

## Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The TREE OF LIFE is a weekly teaching summary. The Tree of Life for the week ending 11-05-00

### The Doctrine of Pseudo Spirituality

Phi 3:17 says *“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”* The passage begins with the word “brethren” which is addressed to the Royal Family of God or to every Church-age believer.

This verse introduces the principle that there is someone for us to follow. Someone to lead us and to communicate the Word of God. With this we see the importance of a pastor who understands the original languages which is the only way that he, as a pastor, can be under the authority of the Word of God. No pastor is free from the authority of the Word, just as no congregation is free from the authority of the pastor. There is a chain of command and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince Ruler of the Church, has ordained the Canon of scripture to be the source and the content of His thinking, by which there is authority transmitted to the communicator or the pastor-teacher. When the Canon, in its original languages is not understood, there is a bypass there. A pastor must go daily into the Word, for his instructions, growth, for his authority, and no pastor should ever pick up the word of God without realization of the fact that here are his orders from the highest headquarters, 2Ti 2:15.

In Phi 3:17 we next have the phrase for the Royal Family to “join in.” and it denotes what habitually occurs when the believer is perpetually under the teaching of a pastor who is communicating truth. That is the pastor who is perpetually studying and teaching the Word of God. Next in Phi 3:17 we have *be following my example*. This is the Greek word “*Summimetai*” and it literally means co-imitators or fellow-imitators, and therefore we are right back to our main verb in verse 16, and the subject of “*marching together.*” Paul was encouraging the Philippians, (members of the Royal Family) to be imitators together of his example.

Paul gives a further explanation in verse 18, when he says *“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,”*

So, we will translate the first part of Phi 3:17 *“Brethren (members of the royal family) be co-imitators.”*

Being a co-imitator or fellow-imitator does not mean to be a clone or the stereotype Christian, this is a challenge to fulfill our calling of going on to supergrace and ultra-supergrace.

This passage continues the theme of Phi 3:14 *“I keep on pressing on toward the objective for the purpose of the reward belonging to the upward call of God [Father], by means of Christ Jesus.”*

Paul is saying, all of you, be fellow-imitators of himself, follow the doctrine that he is teaching so that you too can reach the objective of living the spiritual life.

There isn't any better historical example for us concerning this than Paul. That is one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit filled the New Testament with that one man. He dominates everything after the gospels. He dominates the book of Acts from chapter 13 on.

At least thirteen of the epistles came out of his pen and out of his heart and out of his mind and out of his life.

We have an invitation in Phi 3:17 to pattern ourselves after him, in so many ways, he shows us how living the spiritual life can be lived by fallen man. That's why he said to the Corinthians twice, “Be followers of me.”

That's why he wrote to the Thessalonians, 1Th 1:6 *“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”*

The Christian life is a process of pursuing Christ's likeness. That in simple terms is the direction of the whole matter of experiential sanctification. We are to become more and more like Jesus Christ. We can not become like Christ until we give Him more time. To His disciples our Lord Jesus Christ said *Come with me, walk with me, eat and sleep with me, that was their college course for three years.*

He chose them, the Bible says, Mar 3:14 *“And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him,”*

He said, *“Follow Me.”* that particular command has not been replaced or improved upon.

To Peter and Andrew in Mat 4:19 *“He said to them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

The next verse says they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.

He says to all of us Mat 16:24 *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*

He said in Joh 10:27 *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;”*

The whole matter of the Christian life and Christianity is this matter of following Christ to become more and more like Him.

The most significant passage to us is the Word of God the Father in Romans 8:29, which records for us that God the Father's purpose in saving us was that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. Christ called us to be like Him.

This should be the goal of every Christian, to become more and more like Jesus Christ.

With one simple statement, Paul reduced the Christian life to its lowest common denominator, Phi 3:13 *“constantly forgetting the things that lie behind and pursuing vigorously to what lies ahead,”*

If we're going to become like Christ, we have to know what Christ was like. If we want to know what Christ is like we go to the Bible because this is the revelation of Christ.

The Old Testament sets the scene for Him, creates the need for Him, announces that He is coming. The gospels record His arrival, the book of Acts records the immediate impact, the epistles delineate the significance of His life and ministry, the Revelation talks about the consummation. But Christ is the focus of it all.

As we study the Word of God, we study it in order that we might know what Christ is like.

We are also dependent on the spiritual work of changing us into the image of Christ which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

A Spirit-filled believer who lets the Word about Christ dwell in him richly is one who progresses toward the goal.

In our passage Phi 3:17 we must be careful however, the idea that we are supposed to imitate those who seem to be spiritual is absolutely incorrect. We must beware of pseudo-spirituality and personality imitation.

This imitation does not imply loss of individuality or personality.

This is where many Christians get into trouble, they become involved with personality imitation, they mimic they lose their individuality.

Character transformation is justified but not personality imitation.

When Christians suppress their own individuality and personality they are no longer normal. We cannot imitate someone else and use their individuality and personality and call it spirituality.

The book of Hebrews say the same thing as Paul said in Philippians, Heb 13:7 *“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith [not their personality, or mannerisms, or life-style, but their pistis, their doctrine].”*

We are not to copy the lifestyle of Paul or of a pastor or of any Christian leader or anyone we deem to be spiritual. Rom 3:23 tells us why *“for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,”*

Every apostle had an Old Sin Nature just as every pastor does.

Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, we are to imitate Paul's message not his personal life.

As Church-age believers, we are to copy or imitate the doctrinal teaching of Paul, Peter, John, and not the personality or the lifestyle of these great men. Imitation then is used in the sense of learning.

Imitation of someone else's personality is loss of personality.

To the extent you imitate someone else, you lose your individuality.

So we are to imitate the doctrine not the one who gives the doctrine.

Paul's skill in the mystery doctrine of the Church-age is definitely something we need imitate.

Many believers are distracted from the plan of God through imitation or concentration on personality, lifestyle, prohibitions, emotions, and ascetics.

There are all sorts of imitations that Christians get themselves involved in which serves to become a distraction in the Christian way of life. The Sabbath observance, tithing, morality apart from virtue, or ritual without reality. All of these are examples of Pseudo-spirituality and most arise out of legalism. Legalism is defined as the strictness in conforming to a code of deeds, observances, and dead works as a means of self-justification or self-promotion.

Legalism is spirituality by works and taboos and originates from a combination of self-righteous arrogance and subjective self-justification.

Some of the systems of pseudo-spirituality include the following.

*Spirituality by personality imitation* begins by creating a role model out of another person--getting your eyes on people instead of getting your eyes on Christ. It involves imitating someone whom you admire. It involves associating with the superficial mannerisms of that believer rather than having the filling of the Spirit. Speaking in a certain way with stereotype cliches, holy language. God uses all different types of personality, and you do not have to create a "spiritual" personality.

Peter was known for being impulsive. Andrew - open-minded. James - fanatical. John - passionate. Philip - inquisitive. Bartholomew - composed. Matthew - humble. Thomas - pessimism. James {the son} of Alphaeus - quietness. Simon the Zealot - strong-willed. Judas (son of James) - intense. Judas - traitor. Then of course, the apostle Paul was a genius and a prepared man, the greatest intellect and eloquence of his day, but he was not arrogant about anything.

*Spirituality by yielding* which is a false interpretation of the verb "paristemi" in Rom 6:13-19 and 12:1.

The Greek word paristemi means to place yourself at someone's disposal. We place ourselves under orders to God by the filling of the Spirit through rebound when necessary and the cognition of doctrine on a daily basis. Yielding is the day-by-day function of the spiritual skills in your life. Pseudo-spirituality through yielding assumes that the believer is spiritual because of some overt act of dedication like coming forward at the end of a church service. Rededication and reaffirmation of faith can be blasphemy when performed by a Christian. True spirituality is the filling of the Holy Spirit, placing the believer at the disposal of the Lord every day through the function of the spiritual skills.

*Spirituality by taboos* is something that is prescribed by society as improper and unacceptable; hence, a practice excluded from social intercourse. While a taboo is something forbidden by culture, tradition, or social usage, it becomes a false system of spirituality when such prohibitions are established by legalistic Christians.

In this false system of spirituality, a taboo is a problem established by legalism and not really a true issue in the Christian life.

Popular taboos of legalism include: do not drink, dance, do not go to movies, smoke or gamble. These things can cause health or social problems but they do not indicate a lack of the filling of the Spirit.

Taboos must be regarded in terms of a certain amount of self-restraint under the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the four laws of Christian behavior apply.

1. *The law of liberty.* You have the right to do certain things which will not cause you to sin or enter into carnality, 1Co 8:4, 9. This is the law all believers operate in when they are filled with the Spirit.

The law of freedom and liberty is freedom to serve the Lord and freedom to produce divine good. With this law of freedom we have to be careful when we are around people who might be corrupted by something that is meaningless to us.

1Co 8:9 *"But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."*

2. *The law of love.* This is the function of impersonal love to avoid offending weaker believers and becoming a distraction to their spiritual growth. 1Co 8:13. There comes a time when the law of love will take precedence over the law of freedom or liberty. The law of freedom is directed toward self whereas the law of love is directed toward others.

This means that there are times when we will impose upon ourselves certain things that we don't normally observe. We may refrain from certain things that are legitimate in order to be of help to other believers in their spiritual growth. 1Th 5:22 *"abstain from all appearance of evil."*

2Co 6:3 *“Give no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited,”*

3. *The law of expediency* is directed toward the unbeliever, 1Co 9:18ff. The believer avoids doing certain things so that the unbeliever is not prevented from seeing the true issue of Christ.

In the interest of witnessing for Christ, the believer refrains from doing certain things because they prevent the unbeliever from seeing the true issue in salvation--to believe in Christ for salvation. 1Co 9:18ff. The law of expediency says make an issue out of the Gospel and nothing else.

4. *The law of supreme sacrifice* is the highest law of Christian behavior. It sometimes requires the believer to forsake even normal living and legitimate function in life, in order to serve our Lord in a special capacity, 1Co 9:1-15. This is a law where the believer sets aside normal and legitimate functions of life to progress the plan of God.

These laws are not taboos which reject the enabling power of the Holy Spirit inside the Pre-designed Plan of God. Taboos reject the doctrine that the Christian way of life is a supernatural way of life, and therefore, demands a supernatural means of execution.

Taboos ignore the principle that spiritual skills must precede production skills for the performance of divine good.

Taboos ignore the fact that no two believers have attained the same status of spiritual growth; therefore, there are differences of *modus operandi* among believers.

Another system of false spirituality is *spirituality by respectability* which is the false contention that a believer is spiritual because his sins are more respectable than the sins of someone else.

This is arrogant self-righteousness involved in arrogant self-vindication or self-justification of one's own sins while condemning the sins of others. This is the story of, not the prodigal son, but the his elder brother. After the prodigal son came back and rebounded and was restored by his father we see in Luk 15:28 *“But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his Father came out and {began} entreating him.”*

The believer who is arrogant hates to see other believers prosper.

The believer who is humble and has true humility is delighted to see other people successful and make it. When you cannot stand to see other people prosper and become successful then you're in trouble.

The older brother was jealous and he became angry because his Father had treated his younger brother in grace and therefore he sulked and would not go into the house.

In fact, his Father came out and begged him to come in. God's attitude when believers have rebounded is to forgive them.

God the Father entreats us to have compassion on other believers, that's grace orientation. Compassion is a gracious system of thinking.

God will never fail to be compassionate toward us.

Lam 3:22-23, *“The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.”*

Even if a person is under divine discipline, the divine attitude is one of restoration and compassion.

We can become a legalist and become involved with all of the subtle legalistic teachings that are being peddled today or we can learn the value of grace orientation and compassion.

The Lord has not called you to give up things and sacrifice for Him, He has called you to grow in his grace and knowledge and be gracious and compassionate toward others.

Mat 9:13 *“But go and learn what {this} means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

We should have the same mental attitude of grace which was manifested by The Lord Jesus Christ.

The older brother failed to see that he was a sinner, and he also failed to understand that God has provided salvation for all sinners who truly repent. What the older brother did not think he needed (repentance and salvation) he resisted and resented in others, and thus he could not, he would not share in the celebration.

His self-righteousness is such that he expects, and even demands God's approval and blessings.

**He was living in the false system of spirituality by respectability which is the false contention that a believer is spiritual because his sins are more respectable than the sins of someone else.**

**The sad thing is we never know what happened to the older brother.**

**This is a story of the grace of God.**

**The gates of death will never shut on a person until the gates of grace have opened for him over and over again.**

**Today your Father views you from His throne in heaven and runs to you with the message of forgiveness and compassion.**

**And says as our Lord did in Luk 7:47 *"Your sins which are many, have been forgiven."***