

Last week we read about the zeal of the Apostle Paul as he chose to forget what was in the past and strained forward for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ. His hope was that, by the grace of God, he would serve Christ each day doing what his Lord instructed him until the day he was called home to heaven. To those who were not as devoted, he trusted that God would reveal that it was the only way to live. We ended with the challenge to live up to what has already been revealed to us.

The next paragraph picks right up with this previous thought of giving our best to the Master. Paul points to himself as an example. ¹⁷ *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* Paul did not hesitate to use himself as an example. He'll do it again before the letter concludes. (4:9) He said the same to the Corinthian church. (1Corinthians 4:16)

I remember years ago reading this expression of Paul and being a bit taken back by it. How could any human urge others to follow them? In 1Corinthians 11:1 Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to follow him as he follows Christ. We have to remember that he just wrote that he had not yet reached his goal. He humbly gave an accurate assessment of his spiritual life and he encourages others to do the same. ³ *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.* Romans 12:3 (ESV) We should avoid an overestimation of our self, knowing that Jesus is the example. But neither should we underestimate the gifts and spiritual maturity with which God has graced us. (1Corinthians 7:17) *Excessive humility is as uncomely as pride.* The verses that followed this invitation to judge ourselves are about spiritual gifts.

My discomfort from reading the verse was that I was not at peace with where I was spiritually. There were things in my life I knew that still needed to change. I couldn't say, "Brothers, join in imitating me." I don't even think that I would be comfortable with being one of the ones that Paul was pointing to as examples to watch. I had to forsake some habits, change some priorities, and take up as my goal the prize of the upward call of God. As the Apostle said in the previous passage, *"...if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you."* Philippians 3:15b (ESV) He revealed it to me and the changes became my priority in response to the love of Christ.

Would you be comfortable with a brother living with you and observing your life on a daily basis? Could you say, "Brothers, follow my example"? And if not, why not? What needs to change? In what area are you refusing to follow Christ? That is the assessment that Paul encouraged, to think with sober judgment.

Commented [Paul1]: Philippians 4:9 (ESV)

⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Commented [Paul2]: 1 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

Commented [Paul3]: 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Commented [Paul4]: 1 Corinthians 7:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

There is an interesting word that Paul uses in this exhortation, "the example". It is sometimes translated pattern (NIV). There are certain habits that are a part of the mature believer's life. These disciplines don't make a person mature, but the mature engage in them because they have grown spiritually. The changes I had to make in my life were a part of becoming mature. The changes didn't make me mature. We pray because we desire communion with God, not to as a ritual that merits reward. (Hebrews 5:14)

Paul doesn't give a full list of the examples they observed in him, but he does list more of these disciplines in other letters. He has just told them one, forgetting what is behind and straining forward for the prize. (3:13) He has also pointed to rejoicing in the Lord. (3:1) In the next chapter he'll also instruct them to think in a godly way. (4:8) In other letters he mentions continual prayer (1Thessalonians 5:17), study of the word (2Timothy 2:15), yielding to the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), speaking truthfully, not unnecessarily offending, sharing with those in need, encouraging others, and being hospitable to name a few.

We could make a long list, but it's easier to sum it up in saying that Paul loved God with his all and his neighbor as himself. Though not perfect, his conscience was clear (Acts 24:16) and the pattern of his life was on target, heaven directed, and an example for all to imitate. By the grace of God may our lives become examples as well! Amen? In the meantime, watch those that are examples and learn from them. The spiritual life is more caught than it is taught. The rabbi disciple relationship is still the best way to learn.

Paul gave himself and his team as examples in contrast to the bad examples influencing the Philippian church. *18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.* The contrast was made between Paul's way of sacrifice and those who live for the flesh. They may have been Gnostics who intellectualized Christianity and used grace as a justification for indulgence. Their reasoning went something like this: "My flesh is evil, but I am saved by grace. God has saved my soul but my flesh is beyond hope, so I'll indulge it to appreciate the grace I have received." (Romans 6:1)

It was a false idea that still permeates the church today. People mistakenly see sin as a thing of the body. When God finished creating man, He declared all was good. (Genesis 1:31) When man fell it was not because his body was evil, but because in the freewill of his soul (mind, will and emotion), he turned from God. The corruption of the soul is behind the misuse of the body not the other way around. The salvation of the soul

Commented [Paul5]: Philippians 3:17 (NIV)
¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

Commented [Paul6]: Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Commented [Paul7]: Philippians 3:13 (ESV)
¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Commented [Paul8]: Philippians 3:1 (ESV)
¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Commented [Paul9]: Philippians 4:8 (ESV)
⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Commented [Paul10]: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ pray without ceasing.

Commented [Paul11]: 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Commented [Paul12]: Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)
³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Commented [Paul13]: Acts 24:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

Commented [Paul14]: Romans 6:1 (ESV)
¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Commented [Paul15]: Genesis 1:31 (ESV)
³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

results in a right use of the body for the glory of God. Hedonism is an expression of a depraved soul. Righteous living is the expression of a redeemed soul. (Proverbs 20:7)

Commented [Paul16]: Proverbs 20:7 (ESV)

⁷ The righteous who walks in his integrity; blessed are his children after him!

Paul wept over those who refused to die to themselves and follow Jesus. He could see the future consequences and it broke his heart. (Acts 20:31)

Commented [Paul17]: Acts 20:31 (ESV)

³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

"Enemies of the cross" took on a special meaning in the first century. The Romans often mocked Christians for worshiping a condemned criminal that was executed in such a humiliating way. (1Corinthians 1:18) Some churches would downplay the cross because of this cultural issue, but it is the great difference between the Greek or Roman gods and the God of the Bible. Their gods would never humble themselves to serve their subjects because they have no love for them. The God of the Bible loves us and was willing to humiliate Himself to pay the price we could never pay. (Philippians 2:8)

Commented [Paul18]: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

That message was hard to communicate then as it is now because it implies that we imitate Christ in taking up our cross daily. (Luke 9:23) We become friends of the cross, while they become enemies of the cross. We embrace sacrifice and service to others while they indulge in selfishness.

Commented [Paul19]: Philippians 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Commented [Paul20]: Luke 9:23 (ESV)

²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

And the reason for Paul's tears and ours as well is we know that ¹⁹ *Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.* The decision of the soul that results in that lifestyle not only is destructive here but will be eternally judged. (2Thessalonians 1:9) They live for their sensual appetites. Living for the belly did not simply mean for food, but for everything they physically desired. (Romans 16:18) Selfish gratification of the body of a depraved soul is self-destructive now and forever, for it is not just the body that is in rebellion but the very soul of the person. The forbidden bodily pleasures become enslaving to the soul and body. Paul says of this depravity that they lose all sensitivity and continually lust for more. (Ephesians 4:19) **They are gratified but never fully satisfied.** And what do they boast of? Their shameful acts!

Commented [Paul21]: 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Commented [Paul22]: 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Commented [Paul23]: Ephesians 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Perhaps the worst consequence is their minds become enslaved by their worldly desires so that they only think of sin. (Romans 8:5) That is why it is so important to guard our thoughts, something Paul will exhort in the next chapter. God has given us all things to richly enjoy, but when the things of this world become our goal and are abused to try to fill the void in our hearts, what was meant for good becomes the means of our own destruction. Then to justify their lifestyle, they justify their actions and encourage others to join them. (2Peter 2:3)

Commented [Paul24]: Romans 8:5 (ESV)

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Commented [Paul25]: 2 Peter 2:3 (ESV)

³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

This is why Paul told them to follow his example. His zeal for the things of God, his love for others, his daily carrying his cross was a contrast to the self-indulgent. His joy

shouted the message that Jesus is worth it! His forward looking life declared that there is more than this world has to offer. (Hebrews 11:26)

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, We've come to two more great verses to memorize and hide in your heart. The desire of a transformed believer is Jesus! His presence is where our heart is at home. The world holds no lasting appeal to us. We would gladly leave it behind to be with our Savior. Our eyes are on Him, waiting for His return.

Philippi was a Roman colony. After 21 years of military service as a soldier to Rome you would receive citizenship and could retire to a colony somewhere in the world. Regardless of the culture around them, they dressed like Romans, spoke Latin, had Roman magistrates, morals, and were proud of it. Philippians knew what it meant to be a citizen in a colony surrounded by another culture. It was a Greek city taken over by Rome.

The word "citizenship" is also used of a community that has its own laws within a surrounding culture with different laws. It was used of a Jewish community in a Romans city. We are strangers and aliens here, just passing through. We're from another place and one day we're going home. (Hebrews 11:13) But while we are in this foreign land, we invite all who will listen to join our community. You will be seen as different. You will have new boundaries placed on your life. You won't fit in like you did before, but we have a destination and a hope. (1Corinthians 15:19)

The Caesars of that day were referred to as saviors. They came into a territory and having conquered it, established order and the peace of Rome. That often meant cultural and practical improvements as well as a more orderly life.

We should be waiting for our Savior to come. We have lost the expectation of the early church that at any moment the Lord will appear in the eastern sky and we will be caught up to meet Him in the air. (1Thessalonians 4:16-17) I think we need to restore that fervor, gazing occasionally to the eastern sky with expectant longing as we imagine the scene of Jesus bursting through the clouds, more radiant than the sun, with eyes of fire, welcoming us home. (Matthew 24:29-31) **Are you expectantly waiting for your Lord and Savior?**

The King from our homeland is coming to take over. The improvements He will make are out of this world. The first great improvement is to these corruptible bodies. As good as they are, they are perishable and made for this temporal existence. (Psalm 139:14) The king is coming, *²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Commented [Paul26]: Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)

²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Commented [Paul27]: Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Commented [Paul28]: 1 Corinthians 15:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Commented [Paul29]: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Commented [Paul30]: Matthew 24:29-31 (ESV)

²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Commented [Paul31]: Psalm 139:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Jesus already transformed the souls of those who have received the salvation He offers. That is what made us citizens of heaven. But we still have these fallen bodies that have degenerated over the millennia to the state we now experience. I realize some in the church believe they should have perfect health and I can see where they get that idea from Scripture, but I also see that all God's servants (with a couple of notable exceptions) eventually died. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. (2Corinthians 12:7) John the Beloved died of old age. And when the rest of the Apostles were martyred, they were not raised from the dead. Some people want to stay here forever. Not me!

Commented [Paul32]: 2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)
⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

Last week there was a special TV program about people that had near death experiences. The ones that had a little taste of heaven were disappointed to have had to return. They say they'd much rather be there. I'm filling out my DNR! If God wants me back here because He has more for me to do, fine, but otherwise let me go.

1 Corinthians 15 tells us that at the last trumpet, Jesus will clothe us with immortality. We will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. In the Philippian passage, Paul says that Jesus will do it with the power by which everything is subject to him. Jesus speaks and it is. (Matthew 8:8) He is all powerful.

Commented [Paul33]: 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV)
⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Our bodies right now are quite lowly compared to the glorious body into which he will change them. He writes that they will be like the Lord's glorious body. We know from Luke that after the Lord rose He could walk into a locked room. (Luke 24:42-43) He could eat. He had flesh and bone. (Luke 24:39) He was tangible. But other than that we only have the awesome description of John in Revelation chapter one. (Revelation 1:13-16) From other descriptions we know that we will be recognizable as the person we were on earth. And when talking about this moment when the dead are raised and the living are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, Paul says we should comfort one another with these words. (1Thessalonians 4:18)

Commented [Paul34]: Matthew 8:8 (ESV)
⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Here is the great contrast that Paul was pointing out. Some were living for the gratification of their body in destructive lifestyles and choices, justifying it and trying to lead others to do the same. Paul tells the church that they should follow his example of pressing forward for the upward call. **Why aim for destruction when you can aim for glory?** All the hedonists have is temporary gratification of the flesh that leaves them wanting more. They will never attain the lasting joy that we have found.

Commented [Paul35]: Luke 24:42-43 (ESV)
⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,
⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

Commented [Paul36]: Luke 24:39 (ESV)
³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. E

Commented [Paul37]: Revelation 1:13-16 (ESV)
¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.
¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,
¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.
¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Commented [Paul38]: 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

We are headed toward the wonderful goal of being in the presence of Christ forever. We taste it now (Ephesians 1:14) as he transforms our soul and enjoy this world in legitimate ways (Ecclesiastes 8:15), but we are ultimately looking forward to that day when we will get our heavenly body. Then we can enjoy the presence of Christ

Commented [Paul39]: Ephesians 1:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Commented [Paul40]: Ecclesiastes 8:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ And I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

unhindered. (Revelation 1:17) Then we will experience all that God has for us to the fullest extent. Those who have had just a glimpse struggle to find words to describe it.

Let's follow Paul's example of aiming for the upward call. Let's forget what is behind and strain forward toward the prize.

A Chinese Communist, who delivered many Christians to their execution, came to a pastor and reportedly said: "I've seen many of you die. The Christians die differently. What is their secret?" I don't know what the pastor said, but I know what I would have answered. "We're going home. Where are you going?"

Questions

- 1 Would you urge others to imitate you?
- 2 What is a sober judgment of oneself?
- 3 What is the pattern? Who had it?
- 4 Who were the enemies of the cross?
- 5 Where does evil reside?
- 6 What was the shame of the cross?
- 7 What is their god?
- 8 Describe the contrasting examples?
- 9 What does heavenly citizen imply?
- 10 What are we waiting for?
- 11 What will Jesus do first?
- 12 What will our bodies be like?

Commented [Paul41]: Revelation 1:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,