

Be An Example To The Believers

By Brooks A. Harris, O.D.

What kind of an example are you? You might think “Well, I am not really an example for anyone else.” But the truth is that we are always an example to others. We are either a good example or a bad one. We are always being watched by not only non-believers but also by other believers. I’ve heard it said, “A Christian may be the only Bible that people will read and study.” They may not read the *Word of God*, but they will read the *People of God*. What Christians say and do individually and together as the church will impress others, either in a good way or in a bad way.

My dad was a good, hard working man but he did not go to church. There were two main reasons for this: he worked most Sundays and the hypocrites in church turned him off. He knew several men who went to church who got drunk, cussed, lied, were rude, and cheated on their wives. So he thought “this is not the way I live and I don’t care to be around that type of influence.” So because of their ungodly lifestyle, he avoided them by not going to church.

As Christians we are supposed to have a lifestyle which is different from this secular world we live in. We are to live in this world, but not be conformed to it. By trying to live a Godly, Biblical lifestyle we can be a better example for non-believers, but also to new and weak believers in the church. If you are mature in your faith and have a good relationship with God, you have an obligation to be a good example to other believers. New believers often have an understanding of being forgiven of their sins and someday going to heaven after they die, but do they really understand what it means and what the benefits are to living a Christian Lifestyle.

In 1 Timothy 4:12, the apostle Paul, talking to Timothy, gives a very good list of ways to be a good example – especially for mature believers. Paul says “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” So, let’s see what these examples could look like. **We Are To Be An Example** –

IN WORD: We must watch not only what we say, but also how we say it. Our attitude says a lot about our character and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Avoid ungodly conversation as telling inappropriate jokes, being rude, cursing and lying. If you always tell the truth, you don’t have to worry about who you told what to and what exactly you told them. When appropriate, incorporate Biblical concepts into your conversations.

IN CONDUCT: We are to be polite and respectful to others. We are to treat them as we would want them to treat us. Christianity is not a part-time job, just practiced occasionally; it is a way of life – a lifestyle – a life of righteous living – all day, every day. Missionaries, people who have gone into different cultures to preach the gospel of Jesus, have learned the saying: “Often people do not CARE about what you SAY until they SEE how much you CARE.” People are watching this outsider to see if they should trust them. Successful Missionaries often get involved in the community and show that they care for the people by trying to help fulfill a need. They often teach by example before they start telling others about their Example – Jesus Christ. Sometimes **What** you do is not as important as **How** you do it. You should have an attitude of love and respect for others. Sometimes it is better to **BE** a sermon for others than to **GIVE** a sermon to them.

IN LOVE: The word “LOVE” is a hard word for many men to say and talk about. They see it as a feminine word and a sign of weakness to say it. Men often show their love by what they do for their loved ones but they rarely tell them that they love them. But, if Love is such a sissy thing, then why was it God’s greatest commandment? Matthew 22:35-40 says “Then (a Pharisee), a lawyer, asked (Jesus) a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On those two

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Think about this: “If these two commandments were always kept by all people on earth, there would be no need for any other laws.”

Now, how can you tell if you or someone else really loves someone? Consider the following three criteria. (This comes from the article “How To Love” found at www.BiblicalReliability.com). Although these are often seen in relation to one’s spouse, I want you to see how this describes your relationship with God: 1) **When you love someone**, you want to be with them often. You want to communicate with them. They will be on your mind often throughout each day. You live in anticipation of being with them. (*Do you look forward to praying and reading God’s word?*); 2) **When you love someone**, you will enjoy doing things for them. You will want to do things that are pleasing to them. Other people will be able to tell that you love this person by the way you talk about them and the way you treat them. You will want to treat them with honor and respect and not do anything which would be degrading to them. You would not want to hurt them in any way – physically or emotionally. (*Are you respectful to God through your actions and speech?*). 3) **When you love someone**, you would appreciate what they do for you. You would thank them often and not take them for granted. You would praise them for who they are, for what they mean to you, and for how they have enhanced your life. (*Do you thank God often?*). Finally, you would tell them often, “I Love You!”

IN SPIRIT: Our spirit is eternal – it lives forever. We need to show other believers that we do not fear death. The death of our body is not the end of our life; it is just a transition for us from one form of existence to the next (physical to spiritual). Others need to see that we look forward to spending the rest of eternity with God in His heavenly kingdom which is to be a much better existence than we have now.

IN FAITH: Christianity is not just a belief – it is a way of life. We need to show and tell others how we depend on God for guidance, wisdom, protection, peace and much more. I tell others that I want God’s will to be done in my life and that I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me in all aspects of my life – home, work, with my family, my employees, my patients and all my activities. I trust God and appreciate God’s help.

IN PURITY: This is sexual morality. We are to be faithful to our spouse and keep God’s commandments.

So, by the way we live, we are to be an example to non-believers and believers who look up to us. We are to give them a reason to want to live the Christian Lifestyle. We need to tell others what we believe and why we believe and why we live the Christian Lifestyle. Think about this: If Christianity were deemed to be a crime, and you were charged as being a Christian, would there be enough evidence of your Christianity to have you convicted? Do people see you act and speak in public as a Christian?

Looking back on my dad’s life, I remember many things that he would say and some expressions that he would give. Some were verbal and some silent. Some were good and some bad. As I grow older, I see many of those expressions come out of me in what I say and what I do. I see and hear my dad in me. People who knew my dad well often say that they can tell that I am my father’s son because I sound and act just like him at times. Now that has made me wonder, “Can people look at me and hear me and tell that I am my Heavenly Father’s child?” Do my expressions, my speech and actions, reflect the character of God?

Now I know that there are NO perfect Christians. We all live in a fallen world and we are all flawed. I’ve heard it said that “The Church is Not a Country Club for Saints, it is a Hospital for Sinners.” And “If you take all the Sinners out of Church, there would be no one left.” But if the Church – all of God’s people – acted the way they were supposed to (truly caring for others and taking care of each other), people from the community would see and feel the love and they would be flocking to the Church.

So we, as God’s people, must follow God’s Great Commandment and Paul’s guidelines and demonstrate to others how and why to be a Christian and to live a good Christian Life.