

The Power of Examples – Philippians 3: 17-19

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 3: 17–21; Revelation 3: 14-22.
- The contrast between true and false Christians runs through the whole chapter of Philippians 3. Verses 1-3 directly contrast the two; 4-11 is Paul’s own testimony to illustrate the internal transformation of every true Christian at salvation; 12-16 is the life pursuit of every true Christian; and now 17-21 again returns to the direct contrast between true and false Christians. —Which kind of Christians are you following as your example?
- Outline:
 - Title: The Power of Examples
 - 1. Imitate Good Examples (v17)
 - 1a. Examples in the Bible
 - 1b. Examples in Life
 - 2. Beware of Bad Examples (vv 18-19)
 - 2a. The Danger of Bad Examples
 - 2b. The Characteristics of Bad Examples

Imitate Good Examples (v17)

- “example...pattern”: Today’s culture promotes individualism. People do not like the idea of following examples. Interestingly, however, bad examples never seem to lack followers. (e.g., the “fan clubs” ...)

It is a clear biblical principle that Christians must have life examples to follow. The ultimate example is Jesus, but his example alone is not enough. You won’t even know where to start if all you have is a perfect sinless example.

Illustration: Let’s say you want to climb a mountain. There’re no marked trails on this mountain, so you stand at the foot and wonder where to start. Now, all of a sudden, a helicopter flies by and drops a man right on the top of the mountain. He calls out to you from his vantage point: “Come on now! Up here! Just follow me! Just fix your eyes on me! I am your goal! You can do it!” Guess what? You still don’t know where to start! You need someone to walk before you and show you how you can go up *from the bottom*. Jesus Christ is the example of absolute perfection. But He is not an example of becoming perfect from imperfection. He has never been imperfect. You need both examples!

Beware of the kind of misunderstanding of the statement, “Only follow Jesus, do not follow man.” It can be very individualistic, as if everyone around you is a distraction to be filtered out. You need the life examples of mature Christians and imitate how they grow!

- “Following my example”: I, Paul, have the same nature as you. I too must fight my flesh daily and depend on the power of the Holy Spirit. You watch how I discipline my body and make it my slave, how I press on, how I give my life to serve, that I may know more of Christ and become more like Christ—That’s what you must imitate from me.

1 Corinthians 11: 1 “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

And that is why the Bible records so much of Paul's life and the words he wrote with his own hands. You too must imitate Paul!

Take Philippians 1 for example. Paul has exemplified to us: thanksgiving for the saints (1: 3-4), fervently loving the saints (1: 8), prayer life (1: 9-11), joy in the work of the gospel of Christ (1: 18), proper view on life and death (1: 21), and self-sacrificial service for the benefit of the saints (1: 24)

- “ those who walk according to the pattern you have in us”: The examples are not just in the Bible, but also in real life!

1 Timothy 4: 12“.....but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”

Titus 2: 7 “in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds.....”

Hebrews 13: 7“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

Look at the chain of imitation: Paul imitates Christ, they imitate Paul, and you imitate them. (cf. 2 Timothy 2: 2 chain of teaching) The essence of discipleship training —— being an example, passing on truth, passing on life.

Beware of Bad Examples (vv 18-19)

- “For”: Why do you need to follow them? *Because* if you don’t follow good examples, you *will* be affected by bad examples for sure.

1 Corinthians 15: 33-34“**Do** not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God.” —— Follow good examples and avoid bad ones! Don’t let them corrupt your good morals!

- “Many”: Beware, there are many bad examples. They are everywhere around you, and some are even in the church!
- “walk... that they are enemies of the cross of Christ”: They are not those who prosecute Christians outside of the church, but the false Christians within the church! They are enemies of Christ by the “walk” of their life, not by the profession of their mouth. They too call Jesus, Lord, Lord, but their life conduct is really against Christ, for they not only don't pursue Christ themselves, they also entice true (but immature) believers to follow their bad examples! They’re the enemies from within!

- “tell you even weeping”: This is tears of love, for I know how dangerous these enemies are to you! Every time Paul weeps, it is the tears of love. (cf. Acts 20: 31; 2 Corinthians 2: 4)
- “whose end is destruction”: These people will go to hell eventually! Don’t be fooled by them. Those who call themselves Christians and yet do not pursue Christ in their lives may seem to live a better life now than true Christians, but their *end* is hell!
- “whose god is their appetite”: “appetite” is a metaphor, referring to all kinds of fleshly desires, including the pleasures, wealth, and fame of this life — these are their “god,” that is, the idol which they serve with their lives and to which they devote their hearts!

Jude 4 “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

- “whose glory is in their shame”: Sin distorts their view on what is honor and what is shame. (cf. Isaiah 5: 20) Today’s world is full of examples of glorying in shameful things: A random collage of chaotic imagery can be labeled fine art (fancily termed postmodernism); a stream of nerve-wrecking noise can be called music (dark rock, death metal, etc.); and the rampant pornographic culture is just sheer plain bare shamelessness.

Another example is the Corinthian church: Factions, abusing God-given gifts, gathering without any order, even publicly accepting someone who has an immoral relationship with his step mother and *they even boast about it* (1 Corinthians 5: 1, 2, 6)!

Glorying in their shame is not just referring to those whose morality is obviously corrupt, not knowing what is honor and what is shame. Paul apparently also includes the Judaizers who put confidence on their flesh, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. At salvation, Paul realized that everything he used to glory in is all but shame. (vv. 7-8) Without the salvation of Christ, without regeneration by the Holy Spirit, without a total transformation of the mind, all outward actions are tinted by sinful desires of the heart and all boasting is glorying in shame.

- “who set their minds on earthly things.”: This is the summary of essential characteristics of those enemies of the cross of Christ. The true Christians are totally opposite with heavenly mindedness and think about heavenly things. (cf. vv 20-21)

1 John 2: 15 “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

The Laodicean church is neither cold nor hot. The Lord Jesus says: “I wish that you were cold or hot.”(Revelation 3: 15) Either cold or hot would be better than lukewarm. Why? What’s good about being cold? Answer: If you are totally cold toward the Lord, you at least will not be a stumbling block. Others won’t look at you and be deceived, thinking you can stay lukewarm and still be saved! Some true Christians are deceived into a lukewarm state and they don’t know the danger they’re in! Listen to Paul’s warning in tears! Those people are the

enemies of the cross of Christ; their end is destruction! Stay away from them! You must follow those who press on diligently!

Summary application: Do you have examples whom you can follow in our church? Are you committed enough to our church and connected closely to the lives of brothers and sisters, so that you can see their examples of pursuing Christ and be motivated to imitate their lives? This kind of life observation and imitation requires regular commitment as a basis. Only by living life together, fellowshiping and serving together with brothers and sisters can you follow examples. For some brothers/sisters, it may be time for you to become a member and serve the body! For others, it may be time to reduce your commitment to other things so you can be more committed to church life.