

Philippians 3:17-21

“Christian Enemies Of The Cross!”

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “*Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’*”¹ Perhaps Paul had Lot in mind when he wrote those words... When uncle Ab was his company, he did well, he excelled... When he moved *into* & began to associate w/the ungodly citizens of Sodom, he fell. Over & over again the word of God exhorts us to be careful of the company we keep & to beware of those we allow into the inner circle of influencing our lives. Because we become like those w/whom we hang around.

Proverbs puts it like this, “*The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.*”² If our heart’s desire is to *know Christ* in a deeper way, to lead my life in a manner that’s *pleasing* to Him, that brings *glory* to Him, one of the best things I can do is find & follow after those people who are doing just that. Those who *know* Him intimately, who seek to serve Him wholeheartedly & pursue Him consistently. & If I’m going to do that, I’ve got some decisions to make. I’ve got to be intentional about coming alongside certain people & cutting others out of the inner circle of my life.

I’ve been reminding my leaders lately, no one grows haphazardly, or accidentally. We have to be intentional about our growth. & I can’t follow after people who are headed different directions. I’ve got to choose which way I want to go & be intentional about surrounding myself w/those who are going the same way, who have *been* going that way & can help *lead* me in the way I should go...

Let’s recall that Paul has been pleading w/us to refuse to be distracted & purpose to be devoted to the calling of God upon our lives. That we forget those things which are behind & reach forward to those things which are ahead; laying hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of us.

Family, we’re to set the mission above personal ambition. Passion & drive is great, but *personal* ambition can be toxic. Ambition in & of itself is not a bad thing, put that little word “selfish” in front of it & it changes everything. What’s the mission? Love God, love others, make disciples. As believers we reject the consumer mentality, (what’s in it for me). The church doesn’t exist for us, we *are the church* & we exist for the world. Our attitude, our mentality is not one of consuming, it’s one of contributing. Not what can I *gain* from this ministry, but how *give* to this ministry? What can add to this ministry? How can I help, or improve this ministry... I’m here *not* to be served but to serve... It’s not about my *gain*, it’s about God’s *glory*.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 12:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 17-21

In the previous Vs we might say that Paul threw down the gauntlet. “My passion, my priority is to follow after Jesus w/all that I am, to press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Now he challenges us to take the logical next step. He says, “Brethren, join in following my example.” The challenge is that we carefully consider his manner of living, his passions, his priorities & seek to pattern *our* lives after *his*... Now we shouldn’t think that this is coming from a place of egotistical arrogance. As if he’s saying, “Listen children, I’ve got this all figured out, so just look to me blindly & follow me recklessly.” If we keep the context he just said in Vs 12, “Hey, I’m not perfect, I haven’t arrived, I’ve not attained, but I’ve narrowed my scope & I’m aiming at one thing.” & Here he’s saying, “You do the same.”

His one aim was to remain undistracted & completely devoted to Christ. He wanted to know Him & be about His (Jesus’) agenda for his life. & I think we can all agree that such is a worthy example to follow after! But Paul was not shy about calling people to follow his example. To the Corinthians he said, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”*³

Last week we were speaking of the focus, determination & motivation of an athlete. How they don’t win by doing everything, they specialize in *one* thing... & In that one thing it’s not uncommon at all for athletes to watch video of other renown athletes so as to study their techniques, see how they do what they do. We all need good role models in our lives.

For you & me, I think there can be a tendency to back off of a statement like this. How would you feel about telling people, “Imitate me” or “Follow my example”? (& Listen, while we know it’s wrong to put *our trust* in any man, it’s also hypocritical for any Christian to promote the philosophy that says, “Do as I say, not as I do.”)

→ There is a sense in which it’s wrong if we can’t call people to observe our lives & imitate our example. Again, none of us are so deluded/deceived so as to think that we’ve somehow arrived at sinless perfection. Yet as pointed out previously, rejecting any/all efforts of *self*-righteousness, receiving the righteousness from God which is through faith in Christ, refusing to be distracted & devoting oneself to J.C. & His call upon your life... is an honorable example for *anyone* to follow!

³ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Co 11:1]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So here's the challenge of the day. Would you say to others, "Join in following my example"? If not, why not & what are you going to do about that? I think we're all too familiar w/our own shortcomings. But let's quit making excuses & step up to the plate & be an example for others...

Yes, we all *need* role models. Younger married folks can learn from older married folks (both in the *what to do* & *what not to do* departments). Maybe you're starting a business & you're looking to someone who's established in business, who's honored the Lord through their business & they can be an example for you. But we also need to *be* role models for others, (our children, our spouses, other bros & sisters in the Lord)... Think it through what kind of example are you? ←

Paul says, "& note those who so walk." Translation? He realized he wasn't the only one who was a good example. You see someone who's godly, pay attention to the pattern of their lives. This word "note" means "to fix the attention upon with a desire *for* or interest *in*." You're looking to learn by paying attention to them.

Now; conversely the same is true in the other direction. There are other examples we're to take note of w/the intention of *avoiding them*, refusing to align ourselves w/them &/or follow *after* them. To the Romans he said, "Now I urge you, brethren, *note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*"⁴

In much the same way he says here.

Vs 18-19

Here's the short of it, not everyone who calls themselves "Christian" is necessarily good *for* you, in fact they may be incredible toxic *to* you... Earlier in this Ch Paul was speaking of the Judaizers, the legalists who would say, "Yes, you need Jesus, but you also need to be circumcised, you also need to keep the law of Moses." & He thoroughly refuted that position, we trust in the sufficiency of the sacrifice of J.C. & the grace of God to save us!

But there's another group that he seems to be alluding to now. The group that allows the pendulum to swing to the other extreme. They don't emphasize legalism, but *liberty*. & They allow Christian liberty to degenerate into *license*. They think that freedom in Christ isn't a freedom *from* sin, but a freedom *to* sin. Because where sin abounds, grace abounds more! & Paul addresses this in Rom 6.

⁴ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ro 16:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's faulty logic, because how can he who has died to sin live any longer in it? To the Galatians he wrote, **"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."**⁵ Peter wrote, "you're free in Christ, but don't use liberty as a cloak (or covering, justification) for vice (for sin in your life)" 1 Pet 2:16.

Paul says that those who would preach a "sloppy agape" or an ungrounded grace are not your friends, they're *enemies* of the cross of Christ! They may call themselves "Christian" however they're anything but "Christlike". Rather than teaching & preaching, modeling a life of sacrifice & service, death to self & to the self-will, they live only in self-indulgence. Be very careful who you allow in your inner circle of influence; or who it is that you "look to" as an example of appropriate Christian living. Just because a particular preacher, or Christian leader says something is ok, or speaks a certain way, doesn't make it so. Run their lifestyles through the lens of scripture & see if it stands the test...

Let's not perceive Paul as someone emotionally weak here who was finally caving under the stress & strain of ministry. He didn't weep for himself. He didn't weep when he was beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned or stoned & left for dead. But when so called "Christians" perverted the point/principle of the cross it broke his heart. Family, J.C. died upon the cross, *not* so you & I could *abound* in sin, but so that we could be set *free* from sin. It cost Him His life, His blood. He was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him & to see that twisted & perverted & promoted as license to sin or a means of personal gain was grievous to the apostle as it *should be* to us.

What did Jesus say, **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."**⁶ The message of the cross isn't "indulge yourself" it's "deny" yourself. Now, is it wrong to have things? No. But if things *have you*, it's a problem. Why? Because that's idolatry... It's making the primary priority & master passion of your life something other than J.C.

The people to whom Paul is pointing in this passage, haven't denied themselves, haven't taken up the cross, they're enemies of the cross. Their god is their *belly*! What does that mean? It means they serve the appetites of their flesh... Earlier I quoted Rom 16:17 to you, to note those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine you've learned & avoid them.

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ga 5:13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Mt 16:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 18 says this, *"For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."*⁷ John wrote, *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*⁸ Those to whom you're looking; do their lives model sacrifice, service, obedience to the word of God? Or is it self-indulgence, liberty turned license, justification for sin, glorying in things they ought to be ashamed of...

They set their minds on things of the earth. The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh & the pride of life. The cares of this world, & the deceitfulness of riches are ultimately the all consuming passion of their lives & their destiny will be the rude awakening of destruction. Where do you set your mind? On the temporary things of this world, or do you strive to maintain the eternal perspective? God help us...

Now it's certainly not sin to concern ourselves w/the affairs of this world. It's where we live. It's noble (even scriptural) to do our best to be contributors to the overall good, to be good employees or business owners, to provide for our families to the best of our ability. That's not what we're talking about... We're talking about claiming to be a Christian, but your life contradicts your claim... You set your mind, your heart on the things of this world, not on things above (Col 3:2).

*But what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? We may be *in* the world, but we're not *of* the world because Jesus has called us *out* of the world. This place isn't our home, we're just passing through.*

Vs 20

"Our citizenship is in heaven". This particular phrase would've resonated in the Philippians because *they're* citizenship was in Rome, even though it was hundreds of miles away. Philippi was a Roman colony, they were "honor bound" (even legally bound) to reflect their place of citizenship though they were (what we might call) "far from home" (that is, the land of their citizenship).

Paul is saying to us as believers, "We may not be in heaven literally (at this moment), but that's where your citizenship lies in reality. We are therefore 'honor bound', we have a duty/responsibility to represent & reflect our place of citizenship though presently we may be "far away".

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 16:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 2:4]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We're *ambassadors* of heaven & as such our lives & lifestyles should reflect that accurately (appropriately). The way we speak, the way we act, the things we do (or perhaps opt out of doing), our priorities, the things we pursue...

Look at the contrast between the citizen of this world Vs the citizen of heaven. The citizen of this world: Their god is their belly, they glory in their shame, set their minds on earthly things. The citizen of heaven: Eagerly awaiting the Savior, the Lord J.C. Ours is a future hope, we're looking for the rewards of heaven over & above the treasures of this earth. We know that Jesus is coming again & we *eagerly* anticipate that. & The fact that He's returning is a powerful motive for dedicated living & devoted service today. We don't want to be *ashamed* at His appearing, slacking off & seeking to gratify the flesh. We want to be found "so doing" our Master's will, *His* work.

Of course that doesn't mean we ignore or neglect our responsibilities in this life, but we're governed, guided by a future hope, the anticipation of the return of J.C.

Vs 21

Some will be raptured, others resurrected, all will be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:50-55). Jesus will transform our "lowly" body, our corruptible body of humiliation, that it may be conformed to His glorious body. Or as the apostle John said, "...but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."⁹

When Jesus raptures the church & resurrects those who've died in Christ prior to that, we will be given bodies that share the same essential character as His. Jesus (when He rose from the dead) wasn't merely resuscitated in the same body. He rose in His resurrection body, patterned after the old, but equipped & fitted for heaven. There were all kinds of upgrades ingrained in it. He wasn't bound by gravity, He could appear & disappear at will, He could walk through walls (or manifest anywhere at any time). Your new body will be like that, it won't gravitate any more toward temptation or sin, we will be changed... This one of the reasons (one of many) that we *eagerly* await His appearing!

Now, how is He going to do that? He's going to transform our bodies (notice) *according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself*. Through the same omnipotent power by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself.

⁹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Jn 3:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

For w/God, nothing will be impossible, even the resurrection & transformation of our lowly bodies to be conformed into the same essential character of the glorious body of Christ Himself.

That word, “subdue”, means not only to submit, but even to “arrange in order”, putting things in their proper rank as under a military leader. & I find that’s the problem so often in our lives, we’ve got things “out of order”. They’re not arranged right. Our values are twisted, so we waste time & energy on otherwise pointless activities... Jesus can arrange the things in our lives according to their proper rank... Keeping the main thing the main thing & placing everything else in its proper place.

Question: do you really believe that Jesus is able to subdue, to subject & submit *all* things to Himself? Here’s my next question. Does your life, lifestyle reflect that fact? Is there some sin in your life that defies you? That no matter what you do, they refuse to be subdued by you? Give it to Jesus, *He* will subdue it. Listen, what you can’t do, He can.

Maybe you don’t know how to give it to Him, ask Him to take it from you, relinquish control, & He’ll be glorified in your life.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the timely warning found in Your word. That we use wisdom in who it is we look to as examples. Put us in the path of those who love You & follow after You, who are ambassadors of the cross, not enemies of the cross. & Thank You for the exhortation to *be* examples one to another. To not make excuses, but to step up & serve You w/all that we are that others might look to us & find a pattern in our lives becoming of a child of God. Be glorified in our lives.

Maybe you’re in a place where your life is out of order. Organized chaos or just straight chaos, you’ve not been subdued, you’ve not humbled yourself *before* Christ, or believed *upon* Christ. Turn from your sin today, relinquish control, surrender to Jesus & He’ll make you new.