

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“I Have Given You an Example”

John 13:15: *For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you.*

One of the things accomplished by the Son of God's descension to earth was the provision of a perfect example to follow. Consider some specific practices exemplified by Jesus that we must imitate.

Self-Denial – In **Matthew 16:21**, “*Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.*”

Such suffering was not *Peter's* will for the Lord, so he rebuked Jesus and, inadvertently, promoted *Satan's* will by trying to stop Jesus from going through with *the Father's* will (**verses 22-23**).

After rebuking Peter, “*Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me’*” (**verse 24**).

Jesus was prepared to forsake His own comforts to submit to the Father's will. He taught that His followers must do likewise.

Taking up our crosses, as **verse 24** refers to, involves forsaking and pursuing *anything* necessary to please God. The sincere Christian will notice many situations in which he or she must choose between what pleases self and what pleases God. Like Jesus, we must always choose the latter.

His words, “*not as I will, but as thou wilt*” (**Matt. 26:39**) must describe *our* attitude toward God.

Love – By denying His own comforts for the sake of the Father's will and the benefit of mankind, Jesus perfectly exemplified *love*.

Ephesians 5:2 commands, “*walk in love, even as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling fragrance.*”

Like Our Savior, we must not only deny ourselves in order to submit to the Father's will, but also deny our comforts and pleasures as needed to do what is right toward *others*. We must look out for others' interests (**1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:4**), instead of merely basing all decisions on what we want.

Servitude – Jesus' example of self-denial and love shows us that doing great things for God is not about seeking preeminence, popularity, and possessions. Rather, it is about being a *servant* for God and others.

In **Matthew 20:21**, James and John's mother asked Jesus to give preeminence to her sons. The other ten were indignant toward James and John upon hearing this (**verse 24**). Jesus' disciples seemed to have a carnal view of “greatness.”

In **verses 25-27**, “*Jesus summoned them, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bondservant.’*”

Jesus then noted the perfect example of servitude. **Verse 28:** *even as the Son of Man came not be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

John 13:3 says that Jesus knew “*that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came from God, and was going to God.*” It is striking that this statement showing Jesus’ superiority is followed by a description of Jesus *servicing* those He is superior to (**verses 4-12**). In **verse 14**, Jesus explained, “*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.*” This is the setting for His statement, “*For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you*” (**verse 15**).

Humility – By becoming a servant in this way, the Son of God perfectly exemplified what it means to *humble oneself*.

In **Philippians 2:3**, the Holy Spirit exhorted, “*doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself.*” This is followed by an exhortation to pursue selflessness and servitude (**verse 4**).

After commanding humility, the Holy Spirit commanded, “*Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*” (**verse 5**).

He went on to stress at least three ways by which the Son of God perfectly exemplified humility: (1) by taking on human form, though He is Deity (**verses 6-7**), (2) by being perfectly obedient to the will of the Father (**verse 8**), and (3) by dying a humiliating death by crucifixion (**verse 8**).

Though points 1 and 3 do not directly apply to us, the principle of humility *does*. If the Son of God was willing to humble Himself, how much more should we eagerly humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand?

Forgiveness – Jesus’ perfect love is also shown by His willingness to *forgive*.

Perhaps the most striking verse in connection with this principle is **Luke 23:34**.

In this verse, the Son of God and Savior of

the world was being crucified because of the envy and hatred of others. Remarkably, He reacted by saying, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*”

Jesus’ statement was not excusing evil-doing. It did, though, show that Jesus had no resentment or bitterness toward those who treated Him despicably. He was desirous of their repentance, rather than wanting the worst for those who mistreated Him. Such is the essence of having a forgiving heart.

Writing “*to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae*” (**Col. 1:2**), the Holy Spirit through Paul commanded, “*bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do*” (**Col. 3:13**).

No one has ever mistreated us as much as we have mistreated Christ. If *He* is willing to forgive *us* upon submission to His terms, how much more should *we* eagerly forgive others?

Steadfastness – Jesus’ forgiving attitude of **Luke 23:34** exemplifies one component of how we should respond in trials.

Christ provided a perfect example of steadfast allegiance to the Father’s will when faced with such trials (**1 Pet. 2:21-23**).

Jesus showed us that no matter how difficult it is to do the right thing, we can (and must) always choose this path. Mistreatment from others does not mean we can mistreat them. Going through a hard time does not mean we can put service to God on the “backburner.” As Jesus exemplified, there is *never* a right time to do what is wrong.

Much more could be said about the perfect example of Christ, but these are among the things He’s exemplified. May we follow the Savior both by obeying His Word and by walking in His footsteps.

- **Michael Hickox**