

November 15th, 2020

Imitate Me

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

The negative and positive commands

Throughout Scripture, the Lord doesn't just give us negative commands—telling us what not to do; but He also gives us positive commands—telling us what we ought to do. When God gave the negative command: “You shall have no other gods before me” (**Exodus 20:3**), He also provided the positive command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (**Deuteronomy 6:5**). We see the same phenomenon in the NT. **Ephesians 4:28** “Let the thief no longer steal [*negative command*] but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need [*positive command*].” Why am I stressing this? Because I think the most difficult part of the Christian life is the *how*? Now that I am no longer part of the world, now that I am united to Christ *how* do I live? I know that I can no longer live like *that*, but *how* should I then live?

Paul's wrap-up: “imitate me”

That's how Paul is wrapping up 1 Corinthians 4. Last time we saw Paul told the Corinthians what not to do or what not to be. They ought not to be (v. 6) “...puffed up in favor of one against another.” Their arrogance and self-love was causing the factions and divisions in the Corinthians Church. So he's spent time doing the negative work: ‘Don't be like this.’ In our passage this morning Paul does the positive work. “Be like this.” Like what? ‘Like me,’ Paul says. v. 16 “I urge you, then, *be imitators of me*.” When the Lord Jesus Christ called the Apostle Paul into service, Jesus did not just make Him *the teacher* of the NT Church. Jesus also made Paul *a pattern* for us to follow. In other words, when we ask the question: How should I live as a Christian? Paul answers: ‘imitate

me.’ God has graciously given us the Apostle Paul to help fill in the gap between theological truths and practical living. Dear congregation isn’t this one of the things you struggle with most? You know that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead for you, but you don’t know how to apply that truth when you face temptation, or suffering, or disagreements with others. The theology in your head is silent in your heart. How do you bridge the gap between Sunday and the rest of the week? Paul gives the Divinely inspired answer: imitate me. He is not only the master theologian of the Church, but he is the master of practical living. Paul shows us what it means to live this life as a follower of Jesus Christ.

The Big Idea...

Christ gave us the Apostle Paul as a example of how to live the Christian life,
therefore imitate him

- ☆ The Command to Imitate Paul
- ☆ The Ways to Imitate Paul
- ☆ The Reason to Imitate Paul

I. The Command to Imitate Paul

Paul’s rebuke

Paul really went after the Corinthians in the last section we covered. Look at v.8 “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!” Paul is dripping with sarcasm and rebuke because they were acting as if the gospel was another worldly philosophy by which they

could distinguish themselves from one another.¹ That's how the culture of Corinth acted. To follow this philosopher or that philosopher determined your social credit. The Corinthian Church simply brought that mindset in the Church. The modern Church does the same thing. To my shame I have done the same thing. When I first believed the Doctrines of Grace or Calvinism I considered myself higher up on the spiritual ladder than my Arminian brothers and sisters. That's the type of arrogance Paul is rebuking here. But it's not just a Reformed problem. It happens all across the spectrum. In Charismatic circles, there is hierarchy between those who speak in tongues and those who do not. Paul is addressing the inclination in all of us to puff ourselves up in favor over others.

Paul's admonishment

But now he changes his tone. Look at v.14 "I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as *my beloved children*." Paul's emphasis in this last section of chapter four is that of a relationship between a father and his loved children. And just as a father's main purpose is not to shame his daughter when she does something wrong, but rather to correct her and to lead her in righteousness, so Paul's main purpose is not to bury the Corinthians in

¹ Calvin says here: "He censures their ambition; he reproveth them for transforming the gospel into human philosophy; he shows that they are destitute of the efficacy of the Spirit, inasmuch as they are taken up with mere ornaments of speech, and seek after a mere dead letter; but not a word is there as to a single false doctrine. Hence I conclude that they were persons who did not openly take away any thing from the substance of the gospel, but, as they burned with a misdirected eagerness for distinction, I am of opinion that, with the view of making themselves admired, they contrived a new method of teaching, at variance with the simplicity of Christ. This must necessarily be the case with all that have not as yet thrown off self, that they may engage unreservedly in the Lord's work. The first step towards serving Christ is to lose sight of ourselves, and think only of the Lord's glory and the salvation of men. Farther, no one will ever be qualified for teaching that has not first himself tasted the influence of the gospel, so as to speak not so much with the mouth, as with the dispositions of the heart. Hence, those that are not regenerated by the Spirit of God — not having felt inwardly the influence of the gospel, and know not what is meant when it is said that we must become new creatures, (*John 3:7*) have a dead preaching, whereas it ought to be lively and efficacious; and, with the view of playing off their part, they disfigure the gospel by painting it over, so as to make it a sort of worldly philosophy." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 39

shame but to help correct them of their faults. That's what admonish means: to warn or convince someone of a fault; to reprove them with mildness.²

Paul's spiritual fatherhood

Paul is gentle with the Corinthians precisely because he was their spiritual father. **v.15** "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became *your father* in Christ Jesus through the gospel." These *countless guides* Paul refers to are the other teachers the Church enjoyed. We have countless guides today, we can listen to any teacher or preacher from around the world with the click of a button. But Paul is saying that he stands in a special and different relationship than any other teacher. Not because other teachers or pastors are defective in love, or authority. Rather because as an Apostle, Paul is *the human instrument* that Christ used to bring into life the NT Church. That's what father's do—they beget *life*, they author *life*, they originate *life*. **Ephesians 2:19-20** "...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, *built on the foundation of the apostles*." That's what Paul means, end of **v.15** "I became *your father* in Christ Jesus through the gospel." In other words, Paul is saying 'I begot you—no one else did—I am your spiritual father in Christ.'³ And it's no less true for us: Paul is our spiritual father. How can I say that? Because Paul *the apostle* to the Gentiles. **Acts 9:15** "...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name *before the Gentiles*." **Ephesians 3:8** "To me...this grace was given, *to preach to the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ." **1 Timothy 2:7** "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle...*a teacher of the Gentiles* in faith and truth."⁴ The entire Gentile world for the last 2,000 years have been spiritually begotten through the ministry of the Apostle

² Dear Church, consider Paul's method when have to correct another brother or sister because of some grievous sin. Your aim should not be to shame them, though that may happen. Your aim is to restore them. **Galatians 6:1** "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

³ Jesus told Paul the same thing in Acts 26:17-18 "I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God."

⁴ also cf. Galatians 2:7-8; Colossians 1:25-29

Paul. After Christ ascended into Heaven, the Gentile world received it directly from his missionary work and letters. Since then, Gentiles have received the gospel either from those who received it directly from him or through his writings in the NT. Paul is the human instrumental father of the entire Gentile Church. Beloved that makes your relationship to the Apostle Paul the most special of all human relationships. His NT letters to you are letters from a father to a son, or a daughter.

Paul's command

It's on that basis, that Paul makes his one command in our passage. **v.16** "I urge you, then, be *imitators* of me." The Greek word is μιμητής [me-ma-ta's] It's where we get the English word *mimic*. Paul is saying: "Mimic me, copy me, replicate me, make yourself a clone of me." So here's the positive command that he's offering to the Corinthians and us. He gave the negative command: 'Don't puff yourselves up, don't arrogant with each other.' Ok Paul, then how do we live? Paul answers with the positive command: 'do what I do—imitate me.' And this isn't the only place where Paul gives such a command. He's going to say it again in **11:1** "Be imitators of me.."

Philippians 3:17 "Brothers, *join in imitating me*, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

Additionally, other Biblical authors tell to imitate those godly saints that have gone before us.⁵

Hebrews tells us to imitate the faith of the patriarchs. **Hebrews 6:12** "*be... imitators of those* who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

⁵ Also cf. Romans 4:16

James tells us to imitate the example of the prophets. **James 5:10** “*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*”

Answering some objections

Now before we get into how we are to imitate the Apostle Paul, we have to answer some objections. We have three such objections. **First**, someone might say “Isn’t Paul contradicting himself? Hasn’t he been telling us all along that we shouldn’t be followers of men? He rebuked the Corinthians creating factions: “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” How do we answer that? Paul’s command to imitate him would mean the death of factions, because he was not factious. His one aim was to bring unity of mind and spirit to the Church.⁶ So no Paul is not contradicting Himself.

Secondly someone might ask: “But isn’t Paul arrogant to make such a claim that all Christians should imitate him?” Paul did not speak as *merely* Paul. **2 Peter 1:21** says “...no [Scripture]⁷ was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”⁸ The Holy Spirit moved Paul to write these words. It is the Holy Spirit behind Paul, in Paul, and above Paul that is telling us to imitate him. So no Paul is not arrogant, he humbly obeying God when he gave us this command.

Thirdly, someone might object: “But shouldn’t we just imitate Jesus? Why should we imitate a man?” Now I think this is the best objection and the one we should think most carefully about. Should we imitate Jesus? Absolutely. Jesus said in **John 13:15** “For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” **1 Peter 2:21** says “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, *so that you might follow in his steps.*” **1 John 2:6** “...whoever says he abides in him [in

⁶ 1:10

⁷ Original—“prophecy”—I changed it to “Scripture” here because I believe it carries essentially the same meaning.

⁸ Every word He wrote in Scripture was breathed out by God (**2 Timothy 3:16**).

Christ] *ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*⁹ So yes it's true that we ought to imitate Jesus. *And* it's true that we are *only* supposed to imitate Paul as he is imitating Jesus. **1 Corinthians 11:1** says "Be imitators of me, *as I am of Christ.*" Jesus Christ is the perfect rule and pattern for our imitation. No man can surpass Him, not Moses, not David, and not the Apostle Paul.

Two reasons why God calls us to imitate Paul¹⁰

However there are two very important reasons why God *also calls us to imitate Paul* and not just Jesus alone. **First** though Jesus was made like us in every respect—truly man—in order to redeem us, He is in a fundamentally different position than us. Jesus Christ as the God-man is head of the Church. We are not to imitate Him in that respect. But we can imitate Paul, because we, like him, are members of Christ's Church. Additionally, Jesus Christ is Lord of Lord and King of kings. We can't imitate Him in this respect. But we can and ought to imitate Paul in what it means to be Jesus's subject and disciple.

The **second** reason God calls us to imitate Paul and not just Jesus alone is because although Jesus was made like us in every respect, He never sinned. **Hebrews 4:15** says that Jesus "...in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Here's the problem: we need to know how to follow Jesus *with* a sinful nature. Paul had a sinful nature. Paul had the same corruption that we have, the same lustful heart, the same wicked thoughts. He said in **Romans 7:18** "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." Furthermore before Paul was converted, he was a very wicked man, a murderer of Christians, he calls himself the chief of sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15**). Therefore God provided us with Paul, a fellow sinner, *to imitate*—because he possessed the same corruption that we do. Christ could not give us an example *in Himself* of how to repent for sin, how to be broken over sin, or how to mortify sin. This is not

⁹ also cf. Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 2:5; 1 John 3:16

¹⁰ So much help here from Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 855 & 866

because there is a deficiency on Christ's part, but rather ours. Therefore Jesus directs us to imitate Paul as an example of a redeemed sinner. That is something Jesus never was.

Christ's kindness in giving us Paul

Dear congregation, consider the great kindness in God in giving us a sinner like Paul to imitate. It's true that no one is more excellent than the LORD Jesus Christ. But if all we had was Christ to imitate, then we would be left with no true likeness to imitate. Because Jesus is infinitely holy and perfect, we can never look to Him to show us how *to feel* as a sinner. This is no small thing. Several of you have said that you appreciate it when I share my own sins with you, because you often feel those same things. Don't you see beloved? That's why God gave us the Apostle Paul to imitate. How many of you have found comfort in the darkness of your sin when you remember what the Apostle Paul said? "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (**Romans 7:15**)? Loved ones, Paul is a gift from Christ. He has already stood in our place. And he shows us the way to follow Christ as a sinner. So imitate him. That's our **first point**.

II. The Ways to Imitate Paul

Paul sends his own heart to Corinth

Paul is so concerned that the Corinthians would learn to imitate him that he sends them Timothy in order to teach them Paul's manner of life. Please look at **v.17** "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church." This *Timothy* that Paul mentions is the same Timothy that Paul wrote to in the books of 1-2 Timothy. He was either the current pastor or the soon to be the pastor at the Church at Ephesus. Remember, Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this letter. When he heard of all the problems, he decided to send

Timothy, his most trusted co-laborer in the faith.¹¹ Paul said of him in **Philippians 2:20** “*For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.*” That’s why Paul called him “...my beloved and faithful child...” Again this shows us how much Paul loved the Church. I’ve heard pastors talk about how they would never want to serve in this particular Church or that particular Church because of how hard the people were, and how many problems they had. But Paul is sending the tender hearted and timid Timothy to the most-difficult Church in the 1st century because he refused to give up on them.

Timothy’s mission

What was Timothy to do when he arrived? **v.17**, he was “to *remind you* of my ways in Christ...” Stop there. Apparently the Corinthians had forgotten about *Paul’s ways in Christ*. Timothy was going to remind them. They forgot how Paul had lived out the gospel in his own life. They remembered some of Paul’s words, but they had completely forgotten how to live out Paul’s words. You see, the Corinthians were just like us. We can know so much of the Bible, but then forget how to apply the Bible in loving our spouses, or going to work, or raising children, or pursuing a career, or fighting addiction, or voting in elections, or being a citizen. There are Christian ways to do all these things. What often happens in the Christian life is that we realize that because of Christ we have been forgiven of our sin, and promised eternal life, but we forget that we have been given a whole new identity. One author called this “gospel identity amnesia.”¹² What’s wrong with people who have amnesia? They forget who they are. They forget what family they belong to or what job they had. They are lost, because they have forgotten. Beloved how many of you have gospel identity amnesia? You know what Jesus did for you in the past and you know what He promises for you in the future, but you don’t know what it means for

¹¹ He hadn’t yet arrived-1 Corinthians 16:10.

¹² Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, (Greensboro, NC.: New Growth Press, 2008), pg. 5

life right now? The Corinthians had this problem, and so they adopted another identity—the identity of the surrounding culture. That’s why the Church was in such disarray, because it was trying to live like the world. Some of your lives are in disarray *right now* because you have forgotten who you are and have adopted the world’s way of doing things.

This applies to every Christian in every Church

But apparently you are a normal Christian, because Paul not only had to teach the Corinthians his ways, but every Church. Look at the end of v.17. He sent Timothy “to remind you of my ways in Christ, *as I teach them everywhere in every church.*” Every Church in every place, in every age until Christ returns needs to learn Paul’s ways in Christ. Listen to what Jonathan Edwards says here:

“God hath appointed the apostle Paul not only to be a greater teacher of the christian church in that age in which he lived, but the principal teacher of his church of any mere man in all succeeding ages. He was set of God not only to teach the church then, when he lived, but God has made him our teacher by his inspired writings. The christian church is taught by the apostle still, and has been in every age since he lived.”¹³

What did the Corinthian’s need to imitate?

So then here’s the question: what *in particular* did the Corinthians need to imitate in the life of the Apostle Paul? I want to draw out three particular areas.

1. The Corinthians needed to imitate Paul in his self-denial

We saw last time that the Corinthians were completely given over to the religion of selfism. It was all about their rights, their status, and their self importance. In contrast, Paul was constantly denying himself many things, things which he was perfectly entitled to take.

¹³ Edwards, pg. 864

- *Paul denied himself* the comfort of marriage so that he could concern himself entirely with the things of the Lord and his Church (**1 Corinthians 7**).
- *Paul denied himself* a salary that the Corinthian church owed him for laboring in the gospel, instead choosing to work with his own hands so that they would have no suspicions toward him. **1 Corinthians 9:12** “...we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”
- *Paul denied himself* certain Christian liberties like good meat and drink because he was more concerned about the weak consciences of his brothers and sisters. **1 Corinthians 8:13** “...if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”¹⁴

In summary, Paul gave up many of the comforts that were lawful for him to have. How many of us even *think* to do that? He made a spiritual calculation: ‘If I give up the pleasure of marriage, and my salary, and my Christian liberty,’ then I can advance the cause of Christ and the Church. And in each of these instances, there was no wrestling in making the decision. The decision was obvious, if it came down to his own comfort on the one hand or the kingdom of God on the other, Paul would part with his own comfort, his own rights. Oh how the Corinthians needed to imitate Paul in this respect. Oh how we need to imitate Paul. How many of us are willing to visit a sick saint, or stand up for the truth of Christ in a difficult conversation, or disciple a young Christian, or give generously, or serve when no body is looking, if it means we will have to part with some of our comfort? How much of your service to the saints is contingent on keeping a certain standard of our own comfort? Do you think that as long as you are not doing anything immoral—obeying the negative command—that there is no positive command to deny yourself? Do you not remember what Jesus said? “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of

¹⁴ Paul even *denied himself* full Gospel liberty at times when he put himself under the law in order to win some of his fellow Jews to Christ. **1 Corinthians 9:20** “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.”

me” (Matthew 10:38). How much are we really denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following Christ? Do you see? Paul gives us tangible examples of what self-denial looks like. He gave up sex, and companionship and children, and money, and freedom because Christ and His Church were more valuable than all.

2. The Corinthians needed to imitate Paul’s contempt for the world

The Church at Corinth was in love with what world. I don’t mean the created world, or even the people of the world. I mean the spirit of the world. Just like there is a spirit of this age that opposes Christ, so there was a spirit of the ancient world that the Corinthians were in love with. They loved what the world loved, esteemed what the world esteemed. In contrast, Paul continually showed his contempt for the world.

- He didn’t chase after the riches of this world. He said in **Acts 20:33** “I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.”
- He didn’t seek the glory of this world. He said in **1 Thessalonians 2:6** “Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.”
- He didn’t seek to please the men of this world. He said in **Galatians 1:10** “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Paul was not thinking about this realm at all. He was thinking about the eternal realm where Jesus is. “...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (**2 Corinthians 4:18**) “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (**Philippians 1:21**). Do you see the example Paul leaves us to imitate? If we are the types of Christians who mainly seek worldly riches, and worldly fame at the expense of Christ and His kingdom; if we invest more to secure honor in this life than in the life to come, then Paul’s life shows our

shame. That is unbecoming a Christian life. ‘Imitate me’ Paul says. Earthly wealth, and glory, and being approved by men is not to be compared to a life that is approved by God. George Whitefield the evangelist of the Great Awakening understood this. When he was in the perhaps the most difficult trial of his life when friends were turning against him, and the world was slandering him, he responded by saying “Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified.” Beloved can you say? Do you share Paul and George Whitefield’s contempt of this world, and love for the next? ‘Imitate me’ Paul says.

3. The Corinthians needed to imitate Paul’s deep concern for Church unity

The Corinthians were completely oblivious to the fact that they were destroying Christian unity. It wasn’t just their factions, it was also the lawsuits they filed against each other in chapter six; their arguing over food in chapter eight; their despising of each other at Lord’s Supper in chapter eleven. At every level they had no care for maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In contrast, Paul lived a life in which he carefully studied to make peace and promote unity.

- As long as it didn’t dishonor God,¹⁵ he always chose to please others rather than himself if it would bring unity. **1 Corinthians 10:32-33** “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”
- When Christians disagreed with him about secondary doctrines he patiently bore with their errors in order to preserve unity. **Philippians 3:15** “Let those of us who are mature think this way [that is, like me], and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”
- Paul’s anxiety for the unity of the Church was heavier on him than all the personal injuries he suffered. In **1 Corinthians 11**, after he gives this long list of all his afflictions, of his being stoned, shipwrecked, robbed, put in prison,

¹⁵ I believe this qualifier is what help reconcile Galatians 1:10 with 1 Corinthians 10:33

he says in v.28-29 "...apart from [these]¹⁶ things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"

Paul spent his soul's energy on the unity of the Church.¹⁷ Dear congregation, do you imitate Paul in this regard? We know the Corinthians didn't. That's why Paul rebuked them. Would Paul commend you or rebuke you in how you pursue or destroy Church unity? Do you have a holy anxiety for the Church to be at peace? Are do you find ways to criticize other Christians, and leadership, and whatever you find displeasing to your own desires? Paul says "Imitate me." Do you see how helpful his example is? He put his experience of being stoned next to his anxiety for the Church to be at peace. He felt weakness and pain when the Church was weak and in pain. Is that you? Paul says "Imitate me."

Experimental imitation

Perhaps you have pressing issues in your life that you are not sure how to proceed. How do you live in such a time as ours when the gospel is despised? How do you praise God when all around your soul gives way? How can you be content when you feel like you've lost everything? How can you continue to suffer when it's already been so long? Go to the Apostle Paul in the Scripture, search out how he faced each of these issues. Search for not just what Paul taught on these issues, but how he lived in response to these issues. His letters are not just doctrinal treatises, they are autobiographies. I would also commend to you a sermon by Jonathan Edwards entitled "The Character of Paul an Example to Christians."

¹⁶ Berean Literal Bible

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:15 "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?"

The great motives laid before us in imitating Paul

Let's consider three great motives that we have in imitating the Apostle Paul. Our **first motive** for imitating Paul is that his life shows us the most earnest and self-denying Christians are the most happy. Who in the NT besides Jesus was happier than the Apostle Paul? Do you realize that when Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he was in prison? And yet no book exemplifies the joy of Paul more than Philippians. His happiness was independent of his circumstances. No one human suffered in the NT more than Paul and yet he could say in **2 Corinthians 7:4** "I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy." Do you want abiding joy that the world cannot touch? Then imitate Paul.

Our **second motive** for imitating Paul is that we will bring the greatest honor to Christ. Did Paul worry about the uncertainty of his future as he sat in prison? No, he had unwavering certainty. He said in **Philippians 1:20** "...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always *Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*" To imitate Paul means that you will adopt his same confidence in Christ. The controlling thought of your life will be that Jesus will use your life, no matter what you face to bring glory and honor to His name.

Our **third motive** in imitating Paul is that we will be the greatest blessing to the world. Beloved how much better has the world been because the Apostle Paul lived 2,000 years ago? Jonathan Edwards said of him:

"Wherever he went there went a blessing with him. To have him enter a city was...a greater mercy than if the greatest monarch on earth had come there...Silver and gold he had none. But what he imparted to many thousands was worth more to them than if he had bestowed upon them the richest jewels of which the Roman emperor possessed. And he was not only a blessing to that generation, but has been so since his death, by the fruits of

what he did in his lifetime, the foundations he then laid, and by the writings he has left for the good of mankind, to the end of the world.”¹⁸

Do you want to be a blessing to mankind? Do you want the world to be better for you having lived here than if you would have never lived at all? Imitate me, Paul says. That’s our **second point**.

III. The Reason to Imitate Paul

Two senses of the kingdom of God

Let’s look at v.18-20, but my object here is only to look at v.20 and God-willing we look more closely at the other parts next time. “Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” There it is. On what ground can Paul command us to imitate him? Because the kingdom of God does not consist in talk *but in power*. There are two senses of understanding this phrase *the kingdom of God*.¹⁹ 1) The kingdom of God *is* the authority and dominion of God. Thus we pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done” (**Matthew 6:10**). In this sense, the kingdom *is still to come*. 2) The kingdom of God is in those who belong to the Lord. That’s why Jesus could say “...the kingdom of God *is within you*” (**Luke 17:21**). It’s why Paul could say in **Romans 14:23** “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking *but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*.” In other words, true Christianity “does not consist in external observations, but in inward grace.”²⁰ In this sense, the kingdom *is here now*.

¹⁸ Edwards, pg. 865

¹⁹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 78-79

²⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 79

The kingdom of God changes lives

Paul is saying to the Corinthians ‘...look at what all your talk has accomplished. You have divisions, you have out of control sexual immorality. None of your worldly talk has produced change. Why? Because the kingdom of God does not consist of talk *but of power.*’ Paul is essentially saying to them: “do you not realize that you have been translated into the kingdom of God?” **Colossians 1:13** “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” “That is what it really means to be a Christian. Christians are not merely men and women who have [made a certain decision]. The really important thing about them is what has been done to them, that they have been ‘translated’ from one kingdom into another and are now citizens of the kingdom of God.”²¹ And this kingdom that you now belong to doesn’t merely have the power to convict you of sin, and convert you. Yes it has that, and praise God for that. But more, it has the power to change your life! “A gospel that doesn’t change lives is no gospel.”²² Listen to how Paul makes this crystal clear to the Corinthians. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” What happens to a person when they enter the Kingdom of God. They are not just justified, they are not just made right with God. No they are sanctified, they are transformed into a new creature. Beloved that is what happened to you. Do you realize that when Christ died to wash away your sins, but that He rose from the dead so that you likewise could walk in newness of life? (**Romans 6:4**). The Corinthians were

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 14-17, Liberty and Conscience*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 230

²² From MLJ’s sermon on 1 Corinthians 4:20 entitled “Not in Word; but Power”

behaving as if they still belonged to the world. Are you? The reason why Paul tells us to imitate him, is because if you have been born again, you already belong to the kingdom of God. And he is giving you and me an example and a patter of what it looks like to be citizens in this kingdom.

To those outside the kingdom

If you are here this morning and you don't belong to the kingdom of God, then you will never have power to change your life. The sins that weigh you down, can never be broken through your own efforts, but will eventually bring you to total ruin. And what will be said about your life is heartbreaking—that the world would have been better off if you never lived, if you had never been born, because the only thing you contributed was your sin. Oh dear friend, what can you do? How will you escape the judgment to come? First admit that you are empty, and powerless to save yourself. That you have nothing to offer God but your own unrighteousness. And then receive and believe the promises of Christ. Heed his voice this morning: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."²³ Jesus said "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."²⁴

²³ Isaiah 45:22

²⁴ John 11:25-26