian character as outlined by Paul in the context of leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-13); these qualities are not only for leaders but they are the character qualities that result from meeting Jesus and being transformed by Him and apply to all.

7) 1Tim.1:16 "However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."

If I had not dealt with these references chronologically I would have placed this verse first, although in terms of Paul's letters it is in its right sequence. The two letters to Timothy are like Paul's last will and testament. He is giving to his son Timothy his final charge, although, at the same time he is not slackening his

responsibilities in the Lord's work (2Tim.Ch.4). He says *"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"* (4:6-8). Similar sentiments are expressed by Paul in Phil.1:23-25.

Such insights into Paul's aspirations and hopes and his practical conclusions regarding the necessity of his remaining here to assist the Philippians in their spiritual growth shows to us that there are many aspects of Paul's life that model godly aspirations and godly attitudes to ministry apart from those occasions when he specifically calls Christians to follow his example. We often speak about the importance of Christian leadership, but it is equally important to realize that a life lived by the indwelling Holy Spirit, reproducing the gracious fruit of the Spirit is a life that we instinctively want to emulate and follow. We may all lead by living a godly life. In the church, the body of Christ each brother and sister leads by virtue of godliness and the Spirit's agape love. In terms of Christian service we lead by those same qualities of sacrifice and endurance that we see demonstrated in the labours of the apostle Paul. No man can reproduce those qualities of service unless he has been called and anointed by God to Christian ministry.

This verse must be viewed in the immediate context in which it is written. Paul is sharing with Timothy about *"the exceeding abundant"* grace of our Lord towards him who had formerly been *"a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief"* (v13). Paul applies to himself the gospel of salvation, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"* (v15). He describes himself this way because he had vigorously persecuted the church. In retrospect he sees that he obtained mercy from the Lord that others may look to him and so seek from God like mercy and grace. Paul is not only an example of Christ likeness and Christian service but he is also an example of one who found grace and mercy from the Lord despite his deep sinfulness towards the Lord Jesus and the children of God. He is an example of gospel grace. Christ's *"unlimited patience"* had been shown to him as an example to all who would believe in Jesus

for eternal life. Paul preached the gospel from an overflowing heart of gratitude to the Lord. He speaks of *“the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gal.2:20).

Paul says there is a reason for mercy, and it is to this end that others follow our example and that we give ourselves to the service of God. There are two aspects to this model, the first one is the amazing grace of God extended to *“the chief of sinners”* through Christ’s unlimited patience towards Paul and the second is that Paul is a model as the recipient of such mercy and grace. This is true for us all. We first testify to the Lord’s abundant grace towards us and His unlimited patience in bringing us to Himself. Only then do we speak of ourselves as the recipient of such grace and mercy. We can all stand alongside Paul here as testifying to the Lord’s grace that brought us to the Saviour and testify with incredulity that I was the object of His favour and love. Thus we can say with the apostle Paul *“I am a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”*

This material was taken from my Module entitled: [Biblical Models of Leadership](#) in the section dealing with the leadership of Paul. (You will find the entire Course on my website). It has changed significantly due to further thought and preaching.

I preached twice recently at Leominster Fellowship on this subject prompting me to re-examine this again.

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