

**Text:** Philippians 3:17-21

**Title:** Examples on the Way to Heaven

**Truth:** Follow Paul's example as he makes his way to the coming of Christ.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 10, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

Last time we learned about energetically pursuing Christ because our highest priority as a Christian is to know Him and be like Him. That is what the apostle Paul was all about, and so we should be also.

### I. Follow Good Examples, v. 17

3:17 Be fellow imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who walk that way, just as you have us as a type/model/example (my translation).

- A. If you do not know what to do, or are unsure, simply imitate the example of another mature, godly Christian person. If you are making a mess out of your life because you thought you know the right way to go but are walking in a way that is out of step with the good examples you have before you, then stop, and instead start on a new path of following a good example. This should get you on the right track. How are your examples conducting themselves in these strange times? What are they choosing to do with their life? How do they handle this or that situation? What do they advise you to do? They are putting flesh on the teachings of Scripture, and this can help you to walk rightly. But you must be *humble* to do that. Many of us think that we know everything and do not need an example to follow. That is pride, and that is a sin.
- B. What is the example that Paul is talking about? He explains that it is the example of himself and "those who so walk" and "us for a pattern." The idea is that imperfect people pursue being like Christ as other examples who also have not attained or been perfected. The "us" includes Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. The Philippians knew all three of these men. And there were probably a few in the Philippian church who were good followers of Christ. By the way, that is the point: we do not follow Paul or anyone *away* from

Christ. Rather, we follow those good examples as they follow Christ.

- C. His example is that he left behind all kinds of un-meritorious works in favor of pursuing Jesus Christ. He makes a concerted effort to forget those things which are behind him—because they are useless in his pursuit of Christ—and instead to press forward aggressively to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, sharing in His sufferings (to know Him even better), and to be made into the image of Christ. All those things are part of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ.
- D. This “follow the example” must be an important principle because it is repeated in at least 10 sections of the Bible: Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6-7; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3. At least two times Paul emphasizes his example of hard work. There is no positive example of lazy Christians in the Bible—we must work. Despise it as an old-fashioned concept if you want, but God put Adam in the garden to work, He calls us to work and not live as freeloaders off others, and it is just the Christian way.
- E. Apply this text: Stop for a second and ask yourself: who are two or three examples that I can follow in my Christian life? And do *not* tell me that you cannot think of any. If that is true, you need to look around a little bit more, wake up, get out a bit more, do some more reading, or something! As I write these words, I am thinking of one... two... three... four... five... exemplary Christian people that I can imitate.
- F. Actualize: OK, now plan to set aside some time this afternoon or this week to think about how you can apply some good examples to your life and put them into practice.

## II. There are Many Bad Examples, v. 18-19

3:18-19 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: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-- who set their mind on earthly things.

A. A few people live like Paul and his band of Christians. There are many others, however, who are terrible examples. Paul reminds his dear friends at Philippi that he has told them many times (e.g., 3:1-2, like in Acts 20:28-31), and now again, about such people. This is such an urgent matter and such a sad thing that Paul is writing them with tears in his eyes.

B. Who are these people? Paul does not come out and name them, but he gives some characteristics.

1. They are enemies of the cross of Christ. They may pretend to have some affinity for Christianity, but they are no friends of the cross nor of true Christian people. They are in the employ of the evil one.

Imagine someone saying this out in public today! How intolerant! How mean! How unloving! But if we honor God as we should, we would never think those things because anything that opposes God is worthy of being called out. It is dangerous to God's people and dishonoring to God.

2. Their god is their belly. Our god is God; their god is their own sensual appetites. This could refer to the Judaizers again, but I suspect it is a reference to another group who do not try to live godly lives, but instead use Christian doctrine as a license to sin. They are libertines or antinomians, those who ignore God's moral imperatives. This phrasing is highly metaphorical: the belly is a figure for the cravings of the flesh. They want to fill those cravings, whereas Paul and Christians recognize that we need to restrain those cravings and keep them within proper God-given boundaries.
3. Their glory is in their shame. Either "my good works save me, aren't I wonderful" or "God loves me in my sin, and I can do as much of it as I wish!" Here is the bottom line: what they take pride in is what they should be deeply ashamed about. Their conduct is inherently evil and shameful. They will recognize that at the judgment. We can recognize that *now* because we can know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:20).

4. Set their mind on earthly things. The Christian mindset is supposed to focus on things heavenly, not things earthly (Col. 3:2). What does this look like? It looks like “love of the world” (1 John 2:15). It is professing Christians who act like the world in terms of their desires and immorality behind the scenes. It is those who focus on sports, entertainment, politics, or pleasure as if they are super important.

C. Their end: destruction. They will be separated from the Lord and God’s people for eternity. They will suffer the “second death,” as it is called in Revelation (2:11, 20:6, 14, 21:8).

### **III. Our Standing with God Demands a Pure Walk, v. 20-21**

3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

A. What Christians have in the future is so far better than belly-worshipping, shame-glorying, earth-minding fake Christianity that we do not want those things. Yes, we live in the now, but we do not live for the now. We live in the world, but not for the world. We have desires, but we curb them to honor God. We have done things that are shameful, but we recognize them as such instead of celebrating them.

B. Our focus instead is this: we are citizens of heaven, and we ought to live like other good citizens do. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are subjects of the great King, Jesus Christ. Knowing this identity is crucial. “I am a Christian; therefore, I am a fellow citizen with the saints (Eph. 2:19) and under the kingship of Christ.” I am not like the rest of the people here who are only citizens of earthly nations. Like a citizen of Rome would feel as he lives in a remote city (like Philippi), so we feel as we await the appearance of Gods’ kingdom.

C. From our homeland—presently in heaven—we are awaiting with great anticipation the second coming of Christ. That is our great hope (Titus 2:13).

3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (NAS)

D. Something so much better than the present awaits us that we are willing to patiently endure life during this age for what is coming. Jesus will use His omnipotent power to transform our present existence into something far greater. That power is the power of creation from nothing, of dividing the Red Sea, of sustaining the Universe, and of resurrection from the dead. It is easily able to bring our bodies into conformity with His resurrection body. That glory is demonstrated in Matthew 17 and in Revelation 1, 5, and 19-22. What happens to us is like when a farmer plants a seed in the ground and it grows out a new and much grander thing (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Our new body will be re-designed, retrofitted, outfitted, and enhanced, all for sinless existence in the eternal kingdom of Christ. God does not tell us all what that looks like, but we are assured that as God because good and infinitely powerful, the state of those with God and Christ will be beyond what we can fathom.

## Conclusion

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17)

Follow Paul's example; leave behind the junk and press forward toward Christ-likeness. Beware of the false believers who want to share their Christ-denying misery with you and recognize that you are citizens of heaven. You have a name better than to permit yourself to wallow in the world's mess.

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