

Approved Example

1 Corinthians 11:1 "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ"

The Apostle Paul in the letter that he wrote to the church at Corinth, encouraged them to “imitate” or follow his example in serving the Lord. He made a similar statement to the saints in Philippi when he said in Philippians 4:9, *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”* Another way that we establish Bible authority is by following the example of godly men like Paul. The practices of the Apostles and other Christians in the first century give us insight into how God expects us to conduct ourselves today. Does this mean that we should do everything that the Christians practiced in the first century? If not, how do we determine which examples to follow? We will answer these questions and examine the **approved example** aspect of Bible authority in this lesson.

Some examples in scripture were used to teach an important Bible principle and the example itself may not be one that we must we follow exactly. For instance, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples a lesson by washing their feet. Read John 13:3-17. In verse 12 Jesus asks his disciples, *“Do you know what I have done to you?”* He answers the question in verse 15, *“For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”* In verse 14 he also tells them *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.”* So, does this example of washing the feet of others apply to us? It seems obvious that it does but there are some other important factors to consider. For example, if we lived in a culture where people always wore sandals and their feet routinely became dirty because of the environment, it may be customary to wash your visitor's feet. In this case, it would certainly apply to us. We know in our culture today, we normally wear shoes and even when we wear sandals; it is not customary to wash someone's feet when they visit us. Another question to ask is; was his lesson simply about washing feet? No, it was really about humility and service to others. How do we know this? A study of the customs practiced in that culture teach us that it was normal for the servants of someone's household to wash the feet of visitors. It was not common for the homeowner to do so. Jesus was teaching them that as the homeowner they should wash the feet of the visitor to demonstrate humility and willingness to serve others. Jesus explains this in verse 16 when he says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” Here we have the Son of God washing the feet of the disciples! What an example! Peter could not imagine the Lord washing his feet and even said *“You shall never wash my feet!”*, but Jesus insisted on it and used the example to teach a great lesson. Read Matt 20:20-28 and Luke 22:24-27 for similar teaching.

Now let us consider another approved example with the subject of benevolence. Many in the religious world today have no problem using the treasury of the church to help anyone in society. This is often referred to as “general benevolence.” Without authority, they think “the end justifies the means” and under the misguided concept of showing love, they feel this practice is justified. Does the Lord want us to help non-Christian people? Are we demonstrating a lack of love by not helping them with money from the treasury? A close examination of the scriptures reveals that the Lord does want us to help all men but we only have authority to use the treasury to help needy saints. We learn that there are two types of benevolence, individual and church. Individually, the scriptures teach us that we are to help all men. This includes our family, brethren and anyone

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

else in need. In 1 Timothy 5:3-4, we are taught to show honor for our grandparents or parents by taking care of them and in verse 8 we are also taught *“if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* In Galatians 6:10 we are told *“let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* These two sections of scripture teach us what we must do individually. As for the church, we see an example in Romans 15:25-27 of how the saints in Macedonia and Achaia financially helped the poor saints in Jerusalem. From this and other passages, we are given an approved example of saints helping other saints and so we should do the same today. We also learn that the church treasury was not used to help non-saints because it is an individual responsibility.

1. What do we learn from the example of Jesus when he washed the feet of his disciples? _____

2. In Matt 20:20-28, what was the principle Jesus was teaching the twelve Apostles? _____

3. Find at least two other passages not listed in the lesson where we have examples of Christians helping other Christians who were in need. What can we conclude from these passages? _____

4. What is the difference in individual benevolence and church benevolence? _____

5. Are the statements below True or False?

___ The church can help a non-Christian if no one else is able to help them.

___ We can follow an example if it is consistent with God’s word.

___ General benevolence is a work of the church.

___ We have authority to do anything if it ends in a good result.

___ All examples should be followed that are in the bible.

6. What two examples do we see in Galatians 2:11-12? Are these examples we should follow today? _____

7. Is it acceptable to follow the example of men? What scriptures would you use to support your answer? _____

8. What do we learn from the example of Christians in Acts 2:44-45? _____

9. What do we learn from the examples of conversion in Acts (Cornelius, Lydia, Philippian jailer, etc.)? _____

10. What three lessons do we learn from 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 5 and 16? _____

11. What poor example did Jesus condemn the Pharisees for in Matthew 15:1-9? What should they have done instead? _____

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

12. In Philippians 4:15-16 and 2 Corinthians 11:9, what examples do we see from the churches at Philippi and at Macedonia? Should we follow their example today? _____