

IMITATORS OF GOD

"Therefore be imitators of God...and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma," Ephesians 5:1-2.

Here, as in most of the New Testament, the church is instructed on witnessing; how to serve. And, here, we see the **dual teaching** from God's word; a difference between being saved and serving, correctly. First, Paul tells of what Christ did on our behalf and then, he instructs us to imitate the Lord.

However, this has been a huge problem for the religious world. The world fails to know the difference between His work, and our work of imitation.

To me, the Bible is a clear story of love. God so loved that Jesus came to redeem fallen man. Nothing can be added to His finished salvation. But, we hear: *'What about this verse that says?'* ... and, quite a list can be cited that call men to be baptized, hold out till the end, and those verses that teach a loss of reward.

However, did Jesus finish the course or not? Is He the only Person to do so? Of course, He is! Our judgment then shall be about our witness of His work; never can we do what He did. We can't initiate it; nor keep it.

Yet, there is a difference between being saved and inheriting the kingdom. To aid us in seeing the truth about two positions, we ought to set the gospel within the framework of the Great Commission. His death, burial and resurrection is the gospel (See 1st Cor. 15).

And, in the great commission, Jesus said to Go, Preach and teach. Then, baptize those who trust in His finished work, as taught in the gospel. Finally, instruct them on how to live; how to be imitators, Matthew 28:19-20.

Here's M. A. Vine's definition of the word, **Imitator**. *"The verb (mimeomai) is always used in exhortations, and always in the continuous tense, suggesting a constant habit or practice," Expository dictionary on N. T. words, pg 248.*

"Imitate" means to "to act or mime." Can't you just see yourself, all dressed out, acting on behalf of Christ? Before you **"mime"** out any move, you carefully pray about it. "Is this in the love of God?" you ask.

Praying before moving is wise. The role, for anyone claiming the name of Christ, is eternally serious. Church members know this and they assemble often to insure their prayer life is up to date. Members throw themselves into every act, feeling the love for God, the lost world and, for other members of His body, the church. They are imitators of God.

While, the noun comes from *MIMETES* in the Greek, we read the King James Version that translates the word to mean "Followers," most often. And, there are a lot of Bible teachings on how to act out and "mime" the teachings of Christ; no matter what version you use.

Some verses have Paul telling believers to: "Follow him," I Cor. 4:16. In doing so, we "Follow God," Eph. 5:1; and, "the Lord," I Thess. 1:6. Then, in I Thess. 2:14, Paul writes of "Followers of the churches of God..."

Missionary Baptists love to follow the churches of God. We believe in a lineage of the Lord's church that goes back to its Founder, Jesus Christ. In fact, if we shake the chain of Baptists Churches, our faithful ears hear the sound rattle all the way back to Jerusalem. It's a great sound.

Shaking our ecclesiastical chain is a good thing! It is Scripture. And, as we know, every believer must have Scripture to imitate, and follow the truth. Further, "shaking" gives the church member a sense of "following the church of God," obeying the gospel, and doing what the Apostles did.

Understanding church perpetuity brings such sweetness to the believer's heart. A history of truth is behind him; which, in part, allows him to imitate God, in love. He was taught how to imitate.

Thus, Ephesians 3:21 carries the powerful truth on the subject of imitating. "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end."

Has there been a time without the church? No! And, this is so important; for, back when the church began, the Head told Peter, "...Upon this Rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matthew 16:18. How far back - without a change in doctrine - does your church history go?

An imitator is a disciple and, a disciple is a "follower of Christ." Yet, we are aware that many do not continue to follow. They forget discipline and go back to the world. Even though it has always been this way, it ought not be; for the Bible instructs us to keep on keeping on.

Just ponder these powerful and instructive words. "...shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," Hebrews 6:11-12.

There is a difference between being saved and serving.