

Philippians 3:17–21 (NKJV)

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 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: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

You and I follow leaders. Everyone does. We ultimately follow Christ if we are believers. But do you realize how very important your choice is of **who** you **choose** to **emulate**? Who you choose as a pattern for your life? Much of your life will be shaped by who you follow. In fact, you can look back at your life and see the effect the people you followed had on your life, for good or bad.

We all emulate people to degrees. There is a sheeplike feature to all humans. And our environment is very important. If we spend enough time around people with one set of values, we will often begin to incorporate them, even in ways we are not aware of. Paul knows all this is true.

This morning we will be looking at **who to follow** and who **not** to follow. Paul will tell us how to know which is which. He is always so very helpful.

17 Brethren, join in following my example,

Paul starts with his warm inclusion of his brothers and sisters in Christ. **Brethren**. Then he says “**join in following my example**”.

This is the kind of minister to follow. The only minister that is fit **to listen to** is one that is attempting to **apply the principles** he is preaching. And that is Paul. Right off the bat we can make this application. If you are doing a ministry, can you ask those **you are ministering to** to **live by your example**? Paul did not have a mindset that said he could drop truth bombs on those he was preaching to and teaching to, and then go home to the privacy of his home and live in a way he would want **no one** to emulate. That is not how Paul thought about ministry. If Paul was **to preach**, he also intended **to apply that preaching** to how **he lived**. And his ministry could not be evaluated only by the content of **what he preached**. It was also open to the evaluation of **how he lived**. If Paul preached one way and lived another, he could not say, “**Join in following my example**”. He would only have been able to say, **listen to what I tell you**.

What can **we say**? What would happen if those we minister to would actually **follow our way of living**? Would they be **better** for it or **worse**? Would our lives **exemplify** our teaching or **negate** it? When we evaluate our ministries, we do well to also evaluate our consistency of **our lives** to **our words**. If they are **inconsistent**, we need to do whatever it takes to make them **consistent**.

The other point to make is that Paul does not regard this as **egotistical**. He regards it as the **expected behavior** of a **good** minister. He has already said that he is not perfect. But he notes that he is running a race and not looking back and giving everything he has. He is not expecting ministers to be perfect. But he does expect that they are not living in such a way where they are completely **distracted** from the end goal by the **circumstances** of life. He seems to think it is normal that leader's behavior should **be able to be** modeled after. If those who we minister to were to follow our behavior, would they be better off or worse? Would our daily life decisions reflect a **good example** of what we **preach**? Or would they get the idea that the preaching can be ignored because, whatever else, **it does not work**?

and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

Now Paul is not in any way holding himself out as some kind of pope. He is saying that when someone really gets what he is saying, they will live the same way. Note that most of our text today, good and bad, is talking about **behavior**. He is not talking about **the way** he preaches, or **the content** he preaches, even though we know that is vitally important. He is talking about the way **they walk**. It is talking about how our lives **are lived**. And he is saying that he is living a certain way and there are others living just like him. What way is it? This is based on what he said in our prior text.

Philippians 3:12–16 (NKJV)

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

This is what all the good preachers and teachers and leaders and fathers and mothers and husbands and wives and disciples are doing. They are doing it just

like Paul. This is not the **exceptional** Christian. This is the **mature** Christian, the **consistent** Christian. How do they live? They live like Paul. Can **we say** look for Christians who live like **I do**? Model yourself after **them**. We **should** be able to say that if we are leaders.

John MacArthur says **Those examples are the pastors and elders of the church, who are to “show [themselves examples] of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:12) by modeling humility, unselfish service, willingness to suffer, devotion to Christ, courage, and dedication to spiritual growth.**

He says you have us as a pattern. The word for pattern means that which is stamped. I think of the stamp that a notary public has to stamp papers. They press the stamp and it always looks the same.

Have you ever noticed that good Christian leaders have significant **similarities**? Oh they have enormous differences. Some are extroverts. Some are introverts. Some are tactful. Some are blunt. Some are good communicators. Some are not. Some have administrative skills. Some do not. Oh there are lots of differences. But there is a **stamp** on their lives that is the same.

They love God and they love people.

Like Paul says, they have this thing that drives them that is **supernatural**. They are driven to press on in their own lives and it is completely independent of all other voices. They have their eyes set on a **goal**, on a **finish line**. And that pursuit defines them. They do not need accolades. They do not need incentive bonuses. They do not need people continually telling them how great they are doing. They are driven by their relationship with Christ.

This drives them to love people. They are continually looking out for ways that their lives can be used to **benefit people**. They are willing to give up their rights. They give up their expectations of how people **ought to treat them**. And they meet people where people **live** and do their best to **help them**. They lay down their lives for the benefit of those they serve. That is the pattern. That is the thing that looks alike in all true spiritual leaders. And that is what Paul is talking about. It is a pattern **just like Paul's**. And of course, more than Paul, it is the pattern just like **Christ's**.

You and I have been given information that allows us to wisely discern who good leaders are. And we should discern wisely. But Paul knows full well that there is more to the story. Where there is the **true pattern**, there is always the **false forgery**. And Paul wants us to think about that.

But how do we spot them?

There are lots of other scriptures about this that give us clues. Often the focus is in on their preaching and teaching. But it is very interesting here that Paul is focused on how the false teachers **live**, what they **do**.

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:

This is not a new topic for Paul at all. He has spoken about the false often. We might get the idea that the false is always going to be going head to toe with the true. We can expect this in the Christian life. We can predict that in every community where a true fellowship is, there is very likely to be a preacher that is **false**. Where there are preachers following Paul's pattern, there will be **false** preachers following this **false** pattern. These false teachers, too, will have things in common.

Notice Paul says they "walk". Again this is not all there is to say about false teachers. The focus in our text is on how **they live**.

But look how Paul addresses the topic. He is weeping. The word he uses conveys **bawling**. This is a **profound sadness** to Paul. It breaks his heart. Paul is not usually too bent out of shape when wicked people do wicked things. Paul usually reserves this kind of emotional reaction for **insiders**, for those **inside the church**. This might be a clue that the false leaders he is talking about were once inside the church fellowship. But they were not content to stay there. They were not stamped with true ministry traits.

The weeping might also be directed at the terrible damage the false teachers will do **inside** the church. He may be weeping for all the set backs believers will experience as they follow these people who have a completely different way of living than Paul did.

Now how does Paul define them?

they are the enemies of the cross of Christ

Are there some who mistakenly preach bad doctrine? For sure. I cringe as some of the things I preached early on in my ministry in YFC. And those people who mistakenly preach bad or incomplete doctrine will **change** when confronted with **good doctrine**. They will respond like Apollos did to Aquilla and Priscilla. That happens. But the people that Paul is talking about are not **accidental** in their lives. They are **intentional**. There comes a time to pronounce that a person is committed to what they are doing for the evil motivations that drive them. When that becomes apparent, we can proclaim that these people are enemies of the Cross. They are enemies. They stand against it because they **want to** stand against it. And what do they stand against? They stand against the **doctrine** and

logical applications of the doctrine of the work of Christ on our behalf. The commentaries are all uncertain about exactly who these enemies are in our text. They may be those who say that the **way that you live** does not matter in the Christian life. The ones who twist grace into some form of **anti lawlessness** where the more we sin the better it makes God look. And God really did not save us for good works and godly living.

Then there are others who believe these enemies are the **Judiazers**. This too is possible. Paul certainly has nothing good to say of them. But the one thing you will never see him say is that **they are sincere**. He must believe the Judiazers heard the gospel enough that they **should respond**, but they will **not submit** to the pattern. They will not submit to a godly way of life.

Verse 19 tells us everything we need to know about their motivations.

whose end is destruction

The word for “**end**” here is the same word used by Paul when he talked about running to **the goal**. Here the false teacher’s goal is destruction. That is the finish line they are running to. That is **completely** different than the goal of a believer.

Absolutely different. This destruction is eternal. It is like they are getting up and running and they have no idea that is where they are running to. They are unaware of their destination. That is one of the major distinctions between believers and non believers. Believers **know** where they are running **to**. Non believers choose not to think about it. Their eyes are fixed on other things.

whose god is their belly

Is this what the false teacher would say? Never. They would never say that. If you were to ask Joel Osteen, is your god your passions, your belly? Is your heart set on the things of this earth that you are accumulating for yourself? Are your passions on the things that money could buy? You know he would be aghast. That is never the **admitted** worship. Of course not. He would undoubtedly say he is **benevolently** trying to help people to **have their best life now**. And he would paint it in our vocabulary. But what truly motivates him? We cannot know for sure, but it sure looks like he is getting way more money than is needed to sustain food, clothing and shelter for this lifetime.

Remember Paul is not talking about looking at one’s **doctrine** at this point. He often does. But now he is talking about the difference between the **true pattern** and the **false**. One lives for **eternal** things, the other for **temporal** things. One is living for rewards in the **next** life. The other is satisfied to gain what is gainable **now**, the best life **now**. **Now** is the focus. **This life** is the focus.

What Paul is telling us is that the motivation for anything these leaders do is ultimately for **selfish gain**. They are not going to go to great lengths to make sure that what they say about God's word is accurate. Because **accuracy** is not the goal. It isn't even a primary consideration. Creating an **impression** on the crowd is the goal. Gaining a **benefit** from the crowd is the goal. The Benny Hinns and Kenneth Copelands who live lives of luxury and fly around in their own jets are the ultimate examples of these ministries. But really, it is any leader who leads the flock with the motivation of gaining a worldly advantage by doing so. It does not need to be on an extravagant level. The **size** of the advantage does not matter. It is simply the existence of that **motivation** that matters.

whose glory is in their shame

2 Cor 4:4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

What is the shame here in 2 Cor? The hidden things of shame appear to be walking in **craftiness** and handling the word of God **deceitfully**. That is the shame that Paul renounced. And those in Paul's pattern do the same thing. Their goal in presenting God's word is first accuracy. But these false leader's glory in their shame. They are proud of the way they can manipulate the crowds. They are proud of the way they can fleece the flocks. They delight in the way they can gain an advantage by their situation.

They are **proud** of the things they should be most **ashamed** of. Can you imagine being proud of your finesse in getting unsuspecting and undiscerning believers to send you large quantities of money just because you are good at misquoting scripture? Can you imagine being **proud** of living in **absolute affluence** because you got a bunch of people who don't know scripture to believe your lies about it? Can you imagine any greater shame than that? But these people laugh all the way to the bank. They **glory**, they hold it as something for which they should be held in **high esteem**, which is really that which they should walk around in **sackcloth and ashes** for.

That is our day. But the same thing existed in Paul's day. There were people trying to exploit the Philippians and all the other churches Paul had a hand in starting or growing. They were everywhere. And they would **keep coming**. And their motivation was not like Paul's, it was not like Timothy's, it was not like

Epaphras's. No it was like the **devil's**. They were just looking to make this life as good as it can be. And that is the concluding remark about them by Paul.

who set their mind on earthly things

Here we have the most significant and telling difference between a **true** minister of Christ in the model of Christ and of Paul and those who are false. The minister who is true is running the race and having their eyes set on the goal hoping to reach the destination of the upward calling of God. Those are in Paul's pattern. They have the mind of Christ. They live a life that resembles Christ's.

Then there are those who are not running that race at all. They are fakes. Their minds are set on **earthly goals**. They are motivated by money, sex or power or a combination of all three. They seek the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They should have their minds set on **things above**, but that would require faith. They live like the world. They want something that pays off now. Suffering for Christ is a far off concept. If the church began to be persecuted, these false teachers would sell out tomorrow. They would never willingly suffer for Christ. They would come up with another false doctrine that allows them to avoid persecution.

I guess we really should ask, what about me? How well do I pass this test? Why do I do what I call ministry?

whose god is their belly

whose glory is in their shame

who set their mind on earthly things

Maybe the thing to ask ourselves is, what would it take for me to **stop doing** the ministry I am doing? If I got no positive reward on this earth for it, would I stop? If I could get more earthly reward for it elsewhere, would I **go**? Do I care about **accuracy** more than anything else when I present the word? Am I really doing this because I love Christ and want to please Him and serve Him? If so, that is Christ's model. That is Paul's model. If so we are carrying **His** stamp.

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

Now we move back to the legit ministers. Paul uses the word for **citizenship** here and remember how the **Philippians** would have **received** this? Their city had Roman Citizenship automatically. That was a big deal. That was a wonderful earthly thing. But Paul lets them know that is **nothing** compared to what **believers** have. The false leaders had their minds set on earthly things. They may have done a lot to get **Roman** citizenship. They were thinking about what they could have **here and now**. But believers are a different animal. They are thinking

about after death. They are living for a treasure that is sure and cannot be taken away. There are no thieves. There is no rust. There is no inflation. There is no decay. There are no taxes. There are no scams. There are no hackers. There are no immoral political policies. The government is perfect.

That is where **our** citizenship is. And we look for our King to return. It is interesting that Paul only refers to Jesus twice as **Savior**.

Gordon Fee says this:

Significantly, both for his readers' context and for our understanding of Paul's christology, the one whom we "eagerly await" is called "Savior." The significance is highlighted by its rarity in Paul; only once heretofore (Eph 5:23) has he used this title to describe Christ. That he does so here is almost certainly for the Philippians' sakes, since this is a common title for Caesar.²⁵ That he does so at all is especially significant christologically, since the title occurs frequently in the OT to refer to God our (my) Savior. As with the title "Lord," therefore (cf. 2:9–10), Paul has co-opted yet another OT term for God and unflinchingly attributed it to Christ. None of this would be missed by the Philippians, who know the term well in both of its contexts.

Those in the pattern of Paul live in our earthly environment, but we are looking forward to a permanent city. We live here, but we are not living **for** here. We do not minister for **temporary** benefits. We are a people who are fixated on a coming event. Jesus is coming back and that is worth everything. That is our hope.

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

I so love that scripture never appeals to us to live in such a way that in the end we ultimately **lose** something of great worth. We lose things temporarily for sure.

We might even lose our lives. But look at the end result at the **return of Christ**.

These bodies we have, these bodies the false teachers live to cater to and embellish, these bodies will be translated into **glorious spiritual bodies** like Christ has. All the stuff we could gain in this life won't hold a candle to what will be given to us in a moment on that day. And Paul goes on. He puts it all in context. How will Christ accomplish this transformation?

according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Paul is telling us Christ will do this just like He does everything else. He will do it like He created the moon and the stars. He will do it like He holds the universe

together. He will do it like He calls His children to Himself when He saves them. There is no struggle seen here. There is no battle. There is no question of the outcome. The future is as sure as the promises of God.

Gordon D. Fee says this:

It simply cannot be said any better than that—for them or for us. This passage reminds us that, despite appearances often to the contrary, God is in control, that our salvation is not just for today but forever, that Christ is coming again, and that at his coming we inherit the final glory that belongs to Christ alone—and to those who are his. It means the final subjugation of all the “powers” to him as well, especially those responsible for the present affliction of God’s people. With Paul we would do well not merely to “await” the end, but eagerly to press on toward the goal, since the final prize is but the consummation of what God has already accomplished through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Maybe a good application for us this week is to look at any ministries we have, whether that is some official ministry position in the church, or whether it is simply a position of authority or influence we hold. We might ask, what parts of our lives would we not want those we influence to emulate? Where can we not say, follow me as I follow Christ? Then may we bring those places to God in prayer and surrender to His guidance in learning obedience to Christ in those areas.

Also it would be good to look at our lives to see what ministry do we currently do for an earthly payoff, that if we suddenly lost the payoff, we would stop doing the ministry? And that payoff does not need to be money. It could be any earthly motivation.

What changes must we make before we can say with Paul. **Brethren, join in following my example**