

PRESSING ON: MARKING THOSE WHO LIVE OR WALK AS EXAMPLES PHILIPPIANS 03: 17–21

Introduction

This is one of the most important passages in the Bible. It has to do with the example we set before the world and before our families and friends. The way we live and what we do influences people. We may not want to influence them, but it does not matter whether we want to or not: they are influenced. Family, friends and children – everyone who knows us – watch us; and they follow both the good and the bad of our example. It may be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional; we may be willing or we may not be willing for them to follow in our steps – it matters not – they follow our example. We influence people by how we live and by what we do.

=> If we follow good and do good, it encourages them to do good.

=> If we follow bad and do bad, it sets a pattern of bad before others. It even causes some (in particular, the young and immature) to think that since we did it and still got along fairly well, they can do it and get along fairly well, too.

The point is this: the life we live sets a pattern for others to follow. Others are going to follow us no matter what we do. This says something to us, something of critical importance: we must live lives on the highest plane possible. We must set the most dynamic example possible. We must set the most perfect pattern possible for others to follow. But it also says something else: we must follow after those who live on the highest plane of life. We must mark those who walk as examples and follow after the great traits of their lives. We must take those who live as examples and dissect the traits of their lives, and apply those traits to our own lives. This is the subject of the present passage: marking those who walk as examples for us all.

- I. Reason 1: some walk as examples (v. 17).
- II. Reason 2: many walk as enemies of the cross (vv. 18-19).
- III. Reason 3: the believer is a citizen of heaven (vv. 20-21).

I. *Philippians 03:17 The Testimony of Paul*

We must mark those who live as examples, first, because they live godly lives. Note what Paul said: he and others followed Christ ever so diligently; therefore, they were dynamic examples as to how people should walk and live. When a person lives a life on the highest plane – when he lives like Christ said to live – he is an example. He is living just like we all should live: just as Christ said.

What did Paul mean? Was he claiming perfection – claiming to be the perfect pattern for men to follow? No! A thousand times no! In fact, the very opposite is true. He had just declared...

- that he could never stand before God in his own righteousness (v. 9)
- that he had not yet obtained (v. 12)
- that he was not perfect (v. 12)
- that he had not apprehended that for which Christ had laid hold of him (v. 13)

What then did Paul mean? Just what he said. He was a dynamic example...

- in forgetting the things that were past
- in straining toward the things that lay ahead
- in pressing toward the prize, for which God had called him in Christ Jesus

Paul was a dynamic example in seeking to follow Christ. He was forever straining ahead, forever pressing on to be like Christ. He never reached the perfect pattern of Christ – he could not, not as long as he was a man – but he pressed and pressed to be all he could for Christ. It is this that Paul sets before us as a pattern. We are to follow Paul...

- in forgetting the past, no matter how terrible it is
- in straining toward the things that lie ahead
- in pressing toward the prize, for which God had called on him in Christ Jesus

We will never achieve perfection, not in this life, but we are to follow after Christ and seek to be like Him. Now note the point: when we see a person sharing Christ with such dynamic commitment and energy, that person is an example for us. We should follow that person. He is following after Christ, doing the very thing we should be doing. Therefore, he is a living example for us.

Note the word *example* (*tupon*). The underlying meaning of the word is that of an imprint or mark made by a blow or some mould or dye. The idea is that we are to be seeking Christ with such diligence that our example will be like a powerful blow being thrown at those around us. Take the most powerful boxing blow of the heavyweight champion and our example for Christ should strike others with just as much power.

Thought 1. No believer should ever claim or think that he has come anywhere close to perfection. But *every believer* should follow Christ with so much commitment and diligence that he is a dynamic example for others. Every believer should be able to say “follow me” – follow my seeking after Christ – my seeking to be like Christ.

1 Cor 4:16 *Therefore I urge you to imitate me.*

1 Cor 11:1 *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Phil 3:17 *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

Phil 4:9 *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

1 Th 1:6 *You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

1 Th 2:10 *You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.*

2 Th 3:7 *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you.*

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.*

2 Tim 1:13 *What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

James 5:12 *Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.*

II. *Philippians 03:18–19 The Enemies of the Cross*

We must mark those who live or walk as examples, second, because many walk as enemies of the cross. Who are the enemies of the cross? Many commentators say they are the hypocritical and false believers within the church, those who are nominal Christians. They say that the word "live" is used of Christians in verse 17; therefore, it also refers to church members in verse 18. It is also said that Paul would weep only for false believers within the church.

It is true that Paul could have been referring to false and hypocritical believers within the church; however, every unbeliever both in and out of the church walks as an enemy of the cross...

- whether the leader of a nation or a movement who is set on wiping out the church and the cross.
- Whether a professing believer who really doubts the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Note something else as well: it is a common thing for believers to weep for the lost. Certainly Paul wept many times over the lost of the world and not just over false believers within the church. (See Mt. 23:37; Lk. 13:34; Rom 9:1-3; 10:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-4.)

1 Tim 2:1-4 *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

Again, who are the enemies of the cross? It seems best to take the verse for just what it says: there are many who walk as “the enemies of the cross” – no matter who they are, whether within or without the church. Unquestionably, the enemies of the cross are many. Note what is said about them.

1. Their destiny is *destruction (apoleia)*. The word means perdition, destroyed or slayed; to lose one’s wellbeing; to be wasted and ruined and given a worthless existence. It does not mean that a person will cease to exist. It means a person will be destroyed and devastated and condemned to a worthless existence. He will suffer waste and loss and ruin forever and ever.

If a person stands as an enemy of the cross, he shall be destroyed. It does not matter who he is, either within or without the church, he shall suffer perdition, that is, utter destruction. Who is an enemy of the cross? It is the person...

- who rejects the cross of Christ as the only way to God
- who does not accept the death of Christ as payment for his sins
- who does not believe that Christ died for him, that is, as the punishment for his transgressions
- who does not believe that the penalty for his imperfection was borne by Christ on the cross
- who does not approach God claiming that he is coming by the death of Christ – that is, that he wants God to accept him in the death of Christ
- who claims that there are other ways to approach God – ways other than the cross of Christ
- who considers the cross of Christ to be foolishness
- who opposes and curses Christ and His cross
- who persecutes and attempts to stamp out Christ and His cross
- who denies and questions that Christ died for our sins

Mat 25:46 *“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

Mark 3:29 *“But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”*

Luke 3:17 “His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he [Christ] will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Rom 2:8-9 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

2 Th 1:7-9 And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Heb 10:29-30 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”

2 Pet 2:9 If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Rev 20:15 If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.

2. Their god is their stomach (*koilia*), that is, their appetite, their sensuality, their desire for the physical pleasures of this world. Physical and material gratification is their god. They centre their lives around...

- possessions and property
- food and appetite
- money and wealth
- acceptance and social standing
- honour and fame
- houses and furnishings
- comfort and plenty
- pleasure and sex
- position and success

Just take a moment and think upon any of the above, how some persons centre and focus their lives upon such things. Some persons spend more time in front of a mirror or eating or thinking about acceptance or success or possessions or some business deal than they do in prayer.

The point is this: when a person has a craving and an appetite for such things, they become his god. The craving begins to consume his thoughts, energy and effort. Before long his craving is taking up so much of his energy that he has very little if any time for God or for anything else. His appetite and craving, or as the Scripture says, his stomach, becomes his god. Marvin Vincent quotes the Cyclops in Euripides as saying: “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 for wise men” (*Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 452).

Rom 8:5-6 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 16:18 *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*

Eph 4:17-19 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

3. Their glory is their shame. This simply means that men boast in their sins and shame. They boast in and pride themselves...

- in their comfort
- in their drunkenness
- in their gluttony
- in their conquests
- in their sex
- in their partying
- in what they eat
- in what they have purchased
- in their authority and power
- in how much they have

Luke 12:15 *Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

Eph 5:3 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

Heb 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

Psa 10:3 *He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.*

Psa 49:6-7 *Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.*

Prov 25:14 *Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.*

Prov 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

4. They keep their mind on earthly things. This is simply another way of saying that a person is worldly. He focuses his mind, energy and effort upon the things of the world. But note: the things of the world include much more than the physical and material gratifications of this world. Worldly things also include the commendable things that are accepted by society such as...

- religions and spiritual pursuits
- self-development programs
- rules of virtue and morality
- the pursuit of ambition or success
- employment and jobs and business

As stated, such things are commendable and some are even necessary for survival and health. But the point is this: the basis of our lives must be the cross of Christ, not the things of this world. The only hope for conquering the ills and corruption of society and the evil and death of man is the cross of Christ. Nothing on this earth, no matter how good and beneficial it is, can give us life — not abundant and eternal life. Only Jesus Christ can give us life that conquers all and that infuses us with life that lasts forever. Therefore, the focus of our lives must be Christ and His cross. Yes, we must give our attention to our jobs and families and to the other good and beneficial pursuits of life, but underlying everything we do must be Christ and His cross. He and His cross must be the consuming passion and purpose of our lives. The person who sets his mind on earthly things is an enemy of the cross of Christ.

Rom 8:5-6 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

III. *Philippians 03:20–21 Believer is a Citizen of Heaven*

We must mark those who live or walk as examples, third, because the believer is a citizen of heaven. Note three points.

1. The believer's life is to be heaven-centred, for his citizenship (*politeuma*) is in heaven. Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and its citizens, although in Macedonia, were citizens of Rome. As pointed out earlier, the citizens of Roman colonies lived as Romans: they dressed as Romans, spoke the Roman language, lived by the laws of Rome, engaged in Roman pleasures and social affairs, and worshipped the Roman gods. Despite the fact that they lived in Macedonia, their citizenship was in Rome. (See note, *Citizenship, Heavenly*, Ph. 1:27; cp. Eph 2:6.)

The point to see is this: the Philippian believers knew exactly what it meant to live in one place and to be a citizen of another place. They knew exactly what it would mean to live upon the earth and...

- to dress as a citizen of heaven and not of the earth
- to speak as a citizen of heaven and not of the earth
- to engage in the pleasures of a citizen of heaven and not of the earth
- to live by the laws of heaven as well as the laws of earth
- to worship the God of heaven and not the religions and gods of this earth

Thought 1. Believers are to live as citizens of heaven and not of this world. The point is forceful.

Luke 10:20 *“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

Luke 22:30 *“So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

Eph 2:19 *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,*

Phil 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Heb 11:9-10 *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Heb 11:13-16 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.*

Rev 21:27 *Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

2. The believer's life is to be focused upon the return of Christ. He is to be waiting, looking for the Lord's return — constantly waiting and looking — looking every day of his life. Lehman Struss makes a strong point in the following:

The greatest event in any country on earth is a visit from its chief emperor. History records the most elaborate preparations and memorials for such an event. Special coins have been minted, commemorative stamps issued, and highways built. Looking forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is the highlight of Christian expectation. We should be dwelling daily in this thought of His return.... Imagine how the residents in your neighbourhood would feel if the President of the United States had announced that he was making a personal appearance in your community. I feel certain there would be some special preparations for his coming (Devotional Studies in Philippians, p. 207f).

Kenneth Wuest points out that the Greek word *await* is made up of three words put together. There is...

- the word *receive* which speaks of welcoming as the welcoming of a guest. It also has the idea of preparation for the guest.
- the word *off* which speaks of withdrawing one's attention from other objects.
- the word *out* which has the idea of waiting for, of stretching out the neck and waiting out or for the return of Christ (*Philippians*, Vol. 1, p. 102).

Combined together, the word *await* (*apekdechometha*) means to yearn, to eagerly look and wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus to take His dear people to heaven.

Mat 24:44 *“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

Luke 19:13 “So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’”

John 14:12 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

1 Cor 1:7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

1 Th 4:16-18 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Titus 2:12-13 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,

1 John 2:24 See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

3. The believer’s life is to focus upon the glorious body he is to receive when Christ returns.
 - a. Right now the believer’s body is vile, that is lowly and humiliating...
 - because it has its origin out of the earth: it is nothing more than earthly chemicals or human flesh.
 - because it is subject to sin and selfishness, evil and destruction.
 - because it is so weak: it becomes sick and diseased, injured and maimed, aged and deteriorated.
 - because it is corruptible and dying, aging and mortal, offering no hope of ever lasting beyond a few short years — no hope whatsoever.
 - b. However, note the wonderful declaration: the Lord Jesus Christ will change the believer’s body and transform or make it just like His glorious body. The word *transform* (*summorphon*) points out a most wonderful thing. The word means the permanent, constant and unchangeable being of a person. Our bodies will be transformed just like the glorious body of Christ. Imagine! To have a body that is permanent, constant and unchanging. (See note, pt. 2, Ph. 2:6 for more on the word *transform*.) The believer will receive a spiritual body.

1 Cor 15:44 It is sown a natural body [*soma psuchikon*], it is raised a spiritual body [*soma pneumatikon*]. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Phil 3:21 *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Rom 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.*

1 John 3:2 *We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

- c. How is such possible? By the power of God, the very power which is able to subdue all things to Christ. The very power that created the world and all that is in the world...
- is sovereign over the world
 - is able to control the world
 - is able to subdue the world
 - is able to recreate the world
 - is able to transform the body of man

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ■*