

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Philippians 3:17-19 (read v.20a also) "Who Are You Following?"

Intro. This passage of Scripture continues Paul's theme of pursuing the goal of the high calling of God. Our ultimate goal should be to attain Christ's likeness. This was Paul's goal for other believers. He wrote to the Galatians, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19). Romans 8:29 says God saved us so that we can "become conformed to the image of His Son." So being like Christ is God's will for our lives, and it should be the goal that we all set for ourselves.

This evening we will talk about some things you should do to become more like Jesus Christ. Jesus said many times, "Follow Me," and we are to do so to model our lives after Him. So we will consider this subject from two sides: the positive side of following good examples, and the negative examples we should avoid. First of all, to become more like Christ, you should:

### I. FIND AND FOLLOW GOOD EXAMPLES

Paul says in v.17, "Brethren, join in following my example and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." This is a command from Paul. The Greek text literally says, "Be fellow imitators (*summimetai*) of me." We get the word mimic from part of this Greek term. Have you ever mimicked someone? I know children will mimic each other at times, even to the point of being annoying. Well Paul was calling the Philippians collectively to follow the way he lived.

A. The Need for Good Examples - Why did Paul give this command? There are several factors involved in becoming a good, Christ-like Christian. That would include worship, Bible study, prayer, and Christian service. Another factor that is pretty important is having a good example of what a Christian is. It is certainly true as Paul said in Eph. 5:1, we should be imitators of God. And Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 11:1 that we should follow the example of Christ. But the example of God the Father is not a visible example to us. So it is helpful for us to have flesh and blood examples to follow. That's why God's Son became incarnate in human flesh and walked among us. You can read about Him in the gospels. But even He is no longer visibly among us, so we need contemporary examples for us to see and observe. This is probably especially important for children, young people and young Christians. It helps greatly to have a good role model to follow. The Philippians, as well as the rest of us, needed a concrete example of Christian devotion. What we see makes more of an impression upon us than what we hear. Paul probably has in mind primarily ethical or moral examples, though modeling Christian service is also important. The Bible tells us how to live, but young Christians especially need to see the Bible lived out in people's lives. So it is important that we have good examples in our church.

In my early days as a Christian, Dr. Jerry Vines was a great example for me to look up to. He was my pastor in Georgia, and he has been a great example for me to follow in my ministry, especially in preaching.

I believe this is one of the roles of a deacon, for the basic requirement of a deacon is that they have exemplary character. We need to elect men to serve as deacons who will be good role models of what a Christian is supposed to be. If you are an active deacon, are you a good example

in your family life, your moral life, and in your church life? How many active deacons are present this evening? Furthermore, S.S. teachers need to set a good example to their class members. Parents need to set a good example for their children.

So who should we follow as examples? Well, I believe we should consider:

B. The Standard in Determining the Good Examples – First of all, the examples we follow and model our lives after should be like:

1. Christ - This is implied in v.17 when Paul says be followers “together with me.” Paul himself was a follower. He followed Christ. This is explicitly stated in 1 Cor. 11:1, where Paul says, “Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.” Furthermore, Jesus said, “Follow Me,” and that simple command has not been replaced or improved upon. 1 John 2:6 says, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

How do we follow Christ? To become more like Christ we need to know the Word of God. We need to know how Christ lived when He was on earth, and the only place to learn that is the Scriptures, which are the revelation of Christ. Christ is the focus of the entire Bible. The main point of Bible study is to know more about Christ so that we can be like Him. Once you learn about Christ, then you should ask, “What would Jesus do?”

Paul also encourage them to follow the example of:

2. The Apostles – Paul goes on to say in the last of v.17, “and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” Paul exhorts the Philippians to observe his life attentively and to become imitators of him, and to do the same also with reference to those other Christians in whose lives they find an example of Paul’s own manner of life. Paul was not putting himself on a pedestal of perfection; he was not saying, “I’m perfect—be like me.” Vs. 12-16 make clear that Paul had not arrived at perfection. Rather, he was saying, “I’m imperfect, but follow the way I move toward perfection.” There’s no better historical example of a Christian than the apostle Paul. He’s a dominant figure in the New Testament so we can conclude God wants us to pattern our lives after him. Paul is my own personal example in ministry. I look at how he handled situations and try to respond the way he did.

3. Other Christlike Christians – We can follow Paul’s example because of the fact that his life and teaching is recorded for us in Acts and his epistles. But that alone is not sufficient. And Paul was no longer physically present with the Philippians. So he also says in the last of v.17, “and note those who so walk.” Paul probably had Timothy and Epaphroditus in mind. He mentioned both earlier in the book (2:19-30). They were fine examples of Christians.

Suppose I decide to embark on a dangerous mountain-climbing expedition. A helicopter takes the leader to the top of the mountain, and he looks down at me and yells down below, “This is the top. Just climb up here; this is where you want to be.” He would not be as much help as someone climbing the path ahead of me, saying, “Follow me. I know the way up.” Even so, mature Christians that actually live among us are like that guide that we can more easily follow. The author of a book, or the preacher on TV who lives elsewhere, is less of an example to follow than someone close by in your church.

Church history may record ours as the era of disastrous collapse within the leadership of the church. The standards for leadership have been lowered. Where are the Pauls, Timothys and Epaphrodituses of today? Where are the holy men? Where are the truthful men? Where are the humble, unselfish models of virtue? Where are the examples of victory over temptation? Where are those who show us how to pray and overcome trials or adversity? Instead, quite a few prominent Christian leaders have fallen into sin or even apostasy.

Now once we identify good leaders to follow, note with me:

C. What We Are to Do When We Find Good Examples – Paul says in the middle of v.17, “and note those who so walk.” The Greek word translated “note” (*skopeo*) speaks of fixing your gaze on something, or observing someone carefully. Our word “telescope” is based on this word. Keep an eye on them, not to criticize, but to take note of the example they are setting for you, so you can follow their example.

So look for opportunities to spend time with such people, and observe their manner of life, and then imitate them. I ask the deacon of the week to visit with me on Tuesdays but there are times when I need a visiting partner that afternoon or at other times. Men, if you are available to visit and want to spend more time with me and folks that need ministry, let me put you on a call list. Or if you like to play golf join our golf fellowship next year. You will find that I am the same on the golf course as I am anywhere else, including church. Dan and Bill can testify to that.

D. *Be an Example* - Godly leaders are vital to the church. Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:12, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” People need to see virtue, humility, unselfish service, a willingness to suffer, devotion to Christ, courage, and spiritual growth in the life of someone close to them.

The famed nineteenth-century British preacher, F.W. Robertson, was soberly reminded of the importance of setting a good example when he visited one of his parishioners. The man, who was busily maintaining his shop, stopped and pointed to a picture of Robertson on his wall. The shopkeeper explained that whenever he was tempted to sell someone shoddy goods, he looked at Robertson’s picture to find strength to do what was right.<sup>1</sup> His example was a powerful motivation.

What kind of an example are you setting for others? When someone becomes a Christian, would they get a good idea of what a Christian should be and do by observing you? What kind of an example are you setting in loving service? Are you setting a good moral example for others? What kind of an example are you setting in church attendance?

So we see from our text that we should look for good Christian examples to follow. Now let’s consider the contrast and:

## II. REJECT THE WRONG EXAMPLES

Paul says in v.18, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” Notice the contrast between those who walk in the right way, as in v.17, and those who walk or live the wrong way, as enemies of Christ. Let us turn away from the bad example set by many professing Christians, whose walk is a disgrace to the name they claim to bear. Paul had already warned in v.2 of this chapter, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” Yes, there are bad examples, both inside and outside the Church, that we should *not* follow. Now I am going to focus mainly on bad examples within the professing Church, but I must also warn you to be careful who you follow in the secular world. Think of some of the young stars that have been idolized by our children and youth that have not been the kind of role models our boys and girls should be looking up to. The same can be said for many sports figures. Most of our political leaders lie, and many engage in extra-marital affairs or political corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> David Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 59.

Sadly, the picture is not much better within the Church of today, and certainly not among religious leaders in general. That seems to be Paul's main focus in our text. So let's consider together:

A. The Deceptiveness of the Wrong Examples - Notice in v.18 that "many" do not walk in the right way, but are enemies of the cross. One main problem with following the right example is that there are few good examples and so many bad examples to follow. It is easy to believe that the majority must be right. But God warned Israel long ago in Exodus 23:2, "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil..." Jesus said in Mt. 7:13, "... wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."

The implication is that these enemies don't say they are against Christ, His work on the cross, or salvation by grace through faith. Apparently, the people described in this passage say they are friends of Christ, and identify with Him, but they do not truly know Him.

Since they are a subtle danger, and one needs discernment to recognize them. Jesus said, in Matt. 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Appearances can be deceiving. Unfortunately, many in the church today lack the discernment necessary to flee from enemies of the cross. There's a lack of solid biblical teaching and therefore a lack of clear thinking. Acts 20:31-32 tells us Paul warned the Ephesians in a similar way: "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Notice we are protected by the Word. If we don't know the Word, we are open to being misled. Paul was a passionate, tenderhearted man with genuine love for people. He ached over the lost.

Now in our text of Scripture Paul helps us out by giving:

B. The Description of the Wrong Examples - In general, we can say that in contrast to v.2 where Paul is speaking of legalists, here he is probably speaking of libertines (though that is debated). Hardly has it become clear to a person that he should not be "entangled again in the yoke of bondage" when he begins to use his new-found freedom as "an opportunity for the flesh." No doubt some in the early church perverted the doctrine of the grace of God (cf. Rom. 6:1).

Now notice what Paul called them. In v.18 he called them:

1. The Enemies of the Cross of Christ – Here Paul implies one of the main ways we can determine if someone is a false teacher, or not a true Christian. True believers glory in the cross and understand the priority of the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:2). False teachers do not. Ask yourself, "What do they believe and teach about the cross of Christ?" Cults and false religions downplay or even deny the cross of Christ. Some even do not believe that the cross of Christ has a role in our salvation. Or they believe that the cross only contributes partly to our salvation. They emphasize certain rituals and minimize the cross. Well here in this text Paul is referring to some false teachers that he considers not just enemies, but *the* (definite article) enemies of the cross of Christ. For example, the Judaizers were enemies of the cross. They didn't deny Christ or His work on the cross, but they said it was insufficient to bring about salvation. They insisted on adding circumcision, and keeping the Jewish law. Today there are enemies of the cross similar to the Judaizers in that they purport to be orthodox in their doctrine but add works to the gospel.

Another reason they were enemies of the cross was because the cross ended Old Testament religion as practiced by the Jews. By His death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished a "spiritual circumcision" that made ritual circumcision unnecessary (Col. 2:10-13). Most of what the Judaizers

advocated had been eliminated by the death of Christ on the cross! Furthermore, everything that they lived for was condemned by the cross. Jesus had broken down the wall that stood between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14-16), and the Judaizers were rebuilding that wall!

There are other enemies of the cross in a different sense. If the friends of the cross are those who obeyed the words of Christ to deny self and take up the cross, then the enemies are those who manifest the very opposite attitude, namely, that of self-indulgence. False leaders often say they are friends of the cross but espouse a gospel that does not include virtue or holiness. The friends of the cross do not love the world. In fact, the world is crucified to them (Gal. 6:14). The enemies of the cross love the world and the things that are in the world (v.19b; 1 Jn. 2:15). This leads to other professing believers we should not follow, those who are:

2. Sensual – He says in v.19 that their “god is their belly.”<sup>2</sup> Paul could have been referring to an early Gnostic heresy. They accepted the common Greek belief that the spirit was good and matter was evil. And yet, they tried to make that belief compatible with Christianity. So that reasoned that since the body is matter, they assumed it to be evil no matter what the Christian believed or did. And since as Christians we are in the Spirit, they reasoned we didn’t have to be concerned about what we do with our bodies. They assumed they could be involved in gluttony, fornication, homosexuality, drunkenness, and other bodily vices without affecting the spirit.

When Paul said that their god is their belly, he may have had in mind people like Cyclops in Euripides who said, “My flocks which I sacrifice to no one but myself, and not to the gods, and to this my belly, the greatest of the gods: for to eat and drink each day, and to give one’s self no trouble, this is the god of wise men.” Instead of striving to keep their physical appetites under control, these people surrendered themselves to gluttony and licentiousness. The Romans illustrated this. They would eat to the full, then go and vomit it up so they could eat some more!

There are some that have a similar theology today. There are known as Libertines. They say that when Jesus died He took care of all our sins, so it doesn’t matter how we live. But 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Christ affects the way we live!

We are not to follow those who come up with some excuse for living an immoral life of sensual, sinful pleasure. We are not to follow the Hugh Hefners of this world. We are not to follow the health, wealth, and prosperity preachers of our day who lead people to believe that that God wants people to be happy, so anything you do that makes you happy is okay, including divorce, gluttony, immorality, and even getting high on drugs or alcohol.

Furthermore, we should not follow those who are:

3. Proud of the Wrong Things – In v.19 we read that their “glory is in their shame.” Their pride was in that of which they should have been ashamed.

My first exposure to this was when I was somewhere between the ages of 11-13. At that time I had mostly non-Christian friends. They would brag about the wrongs they had done, when they should have been ashamed of themselves! This verse is reminiscent of the Corinthian church. It was bad enough that a man among them was engaging in incest, but what was worse was that the church was actually boasting about it (1 Cor. 5:1-6)!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The only way Paul could have in mind the Judaizers here is if he is talking about the way the Judaizers emphasize observing Jewish dietary laws above the teachings of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> If Paul has the Judaizers’ trust in circumcision in mind, the shame will be that of the nakedness of the human body which was required for the rite to be performed. But this is unlikely since the Judaizers did not tend to be libertarian as is described in the immediate context.

Have you noticed that our society has lost a sense of shame over what the Bible calls sin? People will do sinful things in public, and not even blush. Homosexuals will have so called “Gay Pride” parades, when they should be ashamed of such activity that God calls an abomination (Lev. 18:22). Even girls will get drunk and act in sinful ways right in front of a video camera to be posted on YouTube, Tik Tok, or “Girls gone wild.” They won’t even blush! People today utter profanity in public, and show no shame for their speech.

Finally, we should not follow those who are:

4. Earthly Minded – Paul says in v.19 that they “set their mind on earthly things.” The sensualists certainly minded earthly things. These would include immorality, indecency, lust, evil desire, greed, malice, cursing, and filthy talk (Col. 3:2, 5, 8).<sup>4</sup>

You probably heard of Archbishop Earl Paulk, Jr. co-founder of Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in suburban Atlanta. Toward the end of his ministry, a number of women accused him of marital infidelity. One woman sued him. Based on court documents, Paulk manipulated employee Mona Brewer into an affair from 1989 to 2003 by telling her it was her only path to salvation. Then, court-ordered paternity test revealed in October, 2007 that Paulk was the biological father of his brother’s son, D.E. Paulk, who is now (2008) the head pastor at the church. Paulk thus lied in court when he said Brewer was the only woman he had an affair with [*Associated Press*, 1/14/08]. Yet such a man had a large following. At one time his church had 12,000 members. He died in 2009.

Don’t follow so-called Christian leaders who mind earthly things. If they talk more about sports, worldly entertainment, and other worldly concerns more than God, and the things of God, you have a good idea that they are not the ones you should be following! If they preach mainly about health, happiness and financial prosperity, they “mind earthly things” and should be avoided!

C. The Destiny of the Wrong Examples – Paul says in the first part of v.19, “whose end is destruction.” Before you follow someone, you should find out where they are going. One big reason not to follow such people is because of their destiny. Unless they repent, their end is destruction. 2 Thess. 1:9 says that this is an “everlasting destruction,” not something temporary like purgatory. This is their appointed destiny, for God has ordained that “their end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:15). So don’t follow such people! You don’t want to end up like them. Someone said, “If you can’t be a good example — then you’ll just have to be a horrible warning.”

How does Paul view the prospect of their destruction? He is not joyful about it. Instead, in v.18 we see that it brings tears to his eyes. That is the way it should be when we warn people of hell. Sin grieves the heart of God, but so does the punishment of sinners. As the Old Testament says, He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. We ought to warn lost sinners with compassion for their souls. One of the secrets of Paul’s success as a missionary was his genuine, personal interest in those whom the Lord had committed to his spiritual care.

Conclusion: So instead of fixing your attention upon individuals who have confused Christian liberty with license, focus it upon those who are good guides of Christian conduct. Don’t follow others down the wrong path. Also, make a commitment to be a good example to others, especially in your family, church, and in the community.

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<sup>4</sup> The Judaizers “set their mind on earthly things” by being preoccupied with ceremonies, feasts sacrifices, and all kinds of other observances that were merely physical.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962); R.P. Martin, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); John MacArthur, Jr., *Reaching for the Prize: Study Notes on Philippians 3:12-21* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).