

"Be Imitators of Me"

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"Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me." (1 Cor 4:16)

Read 1 Cor 4:14-21

The word imitate is our word mimic. We sometimes find ourselves struggling with the idea of following a man instead of Christ, but what does Paul mean by this idea? Is he putting himself in place of Christ or between the disciple and Christ? Consider the idea as it is found throughout the New Testament (1 Cor 11:1, Eph 5:1).

1 Cor 11:1 Be **imitators** of me, just as I also am of Christ.
Eph 5:1 Therefore be **imitators** of God, as beloved children;

As can be noted, Paul's assumption is that whatever is noteworthy in the leader is only because of what God is doing in and through the individual. There is nothing noteworthy in the absence of Christ.

Have you ever been in thick woods at night without a flashlight? Visibility is almost non-existent. You are somewhat lost and unable to find your way through the woods. And then an individual comes along with a flashlight. You call out to them and they call out to you to follow them, but what you are following is the light. It wasn't the flashlight that led you to safety, but the individual holding the flashlight. You do not give praise to the flashlight, but to the individual. Even though you could not see the individual, you knew that the flashlight had someone behind it.

So it is with Paul's exhortation to be imitators of him. He saw himself as the "flashlight", but the one holding him was Christ. And his disciples in following the "flashlight" were actually following Christ.

This holds true for all of the exhortations in the New Testament to be imitators of something other than a direct statement to imitate Christ.

Sometimes the imitation is a repeating of a pattern or experience (1Thes 1:6, 2:14). At other times the imitation is a following of a similar faith or belief or conduct (2 Thes 3:7, Heb 6:12, 13:7, 1 Pt 3:13, 3 Jn 11).

The object mentioned is only the "flashlight" God is holding to guide His people through the darkness of this age.

In our individualistic culture, children do not always follow in their father's vocational footsteps. In a culture that was pre-industrial, children often did follow in the trade of their parents. Therefore, in Paul's generation it would have been the most natural thing for him to say what has been said.

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What is it that Paul would have them imitate? Paul wants them to embrace the centrality of Christ in the local assembly. We see this in 1:23 and 2:2.

1 Cor 1:23 **but we preach Christ crucified**, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

1 Corinthians 2:2 **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**

There is nothing noteworthy in Paul. Paul does not contradict what he has already said in 1 Cor 1:31, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”, or in 3:21, “Let no one boast in men.” Paul’s exhortation sees Christ in and through His people.

God uses people like we use “flashlights.” They help lead the way, but they are not the true leaders for this is only true of God, yet we are flashlights none-the-less. May it please God to fill the WBC fellowship with a host of flashlights that will be used **by Him** to guide many **to Him.**

Such a petition is in keeping with our Lord’s statement in His Sermon on the Mount where He said, “Let your [flashlight] shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16).”