

Follow or Duplicate?

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If any line of Paul's is relied on to maintain some man's "delegated authority" over other believers – whether the title the man (or woman) takes upon himself is "pastor," "father," "tribal patriarch" or "pope" – that would be Paul's statement, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1 KJV) This wording conjures up images of Jesus finding His disciples and calling to them, "Follow Me..." (Mk. 2:14, etc.) From these two ideas we have little trouble believing that it is only natural and right that men should seat themselves at the feet of some other particularly gifted or eloquent man and follow him just as the disciples followed Jesus and the Corinthians followed Paul. However, we need to look into this more carefully because the transition from Greek to English provides much concealment for the Nicolaitan (Rev. 2:6, 15) subterfuge that rules over much, perhaps all, of modern churchianity.

When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, the Greek word is *akoloutheo* [190] and literally means "to take the same road with." This is precisely the kind of meaning we would expect to find and this supports the above conclusions perfectly. However, when we turn to Paul's statement we find a completely different Greek word, *mimetes* [3402], "a mimic, an imitator." In modern English we have taken the root of this word to name a piece of office equipment – the mimeograph, a copy machine that duplicates and reproduces an exact likeness of the original. From this insight alone, we may glean a deeper insight into what Paul meant. The New Testament uses this word in two ways: as a verb, *mimeomai* [3401], and a noun, *mimetes* [3402]. These two words occur eleven times and in ten of those occurrences, the word is preceded by a very precise list of what exactly is to be copied or duplicated. It is no stretch to say that the four New Testament writers who used this word – Paul, the writer of Hebrews, Peter and John – could readily be interpreted as saying, "Duplicate exactly the original that I have just described."

The Corinthians

Paul used *mimetes* [3402] twice in his first letter to the Corinthians, the passages above being the second usage. The first time Paul uses this word, he writes, "Therefore I urge you, imitate me [duplicate my behaviors]." (1 Cor. 4:16)

At Berea, Paul had to flee to Athens by boat (Silas and Timothy were able to remain but would travel later) to avoid the persecution intended for him by the Jews from Thessalonica. (Acts 17:13-15) Before Silas and Timothy could catch up with him, Paul went on to Corinth where he stayed with Aquila and Prisca, Jews who had recently come from Rome. (Acts 18:1-2) Luke records that Paul stayed with them because they were tentmakers, not because they were Christians. (Acts 18:3) Aquila and Prisca are not seen as workers for the gospel until they take Apollos aside to instruct him more accurately the way of God because Apollos knew only the baptism of John and not of the Spirit. (Acts 18:25-26, 19:1-3) It may well be that while Stephanas was "the firstfruits [the first convert to Christ] of Achaia [the province of which Corinth was a principal city]" (1 Cor. 16:15), Aquila and Prisca may also have been converted to Christ at the witness of Paul at Corinth. But Paul's initial work, with Silas and Timothy as his fellow workers, brought at least three major Corinthian households into the faith: Crispus (the synagogue leader – Acts 18:8), Gaius (who became the host of the Corinthian ekklesia – Rom. 16:23) and Stephanas. (1 Cor. 1:14, 16) Paul initially spent a year and a half "teaching the word of God among them." (Acts 18:11) On the basis of having birthed the Corinthian ekklesia (Paul

is *not* claiming here to be father to any particular Corinthian citizens or individuals but rather the father of the Corinthian *ekklesia* – see the Greek plural “you” in v. 15. Only God Himself is to be and can be the Father of individuals – Jn. 1:12-13, Mt. 23:9), he felt it is duty to speak as a father to children and warn them to copy him. (1 Cor. 4:14-16)

Paul wrote, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake... We are weak... we are dishonored! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we exhort. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

“Therefore [because God has shown my validity as an apostle and because you yourselves know that my work brought you into the kingdom of God] I urge you to duplicate my actions and attitudes.” (1 Cor. 4:9-16)

Paul, in the passage we began with, uses *mimetes* [3402] the second time when he writes, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1 NKJV) Let us note well the changes from the KJV to the NKJV. Modern scholarship caught up with and detected the differences of meaning in the Greek words used and changed “follow” to “imitate.” Even the wording is changed so that the idea of the Corinthians walking down the same road with Paul is absent. Clearly the statement points back to what has just been said and is in no way to be a teaching regarding leadership techniques or principles.

Paul wrote, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the ekklesia of God [in the things you eat or won’t eat], just as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

“Duplicate my behaviors and attitudes, just as I in my own life duplicate those of Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1)

There is one other facet of Paul’s statement about replicating his lifestyle of grace that needs to be underscored. This instruction to copy Paul’s life is given to the *carnal* Corinthians. Paul had already rebuked them by writing, “I could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.” (1 Cor. 3:1-3) Paul would tell the Romans, “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it.” (Rom. 8:7) Paul would use *mimetes* [3402] to tell the Ephesians (the letter considered to be the highest “peak” in all the New Testament), “Be followers [duplicators, replicators] of God...” (Eph. 5:1) To the carnal Corinthians Paul says, “Copy me,” but to the more spiritually mature Ephesians (with whom he had spent at least two years – Acts 19:10 – Apollos, who was “mighty in the Scriptures,” was also teaching there – Acts 18:24 – and a group of mature elders who apparently did *not* bicker with one another to show who was approved by God and who were genuinely watching over the ekklesia there – Acts 20:17, compare 1 Cor. 11:19), Paul says, “Copy God.” The Corinthians were so immature in their spiritual state that they still needed to duplicate Paul, whom they saw and knew, because they had no apparent ability to duplicate Christ whom they saw but very dimly, if at all! It is

also to be noted that if Paul were interested in giving instructions on leadership principles and techniques here, he would have at least instructed the Ephesians to copy their elders!

Those groups that take Paul's instruction to be a statement about leadership technique or principle have only succeeded in identifying themselves with the carnality (enmity against God) of the Corinthians. Their people must be so immature and carnal that they still need some man to demonstrate Christ for them because they don't know how to follow Him for themselves. (see Jn. 10:27) Unfortunately, the "leaders" who most often misuse Paul's statement in this way display themselves as arrogant, untouchable, infallible lecturers who stand over their subjects and "bless" them with their eloquence and spiritual "superiority." Thus those under such leadership will duplicate all that carnality but never enter into anything resembling the likeness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

The Thessalonians

Paul uses both *mimeomai* [3401] and *mimetes* [3402] in his two letters to the Thessalonians, using each word twice. Paul wrote, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

And you became followers (*mimetes* [3402] – imitators, duplicators, replicators) of us and of the Lord,

having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe." (1 Ths. 1:5-7) Here Paul says that the Thessalonians received the word of God and copied Paul, Silas and Timothy so well that they became an example, an "original," for all those in the two provinces around Thessalonica to copy.

Paul wrote, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

For you, brethren, became imitators (*mimetes* [3402] – duplicators, copiers, replicators) of the ekklesias of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men..." (1 Ths. 2:13-15) The Thessalonians had received Paul's message as the word of God and were willing to endure persecutions from their own countrymen. In so doing, they became copiers of the other ekklesias who experienced the same treatment from religious but God-less men.

Paul wrote, "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow (*mimeomai* [3401] – copy, imitate, duplicate) us,

for we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority [as some claim], but

to make ourselves an example of how you should follow (*mimeomai* [3401] – copy, imitate, duplicate) us.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” (2 Ths. 2:6-12) The Thessalonians already knew how to copy Paul, Silas and Timothy's example of working and not meddling in the affairs of others. (v. 7) And they had been careful to set such an example so that the Thessalonians could copy and duplicate their “original.” (v. 9) This is not an over- under, controlling connotation, merely a before and after one.

The Ephesians

Paul, as was already touched upon, wrote, “Be followers (*mimetes* [3402] – copiers, imitators, duplicators, replicators) of God as [His] dear children.” (Eph. 5:1) Again, unlike the letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1), Paul is not speaking to carnal, immature people. He instructs them, as he would surely loved to have been able to do with the Corinthians, to look away from all men and look directly to God. Paul knew, as John also wrote, “You do not need that anyone teach you; but as the [Spirit's] anointing teaches you...you abide in Him” (1 Jn. 2:27) and as Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice...they follow (*akoloutheo* [190] – walk the same road with) Me.” (Jn. 10:27)

Immediately preceding Paul's instruction to copy or duplicate God, he wrote, “...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Therefore be duplicators of God's goodness and forgiveness of others, bearing the likeness to Him that any son has to his father.” (Eph. 4:23-5:1)

This is “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phlp. 3:14), that we would be enabled to imitate – copy, duplicate, replicate, reproduce – the life of Christ by the power of the Spirit of God in the context of our own lives. Those who opt to imitate – copy, duplicate, replicate, reproduce – a mere man have been robbed of their glorious inheritance.

The Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews uses both *mimeomai* [3401] and *mimetes* [3402], using each word only once. He writes, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but

imitate (*mimetes* [3402] – copy, duplicate, replicate) those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:10-12)

The writers calls on his readers to copy those like Abraham who “patiently endured [before] he obtained the promise.” (Heb. 6:15) He calls on them to continue to serve the people of God with faith, patience and endurance and so replicate those who in due time inherit what God has promised.

He also writes, “Remember those who lead you, who have spoken the word of God to you,

whose faith follow (*mimeomai* [3401] – copy, duplicate, replicate),

considering the outcome of their conduct.” (Heb. 13:7) This is the only occurrence of these two words that is not directly connected to its context. This is because the instruction is given in a series of short instructions that serve as a conclusion to his letter. Yet even so we find the same kind of confusion regarding leadership interjected when the Greek is transitioned into English – especially with the KJV (and similar) usages of “rule over” rather than the more accurate word “lead.” Thus the writer instructs us to be *copying* the faith of those who lead and who speak the word of God (and not their own peculiar doctrines and private interpretations) – he is not instructing anyone to “walk the same road with” them.

Peter and John

Peter wrote, “Who is he who will harm you if you become followers (*mimetes* [3402] – copiers, imitators, duplicators, replicators) of what is good?” (1 Pet. 3:13) We find this question immediately following a description of “what is good.” Peter wrote, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be humble; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For ‘He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.

“And who is he who will harm you if you are reproducing what is good and beneficial?” (1 Pet. 3:8-13)

Peter’s instruction is clear – copy what is good.

John wrote, “Beloved, do not imitate (*mimeomai* [3401] – copy, duplicate, replicate) what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.” (3 Jn. 11) We find this instruction between the descriptions of Diotrephes and Demetrius. John wrote, “I wrote to the ekklesia, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the ekklesia.

“Beloved, do not reproduce what is evil but rather replicate what is good.

He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.” (3 Jn. 9-12)

John is telling his readers to beware of Diotrephes and be more trusting of Demetrius. Diotrephes, the forerunner of Nicolaitan bishops and “church” “pastors” and all “callings” or “giftings” that use these as their pattern, had taken control of the assembly and used it as his own power base. Demetrius, on the other hand, dealt fairly and lovingly with all and as a result received the approval of those who walked in the truth. Each one clearly demonstrated who their father truly was – one belonged to the devil and the other belonged to God. (see also 1 Jn. 3:7-10)

Check Your Original

These two Greek words, which unfortunately have been and still occasionally are rendered “follow” – that is, “follow” has some applicability in English but has too many other inappropriate connotations and there are other words that fit more closely – simply do not have the same meaning of “Follow me down the same road I walk.” That is a place and function reserved for the Master. The Chief Shepherd, the one the sheep knows (Jn. 10:4), walks at the head of the flock – the under-shepherds walk behind to be sure there are no stragglers, lost ones or losses to wildlife. Anyone who insists that you follow (walk the same road with) him (rather than copy his Christlikeness) only stands between you and the Shepherd and prevents you from becoming like Him. Any under-shepherd purportedly of Christ who does not teach you first, foremost and entirely to hear the Shepherd for yourself is a thief and a liar, out to steal sheep for himself. Run – do not walk! – to the nearest exit!

Paul prophesied, “From among yourselves [the elders] will arise men [“bishops” and “pastors”], speaking a [Nicolaitan] corruption of the truth of Christ’s way, to draw the disciples away from Christ and after themselves [and their doctrines].” (Acts 20:30 – interpolations added for clarity of the meaning of the prophecy) Any man who insists that you follow him at the expense of your responsibility to imitate, copy, replicate, duplicate the life and likeness of Christ is a false apostle, false prophet, false shepherd, false teacher, false whatever. Seek the Shepherd as to whether you even need any man any longer. (Heb. 5:12) If you do, find out from Him what man (or woman) you should watch and observe carefully (and not just listen to lectures, “sermons,” from this one) so that you might better hear the Shepherd for yourself. If you no longer need a man to help you hear and follow the Shepherd (which will be evident to and confirmed by those others around you who hear and follow the Shepherd), then seek Him as to whom He would have you to be an example, an “original,” that they might copy. This is the

work of the ministry that is the responsibility of the saints (Eph. 4:12) and not the work of some unScriptural clergy class. This is the way the 1st and 2nd century believers overturned their world and is the only true way of following Christ and God.

Let he who has ears hear.

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