

The "Imitation of Christ" In Christian Tradition: It's Missing Charismatic Emphasis

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Part I

Popular American culture, with its increasing focus on the spiritual,¹ has generated a minor fad among teenagers: a WWJD? ("What Would Jesus Do?") bracelet, which, while bouncing on the wrists of video game players and entangling the TV remote, clicking in gangsta rappers on MTV, seeks to draw its wearers toward an "imitation of Christ." The WWJD bracelet expresses this more or less continuous tradition throughout church history to replicate the life of Christ, the tradition having deep but somewhat selectively attended roots in the New Testament itself. The devotional classics ranging from St Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* to Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* easily spring to mind as examples. But this notion of "following Jesus," "discipleship" or "spirituality" calls up a historically conditioned set of restrictions on how far that "imitation" may be applied. Traditionally, aside from minor movements in the radical reformation or from certain restorationist groups, we understand that a replication of Jesus' life is properly restricted to piety and ethics.

Progress in biblical scholarship over two millennia has produced little movement on this front. A recent collection of academic essays, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*² continues this tradition without any serious consideration of extending "discipleship" to any other areas of emulating Jesus, particularly to the miraculous.³ "Discipleship remains limited to "piety and ethics," very much as is our present notion of "spiritual formation."

Because, in traditional theology, Jesus' unique divinity was accredited by miracles, few Christians seriously attempted to replicate that performance in Jesus' ministry. Within this framework, to attempt to perform miracles would represent an attempt to promote oneself as divine— an effort virtually as blasphemous as to claim one's own suffering and death to be redemptive for sin.

This article attempts to show that the elimination of miraculous works from the purview of the *imitatio Christi* simply does not derive from Scripture and is not, therefore, normative. Against the traditional, restricted view of "imitation," the New Testament contains a strong *parenthesis* for replicating the life and activities of Jesus in *all areas*, including the ministry of the miraculous.⁴

The recent trend toward a more biblical "Spirit Christology" facilitates our thesis that a central New Testament theme in Jesus' ministry was that he is presented not only as a unique sacrifice for sin, but as a normative exemplar of charismatic ministry for others to replicate. Hence, in this article, after Part I, a survey of traditional theology and developments in this area, Part II examines the New Testament and its contemporary expressions of mimesis (imitation/replication) and its semantic field, while Part III shows that the New Testament *content* of mimesis requires a remarkably detailed replication of each stage of Jesus' life and ministry, specifically including his ministry of "signs and wonders." This article represents an exploratory survey of this issue. It is necessarily brief and incomplete, both in its scope and supporting evidence. Early on, Christology found much of its shape in Greek philosophical apologetics. Since it was no difficult matter to prove that Jesus was human, the overwhelming apologetic emphasis focused on establishing his *divinity*, the importance of this being that only God could redeem from sin.⁵ In Christian tradition, then, Jesus came to be seen principally as the divine savior from sin, whose nature and mission were utterly and transcendently unique. To protect this image of Christ, the apologetic impulse tended to recast the New Testament portrayal of his ministry, particularly his miracles, into proofs for divinity, a

move that had the effect of distancing the life and actions of Jesus from those of his mortal followers. Of course Christian tradition is far from uniform on this, or even on most issues, but St Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), for example, expressed some flavor of this discontinuity when he insisted: If any man shall say that the one Lord Jesus Christ was glorified by the Holy Ghost so that he used through him a power not his own and from him received power against unclean spirits and power to work miracles before men and shall not rather confess that it was his own spirit through which he worked these divine signs let him be an anathema.⁶ An anonymous commentator on this passage clarifies Cyril's distinction between Christ and the apostles with respect to miracles and the anointing of the Spirit.

The apostles worked miracles through the Holy Ghost but as by a power external to themselves but not so Christ. When Christ worked wonders through the Holy Ghost he was working by a power which was his own via the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, from whom he never was and never could be separated, ever abiding with him and the eternal Father as the divine unity.⁷

Obviously, while it is granted here that the apostles could and did perform miracles through the power of the Spirit, it is clear that Jesus' experience with the Spirit is unique and cannot be replicated precisely, even by his apostles. In fact, Ambrosiastor (d. 384), somewhat earlier suggested that the experience of the Spirit involves a kind of spiritual entropy, moving from Christ to the apostles, who, in Jn 14.12 were promised they alone would perform "greater works." A second, lower level of spiritual power is described in Jn 20.22, which denotes an impartation of the Spirit conferring ecclesiastical power enabling the successive transfer of the Spirit throughout history via the imposition of hands. Finally, a third level appears in Acts 2 in which the Spirit was bestowed on the laity "whence arises the preaching of the church".⁸ The specifics of this spiritual power are murky in terms of the exegesis as well as the specific manifestations of the Spirit intended at the lower levels. Ambrosiastor does seem to intend, however, that spiritual power, over time, diminishes in stages, that the laity of today could never aspire to the level of charismatic power of Jesus or even his apostles. Calvin echoes this principle:

How plainly is his deity shown in miracles! Even though I confess that both the prophets and the apostles performed miracles equal to and similar to his, yet in this respect there is the greatest of differences: they distributed the gifts of God by their ministry, but he showed forth his own power.⁹

This impulse to protect the uniqueness of Christ, and by extension, his apostles, nourished the doctrine of cessation, which held that miracles and certain spiritual gifts appeared only in order to *point to* the deity of Christ and the significance of his work. These miracles, perforce, ceased when the core of Christian doctrine was established.¹⁰

In this mode, Luther sets the agenda for subsequent Protestantism with respect to the traditional "imitation" of Christ. He suggests that while Christ's role involves serving as an example, his chief mission, "*the cardinal doctrine and the most precious one of the Gospel*" [italics mine], is to redeem us from sin through his work on the cross. "When we possess Christ through faith as a free gift we should go on and do as he has done for us, and imitate him in our entire life and suffering."¹¹ From other passages, we know that Luther limited the imitation of Christ to traditional acts of piety, suffering and ministry, but drew the line at miraculous spiritual gifts.¹² Subsequently, scholastic Protestantism and the deistic Enlightenment overwhelmingly expressed Christian praxis as a matter of ethics. Hence, with the restriction of the miraculous to the first century on the one hand, and the emphasis on Christianity-as-morality that developed later, the profile of traditional Christian discipleship was set.

Prominent Evangelical scholars follow this traditional Protestant line even today. For example, Colin Brown claims that the programmatic charismatic ministry of Jesus in, say, Lk. 4.18 cannot apply beyond Jesus himself: "no one else may claim this anointing and this role." Similarly, Heb. 2.4 ([God] "bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed by His own

will”) “refers to the ministry of Jesus and the founding of the church. The passage is not talking about what happens when the gospel is proclaimed in each and every age.”¹³ D.A. Carson applies the principle a step further: “The apostles and other writers of the New Testament must be viewed as something *other than* proto-Christians, models of what other Christians should enjoy and experience.”¹⁴ Such modern Evangelical sentiment is threatened somewhat by an emerging emphasis these days on Spirit Christology,¹⁵ a doctrine which can be construed in many cases as an expression of the “anthropocentric turn” widely diffused in theology since the Enlightenment and generally denying the divine nature of Jesus. Nonetheless this category of Spirit Christology can also be understood as a turn toward a scriptural emphasis, as Del Colle argues.¹⁶ It is possible to affirm the central creedal statements about Jesus while at the same time retaining biblical emphases with respect to his Spirit anointing. A variant of this line of Christology may also be described as “paradigm Christology,” reflecting an emphasis upon human response and replication of Jesus’ life and ministry.¹⁷

Arguably, any discussion of Spirit Christology engages the most attended, developed and dauntingly complex areas of theology—many areas from which we must prescind in this article. However, this theological complexity has not dissuaded countless Pentecostal preachers from expressing their intuitive (or perhaps simply biblical) insight that “everything Jesus did we should do, because he was empowered by the same Holy Ghost we have”—in other words, a Christology of mimesis. Indeed, I would argue, something like this expression can be demonstrated as a key New Testament theme.

Part II

The mimesis (“imitation”) theme is extraordinarily large in the New Testament. While Louw-Nida lists only 5 words in this immediate family, some 42 words or word groups appear in the semantic field, “Guide, Discipline, Follow,” 26 expressions for “teach” or “instruct,” which involve a sizeable number of references to such activities as repeating, following, obeying or instructing.¹⁸ Moreover, the extensive field of “knowing” words contains a strong Semitic overtone of “knowing by interaction with someone” as opposed to knowing by detached observation or deriving knowledge from abstract principles. It is impossible to survey the multitude of variations in the above fields to make my point that Jesus expressed the clear intention that his mission was to be replicated exactly by his followers, irrespective of their place in succeeding generations. This intention can be shown by an examination of Jesus’ cultural and religious background; the use of the terms, “rabbi,” “disciple” and “follow[er]”; his explicit statements about the nature of his ministry’s continuity in his followers; and the disciples’ expectations of those who would follow them. While an examination of *Jesus’ historical and cultural background* with respect to the teacher–disciple relationship represents no necessary proof as to the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, it is nonetheless instructive to note that in general in the Greek world, the teacher–student relationship “is predominantly characterized by the concept of mimesis. Teachers and students are bound together by a certain teaching and *practice of life*, and the student is recognizable *in his imitation* of the teachings and *life* of the teacher” [italics mine].¹⁹ Closer to Jesus’ experience, Josephus offers a similar goal for all young Jews:

[The Law] orders that they shall be taught to read and shall learn both the laws and the deeds of their forefathers, in order that they may imitate the latter, and being grounded in the former, may neither transgress nor have any excuse for being ignorant of them.²⁰

Even more relevantly, the Palestinian rabbi–student relationship reflects a similar pattern.²¹ Ben Sirach (d. c. 175 BCE) cites the goal of a rabbi as to train his student to such an extent that “When his father [teacher] dies, it is as though he is not dead. For he leaves behind him one like himself”.²² To a humorous extreme, R. Akiba (d. 135), followed his mentor, R. Joshua, into the privy, during which time Akiba claimed to have “learned three good habits.” He defended his action: “I considered everything a part of the Torah and I needed to learn.”²³

In the Gospels and Acts the followers of Jesus are called “disciples” (*μαθηται*;) 67 times in Matthew, 44 in Mark, 34 in Luke and 73 times in John. This does not include numerous references to disciples of others, such as John the Baptist or the Pharisees. In Acts the term appears 29 times, applied to believers in Jesus including one feminine form applied to Tabitha (9.36). The verb form (*μαθητευω*, “to become a disciple”) appears three times in Matthew and once in Acts.

The word “follow” in its noun and verb forms appears some 14 times denoting disciples of Jesus in the Gospels, and once as a participle in Rev. 14.4, used of the 144,000 “who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” It is interesting here that these terms “disciple” and “follow” apply both to the disciples of the earthly Jesus, and also to Christians in general. In the Gospels, Jesus clearly stakes out a claim for his status as “teacher/rabbi” in the face of potential competing claims among his own followers. For example, in the context of rabbinic pride and intellectualism run amok (Mt. 23), Jesus makes a triptych of demands, focusing on his authority as rabbi:

But you are not to be called “Rabbi,” for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth “father,” for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called “teacher,” for you have one Teacher, the Christ (vv. 8-10).

Jesus is frequently described in the Gospels as “rabbi”—a term ranging in meanings from respect (“Sir”) to a more formal term of “teacher/ role model”.²⁴ It is clear, however, from a variety of statements that the relationship of Jesus to his disciples rested upon the latter notion. For example, in Lk. 6.40 Jesus affirms the traditional rabbinic notion that “a pupil [*talmid*?] is not above his teacher [*rabbi*?], but everyone [each, in every case, without exception], after he has been fully trained [*katertismevno*~], will be *like his teacher*” [emphasis mine]. The expression “not above,” in view of the contrasting parallel in the second part of the verse, here suggests that the pupil normatively does not deviate from *anything* the teacher does. In the Gospel of John this pattern of rigidity in replicating Jesus’ life is repeated in 13.34; 17.18, 23; and 20.21, using the conceptual formula, “As I...so you.” In 13.15 Jesus states, “For I gave you an *example* that *you also should do as* [*καγω~j*] *I did*” [italics mine]. The continuation and replication of Jesus’ mission in his disciples is explicit in Jn 20.21: “As [*καγω~j*] the Father has sent me, I also send you.” The English translation “as” for *καγω~j*, implies a sense of rough equivalence, expressing similarity, but necessarily *not* being the same, as in its synonym, “like.” By contrast, the Greek *καγω~* is a word that carries the stronger sense of “exactly as,” or, “to the exact same degree and extent”.²⁵ Hence, in both of these verses, the specific, exact duplication of Jesus’ mission is intended. The significance of all this is that, in Palestinian Jewish tradition contemporary with Jesus, as well as in the New Testament itself, no detail of a teacher’s life is to be either ignored or left unreplicated.

One could argue, however, that the disciples’ relationship with Jesus was unique and not to be replicated in further generations of Christians. Indeed, this is explicit in the cessationist tradition when it comes to replicating Jesus’ ministry of signs and wonders. If we put aside the miracle aspect of discipleship, however, it is generally understood in Christendom that the Gospels and Acts seem to present the disciples of Jesus as surrogates for the reader.²⁶ In fact this is explicit throughout the New Testament: subsequent generations of Christians are normatively to be disciples of the disciples even as Christians are followers of Christ.

When we move into the epistles, the discipleship theme is every bit as strong as in the Gospels and Acts: only the vocabulary has changed. Outside the narrative documents it appears that the terms “disciple” and “follower” are replaced with specific exhortations to live out the Christian life: to “walk” in the “way” of Christ, or “put on” or be “in Christ” in some sense. There is a consciousness of the presence of the promised Spirit, who is virtually equated with the presence of Jesus, for example, 2 Cor.

3.17, cf. Jn 14.17-18, 28; 16.16. In this, discipleship is advanced toward an even more intimate awareness of the rabbi, Jesus, who will empower them and guide them into all truth.

Discipleship, however, moves to a third, fourth and even a fifth generation in the New Testament. Paul can require of his readers, for example, “Imitate me even as [καὶ ὡς ἐγώ], to the same degree and extent that] I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11.1). Four other times he exhorts churches to imitate him (1 Cor. 4.16; Phil. 3.17; 2 Thess. 3.7, 9, cf. Gal. 4.12, Phil. 4.9; Jas 3.1; 1 Tim. 4.16; 2 Tim. 3.4).

In 1 Cor. 4.15-17 Paul says that he became the Corinthians’ “father” through the Gospel.” This obviously means something more than progenitor, or “father” of a new religion, but rather retains the more technical meaning of “rabbi/teacher.” Proof of this is the remainder of the verse: “I exhort you to become imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my *son* [student] whom I love [an echo of Jesus’ baptism?]. . . who will *remind* you of my ways.” The term “ways” is a Semitism that refers to the whole characteristic pattern of life.²⁷ Here, then, we implicitly have three generations of imitators described: Jesus, Paul, Timothy/the Corinthians.

Similarly, 1 Thess. 1.5-6 displays the pattern of imitation, not only to the third generation, but also to the fourth! Not only could the believers observe the type of people Paul and his companions were as they presented the Gospel, but the Thessalonians “became imitators of us and of the Lord . . . so as (*w{ste*, “for this reason”) to become a pattern to all those in Macedonia and in Achaia.” In other words the explicit reason the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul, was so that they, themselves, would become exemplars for others to imitate in exactly the same way. A further pattern evolves in 2 Tim. 2.1-2 where Paul addresses Timothy as “my son” and encourages him to perpetuate the process of replication to the *fifth* generation! “And the things which you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others also.” It is important to note that while the “teaching” here is verbal, it is directed toward spiritual empowerment and action, as is suggested from the previous verse and as we shall see in the next section.

Having reviewed the *nature* of discipleship as mimesis in the New Testament setting, I shall now in Part III briefly examine the *content* of discipleship.²⁸ What does the New Testament emphasize that a disciple was expected to *do* when he imitated the life of his teacher/rabbi?

Part III

Let us step back for a moment and view the big picture of the *content* of New Testament discipleship by asking five simple questions: (1) What is it that the New Testament says that Jesus came to do? (2) When ministering, what does he actually spend his time doing? (3) What does Jesus tell his disciples to do? (4) What is it that they actually spend their time doing? Finally, (5) what is the reader of the New Testament (the “disciple of the disciples”) expected to do?

1. Frequently, when the New Testament writers condense Jesus’ ministry into a sentence or two they show him in opposition to the reign of the devil, which appears as demonic possession, sickness, the disruption of nature, or sin: it was “for this purpose that Jesus appeared, to destroy the works of the Devil” (1 Jn 3.8). Peter spelled out the result of Jesus’ baptism and gave a summary of Jesus’ mission on earth: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power . . . he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10.38). Both of these verses confirm the programmatic statement about Jesus’ mission in Lk. 4.18.

2. Summary statements about Jesus’ mission abound throughout the text of the Gospels with references to healing and exorcisms:

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed...Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons... (Mk 1.34//Mt. 8.16//Lk. 4.40-41).

...he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him (Mk 3.10//Mt. 4.15//Lk. 6.19).

The news about him spread...so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses (Lk. 4.15).

At that time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sickness and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind (Lk. 7.21).

I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal (Lk. 13.33).

He welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing (Lk. 9.11//Mt. 14.14).

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel (Mt. 15.30-31).

Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there (Mt. 19.2). The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them (Mt. 21.14).

The preceding passages illustrate the sizable emphasis the Gospel writers place upon the role of healing in Jesus' ministry. Of course, Jesus did many other things besides healing and exorcisms. But the point is, if New Testament discipleship depends upon replicating the life of the exemplar, then miracles represent a significant part of "imitating Christ." Indeed, if the amount of space a writer devotes to a subject is any index to its importance, then the healings, exorcisms and other "extraordinary" charismata must be extremely important. As a percentage of the text describing the public ministry of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, the space devoted to the accounts of miracles amounts to: 44 percent of Matthew, 65 percent of Mark, 29 percent of Luke and 30 percent of John.²⁹ This percentage is continued in the ministry of the early church, as recorded in the book of Acts, if not actually expanded: of the total text of Acts, 27.2 percent of the space is devoted to "extraordinary" charismata. That represents more text than that of all the speeches of Acts combined.

To conclude, Jesus' public ministry in inaugurating the kingdom of God consisted to a sizable degree of healings, exorcisms and miracles, not as a way of "proving" the kingdom, but of expressing it. 3. The next question is, what does Jesus tell his disciples to do? At the outset, it is important to note the *explicit reason* Mark gives for Jesus selecting disciples in the first place: "He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to announce³⁰ [the kingdom?] and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk 3.14-15). It is only natural, then, in view of our previous discussion, that after their being "with" him, Jesus would then send them out to replicate his own mission: "He sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits" (Mk 6.7). Both Matthew (10.1, 7, 8) and Luke (9.1, 2, 6) echo this commission in some detail. Luke includes a similar commission to 72 others: "Heal the sick [wherever you visit] and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Lk. 10.9). The numbers 12 and 72 could represent the "new Israel," the church, which is here proleptically commissioned to perform the same works.³¹ The "Great Commission" similarly commands the disciples' continuation of the miraculous, though some would wish to deny this.³² This pattern is not limited to the Synoptics. The command to do "greater works" than Jesus is understood as a command to replicate Jesus' ministry in miraculous signs.³³

4. The fourth question is, what did the disciples actually do? The only extensive historical account of the disciples' activities after the ascension of Jesus is the book of the Acts of the Apostles. This work records, we assume, with an appropriate emphasis, the results of Jesus' training of the disciples: in short, what does Acts emphasize about discipleship? True, the disciples exhibited the virtues of the traditional notion of Christian discipleship: morality and piety. But Acts devotes no less than 27.2 percent of its total text to miracle stories! This is more space than to all of the speeches or sermons of Acts combined, at 22.5 percent.³⁴ Moreover, this high percentage of miracle accounts does not occur without a consciousness on the part of the author. Several studies³⁵ have noted the deliberate parallel composition of the Lukan miracle stories in the careers of Jesus, Peter and Paul and have drawn various conclusions as to the reasons these parallels were framed. Susan Praeder³⁶ points out that there is a variety of unreliable criteria, e.g., coincidental events or language, which indicate only spurious "parallels," hence, her caution that mere similarities do not demand an author's conscious motive to draw comparisons of the persons or points described. Nevertheless she notes that for Luke, parallel composition is the "surest evidence" that the miracle working activity of Jesus, Peter and Paul was intended to be understood as sharing parallel roles, that is, as preachers, healers and exorcists. Some of the parallels Praeder examined appear in the following chart.

Jesus	Peter	Paul
----	Acts 5:1-11	Acts 13:6-12
Luke 5:17-26	3:1-10	14:8-18
8:26-39	-----	16:16-24
6:17-19	5:12-16; 8:4-8	19:8-12
8:40-2,49-56	9:36-42	20:7-12
4:38-41	9:32-35	28:7-10

Even without the clearest similarities in content, verbal composition and position in relation to the surrounding pericopes, the charismatic mission activities of Jesus' followers in Acts, at least in broad scope, closely replicate those in the ministry of Jesus and those resulting from the first commission of the 12 and 72.³⁷

Certainly, when St Paul summarizes his mission he does so with a substantial charismatic/miraculous component (Acts 15.12; 1 Thess. 1.5; 2 Cor. 12.12; Rom. 15.19). In this he is simply replicating the same emphasis on the power of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus, while at the same time, if we are to understand "mimesis" and its related New Testament concepts correctly, demanding of his own followers that they reproduce this same pattern of emphasis. This brings us to our final point.

5. The last question is, what is the reader of the New Testament (the "disciple of the disciples") expected to do? Let us assume as before that the New Testament instructions to the disciples or apostles, in general, are instructions also to the reader.³⁸

The New Testament frequently commands the reader/disciple to replicate the charismatic ministry of the apostles, e.g., to "seek," "desire earnestly," "rekindle" and "employ" certain "miraculous" charisma (1 Cor. 12.31; 14.1, 4, 5, 39; 2 Tim. 1.6; 1 Pet. 4: 10, cf. Jn 14.12-14; 15.7; 16.23-24—ask for "anything" in the context of the Spirit's descent to the disciples; 1 Jn 3.22) and implies that their appearance can be suppressed simply by neglecting to imitate faithfully the New Testament exemplars (Rom. 12.6; 1 Cor. 14.39; 1 Thess. 5.19-20; 1 Tim. 4.14; 2 Tim. 1.6).³⁹ Particularly interesting is that the very verses that command a *replication* of Paul's ministry are verses that are explicit about the charismatic *content* of that replication. For example, 1 Thess. 1.5 is a summary of Paul's pattern of presenting the Gospel "not in word only [as in classical Protestantism], but with *power* [ἐν δυνάμει]—the most frequent word for

“miracle/mighty work” in the New Testament] and in the Holy Spirit [e)n pneu/mati a (gi/w|]—carrying a strong overtone of prophetic anointing], that is, in strong confirmation.” The Thessalonians are reminded that they came to know by experience and interaction [oi] date] what sort of messengers Paul and the others proved to be. This is not primarily a reference to character or ethics! At this point, Paul notes that the Thessalonians then “became imitators of us and of the Lord!” The context demands that the Thessalonians were *both imitating and modeling for others* (v. 7), Paul’s miraculous/charismatic gospel presentation, mentioning specifically, *inter alia*, their faith in God—a charismatic gift of the Spirit (v. 8)!

A second example of the “imitation” pattern being integrally bound up with charismatic expression is 1 Cor. 1.4-8, which shows Paul’s presentation of the miraculous/charismatic gospel to the Corinthians, who then replicate the pattern καqw~v [exactly as] the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, *with the result that you do not lack any spiritual gift.*” This replication is to continue among believers until the parousia.⁴⁰

A third example derives from another main “imitation” passage, above: “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2.1-2).” Traditional Protestantism might understand this as an exhortation to “be encouraged to receive the mercy of Christ for forgiveness of sin and for promoting sanctification.” A more Pauline understanding would include this, but with a much stronger emphasis on availing oneself of the miraculous/charismatic power, indicated by the use of e)ndunamou~ e)n th|/ xa/riti⁴¹ of the Messiah who bears the Spirit of prophecy in this, the end of the Age (e)ndunamou~ e)n th|/ xa/riti th|/ e)n Xristw|~ I)hsou~), cf. 1.6. This exhortation, then, is the normative *content* of the “teaching” that flows from generation to generation of Christian disciples.

Conclusion

This article should not be construed as an attempt to deny that normative New Testament discipleship contains none of the elements traditionally associated with the term today. Certainly, piety, meditation, self-sacrifice and moral behavior are also essential expressions of an *imitatio Christi*. Nevertheless, the foregoing should indicate that a thorough review of the New Testament will demonstrate that our somewhat docetic traditional Christology as well as our unbiblical, evidentialist view of miracles, has contributed to an understanding of Christian discipleship that is shorn of its intended spiritual depth and power. Nothing is more crucial for the outcome of the church than our understanding of the charismatic mission of Christ Jesus and our relation to it. Our view of the goals of discipleship has immediate implications for the direction of Christian training and spiritual development.

¹ In an August 1997 Gallup survey, “two thirds (66%) of survey respondents said they think religion can answer all or most of contemporary problems, the highest figure recorded since the measurement was started 40 years ago in 1957. Only 20% said religion is old-fashioned and out-of-date” (*Emerging Trends* [September 1997] <http://www.prrc.com/et.html>).

² Ed. R.N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

³ Even James D.G. Dunn, whose prolific writing career had earlier emphasized Pentecostal and charismatic themes, devotes slightly over a half a page in his recent book on the subject (*Jesus’ Call to Discipleship* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 127, cf. p. 11) to the proposition that “the discipleship of Jesus had an integrally charismatic character”, though even there he describes almost nothing of this “charismatic character.” Much the same can be said of Andreas Köstenberger (*The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]) minimizes the Johannine “signs” and “works” as the charismatic power of God. The mission of the disciples in this work is as decidedly Baptist as its author!

⁴ The popular term, “miraculous” as I use it designates a range of so-called “extra-ordinary” charismata: e.g. healings, “mighty works” (dunavmei~), exorcisms, immediate revelation (prophecy, words of wisdom or knowledge). The “charismatic” of “charismatic ministry”, above, refers not to the general “graced” condition of all Christians, but more narrowly and essentially to the same list of phenomena as “miraculous” in this case.

⁵ See the surveys by F.W. Norris ('Christ, Christology', in E. Ferguson [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* [New York: Garland, 1990], pp. 197-206); M. Simonetti ('Christology', in A. DiBerardino [ed.], *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], I, pp. 163-65) and W. Pannenberg ('*Christologie II, Dogmengeschichtlich*', *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (7 vols.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 3rd edn, 1986) I, pp. 1763-77).

⁶ Anathema IX: Against Nestorius, *Post-Nicene Fathers* (ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace; 2nd series; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans [1900] 1979), XIV, p. 540.

⁷ Anathema IX, 541.

⁸ J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latinae* (221 vols.; Paris apud editorem, c. 1842), XXXV, cols. 2289-91.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. F.L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I.XII.13.

¹⁰ Alternatively, miracles served as scaffolding for the church: when the church was established, the scaffolding (accrediting miracles) was no longer required, and so was removed (J. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], pp. 24-33).

¹¹ "On Christ Crucified", *Luthers Werke* (60 vols.; Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1840), XII, p. 372: "Christ is [secondarily] an example and pattern which we are to follow."

¹² For a popular summary on miracles see E.M. Plass (ed.) *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St Louis: Concordia, 1959), II, pp. 953-57.

¹³ L. Smedes (ed.), *Ministry and the Miraculous: A Case Study at Fuller Theological Seminary* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987), *passim*. C. Brown, "The Other Half of the Gospel", *CT* 33 (April 21, 1989), p. 27.

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament", in C.W. Colson and M.S. Horton (eds.), *Power Religion* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 102.

¹⁵ J.D.G. Dunn, "The Spirit of Christ", in *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 136-49. C.H. Pinnock, "Spirit and Christology", ch. 3, in his *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 79-111. M.E. O'Keeffe, "Contemporary Spirit Christologies: An Examination of G.W.H. Lampe, Walter Kasper, and Piet Schoonenberg" (PhD dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1994).

¹⁶ "[We have] concluded that a dogmatic Spirit-christology may be developed from New Testament sources in a manner that maintains and affirms hypostatic differentiation in God" (R. Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], p. 184).

¹⁷ B. Ramm, *An Evangelical Christology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), pp. 179-81.

¹⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989) sections 27, 33, 36 and 41:44-49.

¹⁹ H. Weder, "Disciple, Discipleship", *ABD*, II, p. 209.

²⁰ *Apion* 2.204.

²¹ For later examples that seem to extend this theme into the second and even third centuries CE, see: *y. Ber.* 1.8.3d; 3.5.6d, cf. *y. Ber.* 24a-b; *Uab.* 12b and 41a. N. Drazin, *History of Jewish Education from 515 BCE to 220 CE* (New York: Arno, 1979), p. 12. Having used these examples, we must avoid the temptation of applying anachronistically to the New Testament the later associations of the term, "rabbi" from the second century CE and beyond, where the term has assumed a more rigid and "professional" cast. In this connection, John Christopher Thomas lists half a dozen important differences between Jesus as teacher and the roles of the rabbis contemporary with him. Thomas's excellent paper ('Discipleship in Mark's Gospel', in Paul Elbert [ed.], *Faces of Renewal: Studies in Honor of Stanley M. Horton* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988], pp. 65-67), which I had overlooked until this present work was completed, anticipated many of the points made here. The overall point, however, of the demand for mimesis in the New Testament, does not rest on these later rabbinic models, which are only illustrative, but rather on the clear patterns and *parenesis* of the New Testament itself.

²² *Wisdom of Sirach*, 30.4.

²³ *B. Ber.* 62a and *y. Ber.* 9.8, 14c. L. Finkelstein, *Akiba* (New York: Covici, 1936), p. 181, typically, a rabbi's disciple was so intent on mastering the "rules of proper behavior that he followed every action of his teachers with the closest scrutiny and recorded their slightest habits." So also, B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1961), pp. 182-83.

²⁴ E. Lohse, "rJabbiv", *TDNT*, VI, pp. 64-65. H. Lapin, "Rabbi", *ABD*, VI, pp. 600-602. M. Hengel (*The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], pp. 50-57) unnecessarily attempts to distance

Jesus' rabbinic pattern of mimesis from that of his Jewish contemporaries. Hengel slides into a logical pitfall when he says, "it is singular what a small part basically is played in the Gospels by the "example" or "imitation" of Jesus: he seems to have directed his disciples' gaze not towards his everyday behaviour but towards the dawning kingdom and the realization of the will of God in its particular and specific requirements' (p. 53). That is, the disciples were not to "follow" Jesus in the sense of carrying on a tradition, but "to prepare for the service of the approaching rule of God." The problem of this observation lies in the fact that Jesus' "everyday behaviour" consisted in acts inaugurating the kingdom of God—the very mission for which Hengel sees the disciples preparing! Hengel confuses Jesus' partial adaptation of the rabbinic *pedagogical method* with a duplication of rabbinic *religious content*. Hengel's major contribution, however, is his emphasis on the "charismatic" dimension of Jesus' mission and discipleship, though his use of "charismatic" seems nebulous compared with more concrete expressions of the *charismata* in Paul's writings. Moreover, Hengel seems focused on what Jesus the charismatic leader is *not*, while this present study is more concerned with spelling out the *content* of the charismatic leader's mission and the *process* of its commission. Also see B. Viviano, *Study as Worship* in *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*, v. 26 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), p. 159. C. Blendinger, "ajkolouqevw", *NIDNTT*, I, p. 482.

²⁵ See *BAGD*, p. 391.

²⁶ E.g., R.N. Longenecker, "Introduction", in *idem* (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 5-6. L. Hurtado, "Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark—and Beyond", in *Patterns*, pp. 13, 15, 22, 28, 37. T.L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy", in *Patterns*, pp. 40, 42, 44, esp. 470-48. On discipleship in Luke-Acts, Longenecker affirms that in all the lessons for the disciples "Luke meant to teach his readers, whether of his day or ours" ('Taking up the Cross Daily: Luke-Acts', *Patterns*, p. 75). Similarly in John: M.R. Hillmer: "at all times and in all places...to be a disciple of Jesus...is to do what Jesus calls his followers to do" (*Patterns*, p. 93. See also W. Kurz "Chapter Four: Sharing Jesus' Power for Service", in *idem*, *Following Jesus: A Disciple's Guide to Luke-Acts* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1984), pp. 57-67.

²⁷ H. Wolf, "derech", *TWOT*, I, p. 197. E. Merrill, "derech" *NIDOT*, I, pp. 989-93. W. Michaelis, "o#doj", *TDNT*, p. 670.

²⁸ Certainly, one could show that the New Testament exhorts its readers to view every aspect of Jesus life as a pattern for the believer: spiritual birth, deliverance from bondage, baptism (with water and Spirit) temptation, moral purity, prayer, ministry, rejection, suffering, trial before judges, death, resurrection, exaltation and rule.

²⁹ See, e.g., Richardson's figures on Mark (*Miracle Stories of the Gospels* [London: SCM Press, 1941], pp. 36-37). He counts the number of verses dealing with miracle stories to arrive at a relatively lower, though still significantly large, 47 per cent of the Gospel, excluding the passion narrative. But this procedure may result in deceptively lower ratios of miracles to the total book. The present approach is to measure the complete miracle pericope, usually a paragraph unit, which dealt specifically and clearly with a miracle. Summaries of miracle activity in Jesus' public ministry were also included. Although Jesus performed miracles while alone with his disciples, (the stilling of the storms, the resurrection appearances, the ascension, etc.), these cases were eliminated from the count, since they were not part of Jesus' public proclamation of the kingdom of God.

³⁰ The rendering, "preach" in most English translations is unfortunate, since the Gk κηρυσσειν in the New Testament suggests "to announce" or verbally to point out or introduce something with an overtone of prophecy, rather than the formal process of preaching we see in churches today.

³¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 54.

³² D.W. Carson and M. Horton (eds.), *Power Religion*, p. 103. C. Brown, "Other Half of the Gospel", p. 28. For a rebuttal: G. Greig, "Matthew 28:18-20: The Great Commission and Jesus' Commands to Preach and Heal", Appendix 3 in *idem*, *The Kingdom and the Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), pp. 399-403.

³³ G. Greig, "John 14:12: The Commission to All Believers to Do the Miraculous Works of Jesus", in *idem*, *The Kingdom and the Power*, pp. 393-97. J. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, pp. 109, 121, 154.

³⁴ C. Hemer, in his important commentary notes that the total text of its speeches comprise about 22.5 percent of the book of Acts (Appendix 1: "Speeches and Miracles in Acts" in his *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* [Ed. C. Gemf, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989], pp. 415-43).

³⁵ See, e.g., the review of proposed parallels in C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS, 20; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), pp. 55-65. See also, W. Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk: Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte* (Europäisch Hochschulschriften 23.49; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975), pp. 346-51, and F. Neiryneck, "The Miracle Stories in the Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction", in J. Kremer (ed.), *Les actes des*

apôtres: Traditions, redaction, theologie, BETL, 48 (Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), pp. 169-73. See especially the extended parallels between the miracles of Jesus and those of the Church in Acts in G.W.H. Lampe, ‘The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke’, in D. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 194-96. In view of scholarly emphasis on the miracles of Jesus (see the bibliographies in Loos, *Miracles of Jesus*, pp. 707-26, and L. Sabourin, *The Divine Miracles Discussed and Defended* [Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1977], pp. 237-71) the dearth of scholarship on what is truly a huge emphasis in Acts—27 percent of the text dealing with miracle accounts—is astonishing. Besides the above and scattered references in the commentaries: J. Fenton (‘The Order of Miracles Performed by Peter and Paul in Acts’, *Expository Times* 77 [1966], pp. 381-83; J. Ferguson, ‘Thoughts on Acts’, *Congregational Quarterly* 35 [1957], pp. 117-33; J. Hardon, ‘The Miracle Narratives in the Acts of the Apostles’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16 [1954], pp. 303-18; T. Crafer, *The Healing Miracles in the Book of Acts* [London: SPCK, 1939]). On the charismata generally, see James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 146-96.

³⁶ Susan Marie Praeder, *Miracle Worker and Missionary: Paul in the Acts of the Apostles* (SBLSP, 22; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 115-16. The chart (modified) is from p. 115.

³⁷ See the numerous references in Acts, above. ‘The fact that the same Spirit which worked in Jesus is now given by him as the exalted Messiah to his followers renders the subsequent history of his Church and its mission parallel, in certain respects, to that of his own life and work... The ministry of the apostles and of other disciples resembles that of Jesus at many points.’ G.W.H. Lampe ‘The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke’, p. 194; See also P. Minear, *To Heal and Reveal* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 122-47.

³⁸ See note 25, above.

³⁹ On the latter verse, J.N.D. Kelly affirms that ‘the idea that this grace operates automatically is excluded’ (*The Pastoral Epistles* [HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1963], p. 159). He compares this passage with the ‘quenching’ of the Spirit of prophecy in 1 Thess. 5.19.

⁴⁰ On this passage, see Ruthven (*On the Cessation of the Charismata*, pp. 126-31) and G. Fee (*God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], pp. 84-90).

⁴¹ On the charismatic emphasis in the New Testament on ‘grace’ (χαρις) see J. Noland (‘Grace as Power’, *NovT* 28 [1986], p. 31), ‘a tangible [charismatic] power in the believer.’ So also, J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 202-205. G. Wetter, *Charis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1913).

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