

# [ traveling companions ]

## :: philippians 3.17-19 ::

Our text this morning is Philippians 3.17-19. Let me read it for us.

**Philippians 3.17-19 - Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 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: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame— who set their mind on earthly things.**

The Apostle Paul understood that an important key in living life as a disciple before the Lord is self-evaluation. He's been giving us all these different areas and issues to inspect within ourselves because there are so many things that can stumble us or derail our walk with the Lord. There are many pitfalls which surround a Christian that can cause us to wander into the spiritual wilderness where we're not receiving all that God has for us, not moving forward in our faith, not developing the kind of fruit and depth that the Lord wants, not enjoying the fullness of Jesus Christ.

Here's the thing, when it comes to the Christian life it's not hard to know what we should do. God has laid that out very plainly for us and He's empowered us to accomplish it. He's sent unbelievable supplies of help and guidance in order that we realize His redemptive power. What's hard is making the decision to actually do it. Because it requires sacrifice and it requires that we place the Lord as Master over us.

Paul is coming to us and saying, "Look, I know what God wants for your life and I know how you get there. *This* is how you get there." What we do with that information determines how full our lives are going to be with God's power and grace.

In these 3 verses, Paul gives us a great comparison to consider. As we're taking an honest look within our own lives to measure whether we're walking with the Lord or wandering in the wilderness, there are 2 examples we can line up against. It's very much like Psalm chapter 1. That's a familiar passage to many Christians. It talks about the *WAY* of the righteous and the *WAY* of the wicked. You figure out how you get on either of those roads and then what that road leads to.

The same thing is happening here as Paul contrasts himself with others who profess to be Christians, yet in reality are something else altogether.

So, beginning in verse 17, we see the first example, Paul and believers like him.

He says,

**Philippians 3.17 - Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.**

We are to be imitators of Christ. But, those of us who were not alive to see Jesus in the flesh might have a difficult time reconciling His example with our imperfection. Now, this is one of the great benefits of the Holy Spirit living within us. We don't travel through life on our own as Christians, but we have a constant companion in God the Holy Spirit. He is with us to speak and direct and empower.

But, even beyond that, because God is a God of grace and love, He gives us not only Jesus' example, not only the indwelling Holy Spirit, but also the example of faithful believers who *do* walk worthy of their calling. Some of them are recorded for us on the pages of Scripture. The Apostle Paul is regarded by many as the greatest example of how to be Christ-like in this life. And so, if we are struggling with some issue or seeking to deepen our relationship with the Lord, we can look to Paul in his letters or in the book of Acts and we can see very detailed examples of how we should live and behave and even think.

It's not that Paul was sinless or perfect, but he was a man who followed after the Lord passionately and faithfully. Therefore, we can look to him as a pattern which we should then apply to our own lives.

What did Paul think about the Church? What did Paul think about finances? What did Paul think about retaliation against slanderers? What did Paul think about liberty? And what do we see him *doing* when it comes to those things? God has given his life and many others in the Bible as an example of Godliness and being Spirit-filled so that we can benefit from what they did.

But not only that, Paul indicates here that we can look around and note other Christians who are walking with the Lord in the way that he's been describing in this chapter. We can take note of those who are focused on Jesus, those who are running the race with abandon. People who are motivated by eternity and have set Christ before themselves as a goal and a treasure. And Paul says we should look at those faithful Christians and see them as an example for ourselves.

Again, not that these people are sinless or are perfect or have super-Christian powers. It's not about status. It's about spirituality. Biblical spirituality. Seeing people who are on board with the will of God and the cross of Jesus Christ and using their example as a measuring rod for my own life. So, we can see these kind of filled-up believers on the pages of Scripture, but we can also see them alive and well in the world today.

Think of it this way: We've been using the analogy of walking the disciple road or getting drawn off into the wilderness for a couple of weeks now. When the 12 spies were sent to check out the land of Canaan, 10 came back and did not trust God, 2 came back and did. And you could look at that group and identify who was focused on following the Lord no matter what and who was focused on other things.

This is what Paul is asking us to do. In fact, he now turns his attention to the other comparison, those who are *not* walking worthy of their calling, but are living altogether differently.

He says in verse 18:

**Philippians 3.18-19 - 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; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things.**

We don't live in physical isolation. We're all here this morning, after all. But we also don't walk in spiritual isolation. As we walk with the Lord, there are other people around us who claim to be walking with the Lord to and who have opportunity to influence us either positively or negatively.

Some of those people are walking like Paul did. Focused on Jesus. Pressing hard toward the finish line of eternity. Walking worthy.

But many who profess to be followers of Christ around us are *not* focused on the calling of Christ. The calling of Christ is to take up a cross. And these folks that Paul is talking about in verses 18 and 19 are enemies of the cross. They're carnal. They have no part in Jesus. And Paul speaks to us about them for 3 reasons.

The first reason is to warn us. We must be on guard against anyone who would seek to draw us away from our pursuit of Christ.

We're often warned in the New Testament of the false teachers that will always plague the Church. There will always be people out there who seek to come in and damage the Church through heresies and false teaching. There's a mental and doctrinal defense we need to cultivate as disciples of Christ.

But Paul also points out that it's not just false teachers that can trip us up, but what we might call travel companions too. People who we've surrounded ourselves with as we live life. Just because a person professes Christianity doesn't mean that they are truly disciples. And if they are not disciples, then we should be very careful about bringing them into our lives. Because our destinations are very different. This group we're seeing in verses 18 and 19 are headed for destruction. We're headed for completion. Therefore we're not going to be able to travel together very long before someone gets off course.

Paul's saying, "Look, there are people around you who have set their mind on earthly things and they are enemies of the cross of Christ." And if we spend *any* time reading the Proverbs, we discover that when we surround our lives with people who are not focused on Christ, there are terrible consequences.

The second reason he's bringing this up is to give us an example to apply to our *own* hearts. Because we cannot reject the **cross** of Christ and hope to receive the **completion** of Christ. It's a very interesting phrase he has here. It's not that in their minds they are enemies of God or enemies of Christ Himself, but the text says they are enemies of the **cross** of Christ. Perhaps, like so many people in the Gospels, they find certain aspects of Jesus appealing, but they are unwilling to sacrifice self in order to love and serve the Lord. They choose earthly pleasures and pursuits over the life of Christ. And Paul says, "You need to compare this example to your own

life, because you cannot benefit from the death of Christ if you are unwilling to take on the sacrifice of Christ.”

James said it this way in his epistle:

**James 4.4 - Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

This is the word of God. If we want spiritual satisfaction and a life that is full of God then we must choose to take on the cross of Christ. A cross of love and self-sacrifice and service. It is a cross of ultimate submission to God the Father. It is the choice to abandon *ALL* other pursuits in order to press into Jesus.

So, does that mean we can just skip out on our various obligations? No. Of course not. Because God places you in specific situations and relationships on purpose so that you can minister His love and His grace.

What it means is that we take our work life, for example, and make the goal of our career to glorify Jesus Christ. The goal of our lives is not to glorify Jesus *AND* make a bunch of money. It's not to glorify Jesus *AND* to build ourselves an empire. Perhaps God will call some of us to a life that is blessed materially. It's not wrong to make money. It's not wrong to build things. What's wrong is to set our minds on earthly things and to pursue self instead of or alongside Jesus. We can't do it. We have to forsake every other pursuit in order to take up the call of Christ.

To hold back any portion of our lives from God is to be an enemy of the cross. And we are given the example and description of that kind of person so that we can measure ourselves and our thinking, our behavior, and evaluate whether we're taking steps toward that kind of thinking or whether we're taking steps toward Godliness.

The third reason Paul lists this other group in verses 18 and 19 is simply because he has compassion on them. He wept at the thought of their coming destruction.

While we must be vigilant to root out carnality in our own lives, we should have compassion on those who are trapped by it. We should desire to reach out to those people.

Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 1:

**1 Timothy 1.13-14 - I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.**

If we are focused on heaven it will remind us that there are people all around us that are not headed there. And that should be something that motivates us to show love and grace and to get people onto the path that will end in eternity with Jesus, not an eternity separated from Him.

Knowing what to do isn't the hard part. Doing it is what we have trouble with. Because the flesh is not a willing sacrifice. But God has redeemed us, He's given us power over the sin nature, He's given us His word with wisdom and direction and example, He's given us His Spirit to indwell us, to speak to us and to empower us with gifting and direction and peace, God's also given us the Church where we can be equipped and strengthened, where we can see how the Lord is moving in all sorts of places and scenarios right in front of us. He's given us other Christians who can serve as examples to us.

He's given all of this and promised to us that there is a life of spiritual fullness waiting for anyone who is willing to take up the call, take on the cross and live in personal relationship with Jesus.

But we have to do it. We have to press forward. We have to take the next step on the disciple road.

Today, let's each evaluate whether we're living in the pattern of Paul or the pattern of these other guys. God will speak. He will comfort and He will draw us to Himself if we are willing to set our minds on Him.