

March 30, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Who Are You Following?

Philippians 3:17-19

1. A Good Example (verse 17)

2. A Bad Example (verses 18-19)

One of the prominent themes in the book of Proverbs is the danger of associating with the wrong people. Below is a sample of verses to demonstrate this.

Proverbs 4:14-15

Do not enter the path of the wicked
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
Avoid it, do not pass by it;
Turn away from it and pass on.

Proverbs 13:20

He who walks with wise men will be wise,
But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 22:5

Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;
He who guards himself will be far from them.

Proverbs 22:24-25

Do not associate with a man given to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Or you will learn his ways
And you will find a snare for yourself.

Proverbs 23:20-21

Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine,
Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
For the heavy drinker and the glutton
will come to poverty,
And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.

Proverbs 1:10

My son, if sinners entice you,
Do not consent.

Such a teaching is all over Scripture. The Psalms begin with this theme. Right at the beginning, Psalm 1:1 says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night."

You see it by example. Lot associated himself with the people of Sodom, and it nearly cost him his life (Genesis 19). When Israel chose to follow the 10 unbelieving spies, it cost them 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 13-14). Those who sided with Korah in his rebellion against Moses were swallowed up by the earth (Numbers 16). When people followed Absalom, they soon lost whatever power they gained (2 Samuel 15-18). The wicked kings of Israel led the country to ultimate defeat (2 Kings 17). The wicked kings of Judah led them to defeat as well (2 Chronicles 36). Paul sums it up in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company corrupts good morals."

This is the concern that we have before us in our text. Paul is concerned that the Philippians might follow the bad examples to destruction. Instead, he calls those in Philippi to follow the good examples to eternal life with Christ.

My message this morning covers Philippians chapter 3, verses 17 through 19. It is entitled, "Who Are You Following?" That's the big question that comes out of our text this morning. Of course, Paul's great desire is to see the Philippians follow the right example and shun the wrong

example. So, as we read it, listen for Paul's heart to urge the Philippians to follow the right path. We will read today to the end of the chapter, but will save the exposition of the last two verses until next week.

Philippians 3:17-21

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 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.

Our text begins in verse 17 with ...

1. A Good Example (verse 17)

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Now, there are those who play pious and say, "We shouldn't follow other people. We should only follow Jesus." They can point to the problems addressed in First Corinthians chapters one through four. Specifically, in 1 Corinthians 1:12, those who were saying, "'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'" But, such sentiment betrays our text. It also betrays the other times that Paul says much the same thing. In 1 Corinthians 4:16, he says, "Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me." Later in the chapter, he says again, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Note that these commands come in the very same book in which Paul warns of following other people.

But, this isn't the only time when he calls people to follow his example. He mentions it in First Thessalonians, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6), and Second Thessalonians, "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example" (2 Thessalonians 3:7). So, don't get hung up in the pious-sounding argument that we should only follow Christ. It is not wrong to follow the example of others (provided that they are worthy examples).

In this passage, Paul is calling those in Philippi to follow his example. His example is what Philippians, chapter 3 is all about. Beginning in verse 5, Paul puts forth his own testimony. He begins with the blessing of his own ancestry: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He continues with his own attainments in religion: as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness in the law, found blameless. And then, in verse 7, he gives his perspective of these things.

Philippians 3:7

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

See, you need to understand that for a Jew, all of those things were gain. Through the circumstances of his birth, he had as much advantage as anyone could possibly have. He was born of the right nation. He was born of the right tribe. He pursued the Lord as much as anyone. He was an expert in the law, zealous for the law, and blameless in following it. But, when it came to following Christ, such ancestry and attainments were nothing, because God doesn't save us because of our ancestry. Nor does He save us because of our religious achievements.

He saves us by His grace. He saves us from our sin not because of our works of righteousness, but because of His mercy (Titus 3:5). He saves us by giving us His righteousness when we believe in Him. In other words, He takes our faith and credits it to us as righteousness. That's the point of verse 9, ...

Philippians 3:9

and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Are you following this example? This is the question that our text demands of us this morning. Paul said in verse 17, "Brethren, join in following my example." Are you following the example of trusting in the righteousness that comes by faith? Or, are you looking to your baptism, your church attendance, your family reputation, the ways in which you have served Jesus, your theological education, your diligence to read many Christian books, or something else that you have done? Paul counts all of these things "as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8).

Do you count them as loss? Or, in the back of your mind, are you trusting in them somehow? Let me tell you, God is not impressed. He wants us to come to Him by faith. Following the example of Paul compels us to trust in the righteousness of Christ alone.

But, such a belief can lead down the wrong path as we saw last week in verses 10-16. There are some who embrace the fact that Christ has forgiven them of all their sins by faith in Him, and they go out and live as they please, with no regard for Christ. But, Paul says, "not so." When he came to embrace Christ, it stirred him on to pursue Him with great diligence. That's the point of chapter 3, verse 10, ...

Philippians 3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Paul had an insatiable desire to know Christ. And verses 12-14 lay out his desire. In verse 12, Paul says, "I press on to lay hold of Him." In verse 13, he says, "I forget what lies behind me." In verse 14, he says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." That's the attitude of Paul. And in verse 17, he's calling us to follow that attitude.

Is that your attitude? If, indeed, you have come to faith in Christ, are you pressing on? Are you seeking to know Christ more and more intimately? Is Jesus your treasure? Is Jesus your prize?

Paul says, "Philippians, follow my example." But, it's not merely his example to follow. In verse 17, Paul says that there are others who are living this way. In the first half of verse 17, Paul speaks about "my example." But, in the second half of verse 17, he speaks about the "pattern you have in us." Look there, ...

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

This has primary reference to Timothy and Epaphroditus. These are the others who were mentioned in this book, both in chapter 2. Both of them were pressing on in their faith. Both of them were pursuing the Lord with passion. They had a like-minded heart with the apostle Paul. Of Timothy, Paul writes, ...

Philippians 2:20

I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare

Timothy was a "kindred spirit" who had a heart for the Lord and a heart for others. He knew of the grace of God in his life. You can go back to 2 Timothy to see this clearly. Paul wrote to him, "I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well" (2 Timothy 1:5). He told Timothy, "I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6).

Timothy didn't rest on his faith, living for his own lusts while trusting in Christ for forgiveness. No, he was pressing on! He gave himself to Christ and to others. Paul is assured, "... [he] will genuinely be concerned for your welfare." (Philippians 2:20). And, he reminds the Philippians, "... You know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (Philippians 2:22). Paul says, "Follow Timothy's example" (3:17).

The same is true of Epaphroditus. He is a picture of hard work and labor for Christ. Remember, he brought the financial gift to the apostle Paul (4:18). He is identified in 2:25 as "your messenger." Apparently, he brought it through some danger. Paul tells us that he "risked his life ... for the work of Christ" (2:30). We can only assume that this was the cause of his sickness. He was "sick to the point of death" (2:27). Perhaps it was sickness along the way. Perhaps it was persecution for the cause of Christ. We don't really know. But, we do know that the trouble and hardship that he experienced was as a result of his labor in the work of Christ!

Like Timothy, Epaphroditus didn't rest on his faith, living for his own lusts while trusting in Christ for forgiveness. No, he was pressing on! He had a huge heart for those in Philippi. Remember what was said of Epaphroditus?

Philippians 2:26

He was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

He felt bad, because the Philippians heard about his sickness, but didn't know the outcome. That's genuine compassion. That's "looking out for the interests of others" (2:4).

So, Paul says, follow my example. Follow the example of Timothy. Follow the example of Epaphroditus. But, Paul's statement in verse 17 goes even further than this. Paul would encourage us to follow anyone whose life is consistent with these men. Look again at verse 17, ...

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

This goes beyond Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus. Surely, there were others in Philippi who were living exemplary lives, worthy of imitation and worthy of following. Like Lydia, the seller of purple fabrics, who came to faith and insisted that the apostles stay with her in her house. Like the Philippian jailer, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ when he heard the gospel from Paul. Like others in the church who had come to faith and were currently pursuing Christ with their whole hearts.

And so, the question comes, are you following such people? You might easily think about your favorite radio teachers. But that's not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about those you know personally, who you admire and imitate because of their example. You can have only a little idea of the life of a man on the radio. If you don't have someone, find someone. Learn from others.

But, I would go even further than this. I would ask, "Are you worthy of being followed?" Consider D. A. Carson's words, ...

Do you ever say to a young Christian, "Do you want to know what Christianity is like? Watch me!" If you never do, you are unbiblical. After all, the apostle Paul can write elsewhere, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Many things are learned as much by example as by word. Paul understood this point. He therefore grasped that his responsibility was not only to teach the truth but to live it, precisely for the sake of stamping a new generation. ...

Do we not recognize the principle when we encourage parents so to live that they model godly virtues to their children? It's not just what the parents say, it's what they do." [\[1\]](#)

And so, likewise, church family, can you say that? Can you say, "Do you want to know what Christianity is like? Watch me!"

To the extent that you have captured Philippians 3 into your heart, that your righteous deeds are nothing in God's sight but that your only hope is faith in Him, and that this gives you a passion to know the Lord. To the extent that you have captured Philippians 3 into your heart, you can say, "Do you want to know what Christianity is like? Watch me!"

So, understand the free gift of God's grace to those who believe. Understand the desire that this creates to pursue the Lord. Oh, for a church filled with examples to be followed!

But, beginning in verse 18, Paul warned those in Philippi of those who were not to be followed. We have seen A Good Example (verse 17). Secondly, let's look at ...

2. A Bad Example (verses 18-19)

This comes in verses 18 and 19.

Philippians 3:18-19

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

And when Paul thinks of these bad examples, he does so with a tear in his eye. The parchment upon which he wrote was stained with tears.

Philippians 3:18

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

Such was the tenderness of Paul when it came to those who were enemies of the cross. Such ought to be our tenderness when we reflect upon those who are walking in their sinful ways. We ought to have compassion for them, as they are deceived and bringing great dishonor to the Lord.

Such was the tenderness of Jesus when He looked out upon Jerusalem. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37). Jesus said those words shortly after He denounced the Pharisees for professing to be righteous on the outside; but on the inside, they were wicked to the core. He said, "Woe to you, ... for you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence" (Matthew 23:25). He said, "Woe to you, ... for you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:28).

Contrast this with the attitude of Fred Phelps, who passed away a week and a half ago. He was the founder of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. He was a hell-fire preacher who preached a gospel of hate. Even the address of their website contains a hate-filled message. Phelps and his followers often go to funerals of fallen soldiers who died in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and picket with signs filled with hatred. They try to tie their deaths in with how our nation supports the homosexual cause. They seem to rejoice in the death of such soldiers. One recent announcement said, "Thank God for 7 more dead troops. We are praying for 7,000 more"

They will go anywhere the media goes, just to give attention to their gospel of hate. They will be in Arlington, Texas next week for the Final Four NCAA Basketball tournament. They will go to churches and to Miley Cyrus concerts and to the home offices of the National Football League and the National Basketball Association, all of which is scheduled for April.

And I say this, contrast their attitude with the attitude of the apostle Paul or with Jesus. As Matthew 9:36 says, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." When we see those who are living for their own lusts, we ought to have compassion for them; we ought to weep for them. We know that they are without Christ, headed to destruction.

Let us not be arrogant or proud or filled with hate toward those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Rather, let us weep like the prophet, Jeremiah. Let us pray for God's mercy upon them, because the truth be known, we were there. In Romans 5:10, we read, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." When Jesus came upon this earth, He came to die for His enemies. He came to transform them into His friends. Praise be to God.

Now, it is difficult to know exactly who these "enemies" are (verse 18). Some commentators would say that these are the Judaizers: the ones who would boast in their Jewish heritage and law-keeping; the ones who would have placed their confidence in the flesh. Certainly, in chapter

3, verse 2, Paul is talking about these people, because he uses the term, "false circumcision." They would have trusted in their circumcision. In fact, that's why Paul gave his testimony in verses 4-6 about all of the ways that he might have placed his confidence in the flesh, but how followers of Christ don't do that.

And it may well be that the enemies of the cross are the Judaizers who boast of their heritage and their law-keeping, but in reality are self-focused, fleshly people. These are described in verse 19, ...

Philippians 3:19

..., whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Other commentators would say that these "enemies" are antinomians. That is, those who are "against the law." "Anti" means "against;" "nomos" means "law." They would be against the law in the sense that their lifestyle knows no restraint.

There is certainly warrant for this as well. This seems to be the error which Paul is addressing in verses 10-16. Yes, our deeds count for nothing. Yes, we have a righteousness in Christ that comes by faith. Yes, through faith, we are made perfect in Christ (3:15). But, this doesn't mean that it doesn't matter how we live. Those who genuinely know Christ will only want to know Him more deeply. Those who genuinely know Christ will only want to serve Him and please Him. And in verse 19, Paul describes those who are living only for their own lusts and pleasures. Such "enemies" could be antinomians.

Could it be that there are some of both errors floating around Philippi? Judaizers and antinomians? Perhaps. Could it be that Paul's words are purposefully vague; so that they could apply to either group? Perhaps. Could it be that there was even yet a third (or fourth) group of people in Philippi, who had gotten the gospel wrong? Perhaps. Those who were claiming to be Christians, and yet, living like the devil? Throw in a little Gnosticism or Docetism. Perhaps some had some Epicurean (i.e. material) tendencies. Who knows what else was going on in Philippi? In fact, one commentator listed eighteen different scholarly suggestions as to the opponents in Philippians 3. [\[2\]](#)

Now, as foggy as the identity of these individuals is to us, I believe that they were well-known to the Philippians. Because, Paul says that they were well-known to them. Verse 18, ...

Philippians 3:18

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

Remember, Paul had been with those in Philippi on several occasions. He planted the church during his second missionary journey. He visited twice on his third missionary journey; once on his way out, and once on his way back home. And he had warned them on several occasions of these people.

Exactly who these people are may have been known to the Philippians. But they are unknown to us. But, here's the good news -- regardless of who this was in Philippi, these words apply to all who fit this description. There's no doubt that those who are living as described in verse 19 are a bad example.

Look there in verse 19, "Their end is destruction." When this life is over, they will go the way of the goats, into "eternal destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:46). They will not see life. Regardless of what they say or profess, their lifestyle demonstrates what they really believe. They believe in the here and now.

Next phrase, "Whose god is their appetite." Literally, "whose god is their belly." That is, they follow and worship their pleasures, be it food, sex, drugs, riches, travel, luxuries, entertainment. Anything that would give pleasure in this life. So passionate are they in pursuing their pleasures, that they don't even realize how shameful they are.

That's the next phrase, "Whose glory is in their shame." In other words, they rejoice in their sin. They flaunt it! They boast of their drunkenness. They fight for their freedoms. They parade their sin for all to see, little knowing that their sins are shameful in the eyes of God.

The last phrase tells us what drives these individuals. "Who set their minds on earthly things." Fundamentally, these enemies of Christ are earthly people. They love this world. They love the things of this world. The testimony of 1 John 2:15 is true, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Paul's message here in verses 18-19 is clear. Don't follow these people. If someone professes to be a follower of Christ, yet lives for this world, avoid him like the plague. Many follow prosperity preachers who are living lives of pleasure. Don't follow after them. Don't go in their ways. It will only lead to destruction.

So, who are you following? Are you following those who conduct themselves according to ways of this world? Those who are living for the here and now? Living for their own pleasures. Blind to their own sin? Or, are you following those who, in humility, are following the Lord Jesus Christ?

The contrast between these two comes in verse 20 and 21. Rather than being earthly minded, followers of Christ are to be heavenly minded. That's Paul's main point in verses 20-21, ...

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 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.

In these verses, Paul speaks of where our true hope lies. It lies not here upon the earth. It rests in our heavenly home. That's where our true citizenship is. It's in heaven. And we hope for the day when Christ returns to bring us home! We hope for the day when our bodies are transformed. We hope for the day when all bow the knee to our king, Jesus. There are so many riches in these verses, we will unpack them next week.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 30, 2014 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] D. A. Carson, *From the Resurrection to His Return: Living Faithfully in the Last Days* (Christian Focus, 2010), 26-27.

[2] Peter T. O'Brien, *The New international Greek Testament Commentary: the Epistle to the Philippians*, O'Brien, p. 27, referring to J. J. Gunther's commentary.