

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." I Corinthians 11:1.

"Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." III John 11.

There is in nature what is called mimicry, or the copying of something else. In the museums of natural history are cases which contain many mimics. There are stick insects. They are long, lean things with strange legs, looking exactly like the twigs on which they stand. There are butterflies with the upper side of their wings colored beautifully, but with the under side, or that which is visible when they rest, almost exactly like the leaves on which they alight, so that their enemies could not see them: moths with their hind-wings brilliantly colored, so that they are visible in flight, but with their fore-wings much the color of the bark of the tree which they frequent, because they rest, not with their wings upright as the butterflies do, but folded down like a roof; butterflies and moths of one species like those of another whose colors are a protection for them against their foes.

Those of you who have had the high privilege of being trained in the country, close to nature, where you could get her lessons, have heard the chirping or croaking of the tree-toad in the shade tree near the house. Perhaps you have climbed the tree, looking for the toad, but usually you looked in vain, because that toad had lived in the trees so long that it had taken on the color of the bark of the tree, and it is almost impossible to distinguish the toad from the tree.

Or, perhaps you may have had the experience of driving a flock of sheep across a stream. A sheep is very timid, and very much afraid of water. The only thing required is to push one sheep in the water and get it to cross, and every sheep will follow it. You may be driving a flock of sheep along a road. The sheep which is in front may suddenly or unexpectedly come upon something and jump to get out of its way, and then all of the other sheep will jump too, even though few of them are anywhere near the object at which the first one got scared.

Children are born mimics. Things are said in their hearing, which parents would not have them to repeat for anything, and yet the parents know that those things are said to mimics. Ask a girl who is laughing "What are you laughing at?" She replies, "Nothing." Why, then, do you think she is laughing? Because others were laughing, even though she did not understand why. There is in people a wonderful power of mimicry, of making themselves like others. One man said to another, "How much like you your son is!" The other man said, "I am sorry for it, because everybody says that I am ugly." When you see and hear ugly things in the lives of children, they are a reflection and a revelation of the parents and the home.

People do not like to be told that they are imitators. But, whether they like it or not, the fact remains that they are mimics. Boast of your independence as much as you like, claim to stand alone, as erect as you can, it still remains true that with all your boasted independence that you are a copyist, an imitator, or a mimic. Perhaps that does not sound very complimentary and pleasing to you, but it is true.

God's Word warns us against mimicking or imitating that which is bad. To avoid doing so, it is important to be exceedingly careful about the company you keep. There are more young people whose character is besmirched, and whose life of usefulness is handicapped or made impossible, by getting into the wrong crowd and keeping bad company than any other single thing that

influences their lives. Goethe, the German poet and philosopher, said, "Show me with whom you are found and I will show you what you are." And one wiser than he said, "He that walketh with the wise shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall become fools." You may think that you are sufficiently strong to resist any kind of company and not be influenced thereby, but in that thought you are wrong. That idea grows out of pure, nonsensical, self-conceit. The experience of every mature person is evidence that your judgment in this regard is wrong.

You would not think of placing yourself in the company of those with a very contagious disease. You would shun the rooms of those who had such a disease. Sin is by far more contagious and infectious than the other diseases, and what renders it more dangerous is that it is exerting itself little by little in an unobserved manner. One can go to a place where hogs are kept, shell some corn and scatter it along on the ground as he walks, and they will follow him to the place where they will be slaughtered. In much the same way evil companions lead people. Almost, if not entirely unconsciously, people are led to the places where their reputations and their characters are slaughtered. Many a young person is handicapped at that very moment in life when he needs his best strength because of the company he has kept in the past. The reputation of his old associations is remembered.

A man had a splendid watch. For some reason it would not keep time accurately. He took it to a jeweler, who examined it carefully, but failed to find any defect. Inquiring of the owner as to what kind of work he did, the jeweler discovered that he was an electrician, and that his watch had been magnetized. Its usefulness was impaired because of that with which it had come into contact. So it is with many a young life. They are rendered unserviceable in later life because of associations of younger days. Do not imitate that which is bad. Choose your associates from those who are better and nobler than yourself when possible.

Two young ladies were roommates at Vassar College. On the walls of their room were two pictures. At the foot of the bed of one was the picture of Marie Antoinette, a despicable character of history, coarse and rough. Over the foot of the bed of the other was the picture of the Madonna, Mary, the mother of Christ. Each morning as each girl opened her eyes to a new day, the first thing beheld was the picture above. One of the students became a noble character, the other rough, rude, and harsh. "Imitate not that which is bad, but that which is good."

Unfortunately, people are more inclined to copy the evil than the good. Slang, bad, and idle words are more often copied than the good words. To many it seems more manly and courageous to imitate evil, but in reality there is nothing brave, wise, or manly about imitating that which is evil. Don't do it, because you will become what you copy. Therefore, since there is much that is good, we may and should copy it. After all, we acquire the best parts of our character by imitating the good points of others.

You are not only copying others, but there are those who are copying you. You are not merely a copier, but a copy. Even the baby of the home will copy you -- your voice, your manners, and your noises. Older ones are always copies for younger ones. Strong ones are copies for the weaker ones. All of us belong to the class of those who are being copied. The important thing is to be a good copy. "No man liveth unto himself." Whoever you are, you are exerting an influence on the life of somebody. A miller, with his clothes covered with flour, walks into the little country post-office, leans against the window, and purchases a stamp. When he leaves, flour is left on the window. He goes to the desk to write his letter, and leaves the mark of flour there. Whatever he touches, wherever he goes, he

leaves his mark. That is exactly what every life does. Everyone leaves a mark on some other life.

Each of us has a tremendous obligation resting upon him. Each has to give an account for what he copies from others, and also from what others copy from himself. If others copy good from us, well and good, and we shall be rewarded accordingly. If others copy bad from us, we shall be responsible in large measure for that. Great possibilities lie in this realm. The railroad conductors were holding a convention in Cleveland, Ohio, one year. An excursion had been planned for Sunday. Two conductors were rooming together. When they were dressing on Sunday morning, one said to the other, "Of course you are going on the excursion?" The other replied, "No, it is my habit to go to church every Sunday when home, and I do not propose to break it when away from home." They went down in the lobby where groups were talking. The word was passed along that one conductor would not go on the excursion, but was going to church. Because of his example one hundred and fifty went to church instead of on the excursion. What we need today is people who will live by the principles when they are away from home they are accustomed to practice when at home. That conductor will be rewarded for the good influence which he exerted on others. Remember that you are to imitate the good, and not the bad, and never forget that you are responsible for what others copy from your life. Therefore, live in such a manner that others can copy good only from you.

The power of example is tremendous. The ancient Romans used to place the statues of distinguished men in their halls. When they left in the morning they were inspired by the remembrance of their noble deeds, and when they returned in the evening they were ennobled by the thought of the associations they enjoyed. The power of Christian example is the greatest. It does not have a rival either in molding or in reforming characters. Its force is that of divine love working through human actions.

Paul appealed to the readers of his letter to the Corinthians to follow his example. He said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." He requested them to follow him insofar as he followed Christ. He did not want anybody to imitate him in anything that did not resemble Christ. We should not imitate others only so far as they are following Christ. The incarnation of the spirit and attitudes of Christ in the life is the irrefutable argument for the reality and greatness of the Christian faith. One can refute an argument, but nobody can refute a life. Enoch, who walked with God, left an indelible impression on many who knew him in the flesh, and through the words of the Bible impressed the minds of multitudes in all the succeeding generations. As Dr. A. B. Davidson, a Scottish commentator, so wisely stated it to his students, "An ordinary life lived well is the greatest of all deeds." In times of testing it is not arguments but inspiring examples that really count. Ask yourself this question, "What sort of a copy am I?" Yield your heart and life to Christ, love Him, and seek to do His will, and you will not need to fear the results if others copy you.