

Follow My Example - Philippians 3:17-21

Introduction: *“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.”* Have you ever heard that? Well, if that’s true, then a lot of people are flattering Tommy Hilfigure, Calvin Kline, and a host of other famous people and celebrities in the clothes they wear, the lifestyles they choose, and the things they pursue. Me; I guess I just flatter Sam Walton, cause I sure do seem to spend a lot of time in his store, buying his stuff.

Of course, the problem with this form of imitation and flattery is that the models that are imitated are often not the best. Rather than imitating the best things, many people imitate the worst things in life. So the question is not if we imitate; we certainly do. The question is what we imitate.

In this portion of Philippians, Paul gives some good advice in this area:) **Philippians 3:17 (NIV)** *“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”* Now on the surface, Paul’s advice may sound a bit egotistical, but we must remember that Paul was the leader of this church. God had placed Him here to establish this church and lead this people in their Christian walk. They were still, in many ways, spiritual babies, and needed an example to follow. As babies and toddlers learn by imitation from their parents, the Philippians needed to learn from their spiritual parent, Paul. Therefore, Paul could point to himself and his fellow leaders as examples of true Christians. Why did he urge the Philippians to follow his example? It is because first:

1. It Points to Christ (17)

The original invitation and command of Jesus Christ was for people to *“Follow Me.”* Christ gave this command to those men He was calling out of the world and into a lifestyle of subjection and under His authority. As the disciples followed Jesus, they learned of Him. They learned who He was and what He was about. They learned to love Him, and the more they loved Him, the more they wanted to imitate Him.

The early Christians, such as these Philippians, had no New Testament, no knowledge of Christ (other than a saving knowledge), and no church tradition or experience to draw from. Therefore the example of the Christian leaders in their presence was extremely valuable to them. In practice, their Christian life became a version of follow-the-leader. Paul was saying to these Christians, *“You want to know Christ, follow me and I will point you to Him by my lifestyle.”*

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul amplified this thought when he said, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”* So every time Paul admonishes us to follow him, there is the understanding that we are really following Christ and imitating His ways. And as we imitate Christ, we *“do what Jesus does,”* so that

others may imitate us. Many have been led to a saving knowledge of Christ by watching the lives of Christians who were imitating Christ. Secondly, he urges the Philippians to follow his example because:

2. It Points to Opposing the Enemies of God (18-19)

In vs. 18-19, Paul identifies some people as “*enemies of the cross of Christ.*” These were people who had perverted the gospel in some way, and Paul had opposed them many times. Paul spent a good deal of his time actively opposing these “*wolves in sheeps clothing*” because they were guilty of watering down the gospel, and it was leading folks astray. As much as Paul was warning the Philippians about these false teachers, he was telling them to imitate him in opposing those who would pervert the gospel of grace.

Now let me clarify what it means to be an enemy of the cross of Christ. Paul is not talking about opposing people who have a difference of opinion. He is not referring to running people off who didn’t think like he did. No, Paul is referring to vigorously opposing those people who were infiltrating the church with a false gospel. The Judiazers, for example, were those Jews who said that one had to be circumcised (become a Jew) in order to be a Christian. The Pharisees were the group that said that one must adhere to a rigid set of rules in order to gain God’s favor. And there were many other groups of people who believed and taught that something must be either added or taken away from the gospel for people to enter the kingdom of God. These are the ones Paul opposed. He said there is only one name by which people can be saved. There is only one way, truth, and life, and it is in the person and power of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

Paul said that these persons’ “*destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. Their mind is on earthly things*” (19). In other words, they are not for God, and if they are not for Him they are against Him and we must boldly oppose them. Finally, Paul urges the Philippian church to follow his example because:

3. It Points to a Blessed Hope (20-21)

With confidence, Paul points out that “*our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lower bodies so that they will be like His glorious body*” (20-21).

Here, Paul gives a final grand and glorious reason to follow his example. It’s found in our blessed hope and promise that the Lord Jesus Christ will someday change this old evil, corrupt, sinful, and decaying body into one like His own. Paul reminds us that our citizenship is already in heaven. Our hearts are already there, but someday our bodies will catch up, as Jesus returns to catch us away with Him.

I'd love to imitate those who have gone on before me right now. I'd love to spend some catch-up time with them strolling down that golden avenue; resting along the bank of the river of life, and inviting them over to my custom-built heavenly mansion. But most of all, I'd love to imitate those saints who are casting their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and kneeling around the throne of God singing Holy, Holy, Holy. Wouldn't you?

Conclusion: What example are we to follow? We are to follow the example Christians like Paul who are following the example of Jesus Christ as they live in this world.

Why? So that what we do and say would so closely resemble the actions of Jesus that we would actually draw others to Him. May we live in such a way that we too could say, "*Join with others in following my example.*"