

Whose Example Are You Following? (Part 1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 May 2021

Preacher: Fred Stone

- [0 : 00] I want to say before she gets out, good job, Sophie. I called her by her sister's name in the first service. And what's so bad before I got up, I thought, that is Sophie singing.
- I'm not going to get it confused. And I didn't think I did until Lisa told me after the service that I called you by the wrong name. I am sorry. What kind of example are you?
- Now, everybody is an example. Some good, some bad. But what I really want us to think about this morning is what kind of Christian example are you?
- What kind of example are you for other Christians? How are you influencing people in this church by your presence, by your involvement, by just the way they see you live your life outside the church, in your home?
- How are you influencing people in your home? Or the people you go to school with? People you work with every day? What kind of impact are you having on them?
- [1 : 15] Are they looking to you as an example? For some, you just don't know.
- There may be some people at school, at work, and you never really understood it, don't know it even, but they're looking at you.
- They're watching you. They know you're a member of this church. They know that you are a professing Christian. What kind of example are you setting for them? And you know, sometimes people don't really look at us.
- They're not really thinking about following our example, but sometimes our example rubs off on people, doesn't it? You know that there's people in your life you've been around a lot, and you never really tried to be like them.
- You didn't think about it, but you've seen how some of the things they do, they say mannerisms, have rubbed off on you.
- [2 : 17] I want you to turn to Philippians chapter 3, verse 17, and see how Paul emphasizes the importance of providing the right kind of example for other Christians to follow.
- It is important that we understand the kind of example we should follow and not follow, and at the same time, the kind of example we need to set.
- So as we go through this passage, I want you to examine yourself. Are you helping people, examine yourself, just think, are you helping people become more like Jesus in terms of developing Christ-like character?
- Or, are you helping people to become more like the world that ignores Him or that even opposes Him?
- Which direction are you pointing people? Let's read it. Philippians chapter 3, beginning in verse 17. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.
- [3 : 37] We're not going to get into that this morning, but I want to call your attention to the fact that most everything he has been talking about in this letter, he has been giving himself as an example for Christians to follow.

But he's not an egomaniac. Paul has made it very clear, I don't think I've arrived. I am not by any means what I should be, but I'm working on it.

I'm seeking to be faithful, to grow and become more like my Lord and Savior. So, as you think about, well, what is that example?

Well, if you've been here for these studies or you just read back through what he said in chapters 1, 2, and 3, he's given us a lot of illustrations or examples of how he lives, how he relates to the Lord, what his desires are.

verse 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.

[4 : 54] Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

Paul is contrasting two basic examples of behavior that are found among professing Christians.

His intent is obvious. We need to make an intentional effort to follow the right examples and not to follow the wrong examples.

Reject them outright. Let's look at this. First, don't follow the example of fake Christians. Don't follow the example of people in the church who profess to be a Christian or pretend to be a Christian.

[6 : 07] I'm calling them fake Christians. Paul gives us a detailed description of who these people are. We can spot them by looking at what he says in verses 18 and 19.

Look, for many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk or live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction. We need to be on guard against fake Christians in the church. Paul's writing to Christians, the church at Philippi.

And he says, I've done this in the past. I've done it over and over again. Called attention to these type people. But he doesn't identify who they are. He doesn't say, here's who they are or give you a kind of detailed description.

But we can figure out. He's talking about professing Christians but they were not true believers. That's why I'm calling them fake Christians.

[7 : 12] Note, here's why we can know this. First, Paul wrote this warning with tears because he knows these people. He wouldn't be writing and making this warning with tears about people he didn't know had no involvement with like just the average pagan on the street of Philippi.

He's writing to people that he knows who've made professions of faith who have been or are even still a part of the church. And it breaks his heart to think about how they have departed from the faith or they have revealed that they've never been true to begin with.

It tears him up. So he's writing with tears a heavy heart. He takes no pleasure in pointing out these fake Christians. He also describes them as enemies of the cross of Christ.

That may mean that they were professing Christians who opposed the gospel of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus plus nothing else.

He may be referring to those Judaizers the ones we looked at a few weeks ago that he recalled dogs, beware the dogs. These were professing Jewish Christians who said yes you've got to believe in Jesus but you've also got to become an Old Testament Jew.

[8 : 38] You've got to keep the law. You've got to practice all these things that the Old Testament law required. You've got to keep the Sabbath. Practice circumcision.

All this kind of stuff. So it could be that they're enemies of the cross of Christ. They reject that Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient to pay the penalty for our sins.

Or he may be describing people as enemies of the cross of Christ as people who were professing Christians in the church but they rejected what Jesus taught about if anyone's going to follow me you've got to take up your cross daily in order to follow me.

Jesus was talking about you've got to be willing to suffer for my sake. You've got to be willing to die if necessary. The Christian life is a life of sacrifice at times.

A time for suffering for your faith. Suffering because you're attached to me. And it may be that there's people in the church who say no.

[9 : 46] They're more into the health and wealth gospel. They're more into the positive thinking and they just reject the true gospel. They reject what it means to be a Christian. That's the kind of person he's talking about here.

Well Paul makes it clear that these bad examples are not Christians because he describes how their life is going to end. He says their end is destruction.

They're going to be eternally condemned on the day of judgment. They not only don't follow Christ they're not truly Christians he's talking about people who are going to spend eternity in hell.

So Paul is telling us as we apply this to us he's telling those people be on guard for fake Christians people who profess to be maybe even still a part of the church but they're not real they're not truly followers of Jesus they're enemies of his cross their end is destruction.

So as we begin this we we need to be on guard against the bad examples of professing Christians if they're in this church or any other church and the way we'll know it is because their lifestyle their lifestyle will betray their profession.

[11 : 18] Their lifestyle will reveal they're not true followers of Jesus. Let's look on. We know who some of the fake Christians are because they show signs or no signs of spiritual life.

Paul is identifying fake Christians in the midst. We know who some of them are because of the way they live. They show no signs of any kind of spiritual life.

Look at verse 19. Their God is their belly and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. Let's think about what he's talking about.

Fake Christians focus on satisfying their physical appetites. That's what he means their God is their belly. They live for sensual or physical pleasure.

He's talking about people who just do what feels good at the moment. That could include anything from sexual immorality to gluttony to laziness.

[12 : 34] Whatever would fit in this sensual or physical pleasure. Sensual pleasures, physical excesses.

Paul's describing somebody whose goal is simply just be happy. Just do whatever it takes to be happy at the moment.

You've heard people say that haven't you? You've heard people say I just want to be happy. And maybe you've joined in with them. I heard this not too long ago. Somebody who was making a comment about somebody close to them and they were not living a faithful Christian life at all and made the comment well I just want them to be happy.

Don't want the people that you love who are living in a sinful or rebellious way of life don't want them to be happy in that.

As we'll see in a little while a true Christian can't be happy in that for long because the Spirit of God within them will convict them that it's wrong and make them miserable.

[13 : 53] You know there's a major problem with us if it applies but there's a major problem with anybody who they just want to be happy. That's the defining goal of their life.

You know God calls us to be holy not happy. That's something that is easy to remember. I've talked about it before but something we never need to lose sight of.

Almighty God is concerned that you and me if we're calling ourselves His children He wants us to be holy more than anything.

His goal is not to make us happy. I want you to understand that. Now if you will seek happiness in being holy well that's good.

You will seek to find happiness in being holy. Now that word holy turns some people off they think you're talking about somebody who's just perfect just like Jesus.

[15 : 00] No. To be holy means to be set apart for God for God's purposes. To be holy is to be different because you are a follower of Jesus.

God calls us to be holy. To live like we belong to Him. To live like we have committed our lives and set ourselves apart to follow Jesus and not be like everybody else.

Ideally we as Christians need to seek to find happiness in being holy and pleasing God. God, don't you with your family, with your spouse, with your children, with close friends, don't you find happiness and joy in pleasing them?

When you do something for somebody that you love, that you really care about, you do something for them and they smile, they enjoy it.

they let you know they enjoy it. Doesn't it please you, brings you pleasure, happiness, that you have pleased somebody?

[16 : 21] Well, our relationship with God should be such that we find joy and happiness and pleasure when we know we please Him.

And He tells us in His Word how we can live our lives to please Him. always remember what I'm talking about is not some kind of far fetched idea. Holiness is not an option for a Christian.

Look at this verse from Hebrews chapter 12. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy without holiness no one will see the Lord.

God. If you want to live like a pagan and just blend in with everybody else and you can feel good about that, you are not a Christian. You will never see God except in judgment when your life comes to an end.

So we need to take this seriously this morning. Fake Christians focus on satisfying their physical or sensual appetites. Their God is their belly.

[17 : 32] Look at this. Fake Christians are proud of what they should be ashamed of. They glory in their shame. Now this would certainly apply to all kinds of immorality.

That's sort of a given, isn't it? But it also includes anyone who adopts and celebrates the world's values that are contrary to the truth of God's word.

This is what a lot of liberal Christians or professing Christians do today. What I'm about to get into, we're not talking about politics.

We're not talking about the White House. We're not talking about liberals in Washington. What we're about to look at next, I'm talking about liberals in churches, professing Christians who are proud of what they should be ashamed of.

They're proud of their opposition to the clear teaching of God's word by being pro-abortion. Now they'll talk about being pro-choice.

- [18 : 45] I don't remember the denomination, but there's plenty of liberal denominations. Presbyterian Church, USA. The Episcopal Church and others, they are openly, they'll call it pro-choice.
- They are pro-abortion. They are pro-killing the life of a baby in the mother's womb and thinking that's some kind of great thing to do for a woman to have that kind of choice.
- There are liberals in churches right now that are proud of their personal and their churches and their denominations pro-abortion views, position.
- There are churches filled with people right now. They've adopted the world's anti-authority attitude. They're especially anti-police, which is sort of the liberal wave all across the country this morning.
- Liberals are fools. They truly are. To think you can live in this country and abolish police, governmental authority.
- [20 : 04] If you have a problem with that, you read Romans chapter 13. God has given government the power, the authority to enforce laws even to the point of using the sword as he talks about.
- There are liberals claiming to be Christians this morning. They celebrate giving a woman the freedom to kill her unborn child just because she don't want that child.
- They celebrate these riots and lootings and killings that take place across our country in the name of being anti-authority and anti-police.
- A lot of liberal Christians or professing Christians this morning support every form of sexual expression that is contrary to God's design like same-sex marriage, transgenderism.
- Now this may come as a surprise to you but there are Christians, professing Christians, pastors in upstate South Carolina who strongly support homosexuality, transgenderism, same-sex marriage and they'll perform weddings for couples of the same sex.
- [21 : 30] Christians. What I want you to see, these are fake Christians who are proud of what they should be ashamed of. They are proud to oppose the clear teaching of God's word.
- And what Paul is trying to help us understand is don't follow their example. Don't listen to them. Don't let them influence you. true Christians indwell by the spirit of God cannot glory in the clear things that are taught in God's word that are sinful, that are shameful.
- It is an impossibility for the spirit of God who inspired the writers to put what they put in scripture. It is impossible for the Holy Spirit who inspired those biblical writers to affirm us as he dwells in us to reject that which he inspired the biblical writers to write.
- You see what I'm talking about? The logic of that? We need to ignore, reject, oppose fake Christians who are proud of what scripture says Christians should be ashamed of.
- And then fake Christians have a worldly view of life with minds set on earthly things, he says. That's the phrase for that. New Testament commentator Frank Thielman has a helpful description of what Paul is talking about here.
- [23 : 14] He says earthly things are not the practical affairs of everyday life, but things that characterize worldly life in opposition to God. I appreciate that definition, that point.
- It's not wrong to take care of the practical affairs of everyday life. I mean God calls us to be good stewards of everything he entrusts to our care.
- God expects you as a man to be the leader of your home and take care of your family. It is your God-given responsibility.
- You better give attention to the affairs of your home and take care of your spouse, your children, whoever else God has placed under your roof and under your authority.

It is not worldly in a sinful way for you to take care of your financial affairs. That's why I tell these young people graduate, major in something you can make a living at because sooner or later you've got to make a living.

[24 : 30] Get a job and something will pay the bills, Josh. And that applies to everybody here. You don't go to college just to have a good time or at least I just don't know people who are that wealthy to send their children to college and just let them blow thousands of dollars for no good purpose.

We should be responsible people, good stewards of everything that God gives us. We've got to work and earn and save and invest to take care of ourselves now and if Lord lets us live in the future.

You've got to provide a home. There's just certain things about living in this world we need to take care of. In order to take care of it, we need to be concerned about it. It is not wrong to give attention to the things in this world that will enable you to faithfully serve God and to fulfill the responsibilities that God has given you.

Let's take care of yourself and your family. It is actually wrong, sinfully wrong for Christians to be irresponsible or lazy.

when it comes to taking care of the people and things God has given us to care for. If you've got a house, you need to take care of it. You need to maintain it.

[25 : 54] You need to care. It's part of your responsibility as a steward. Laziness today, irresponsibility today is rampant.

And what we in the church need to make sure is that we don't in any way overlook it or fail to condemn it. Be a responsible human being.

Be a responsible person created in God's image. Be a responsible caretaker of the creation he has given to us and especially what he has entrusted to your care.

Now, the fact is many people go too far and live as if this world is all that matters. That's the problem.

That's what we've got to guard against with mindset on earthly things. He's talking about people who are just consumed with the here and now with no thought of anything else.

[26 : 57] In fact, this phrase, with mindset on earthly things, Paul is summarizing the attitude of fake Christians when he describes them of in this way.

I want you to understand. He may not be talking about any kind of wicked living at all. He's talking about people who are just basically caught up in this world's values and concerns.

He's talking about people who rarely, if ever, think about life, think about the affairs of this world from an eternal perspective, which we'll get into more next week.

Paul's description of fake Christians is alarming. Look at it. Think about it. They could be members of our church or any church.

These fake Christians, we need to evaluate ourselves to make sure we don't fit in that category. So let's take a moment and think.

[28 : 11] What are you most concerned about right now? I'm talking about the big picture. I'm not talking about what time it is. In the big picture of life, what are you most concerned about right now?

Is it your checkbook or however you take care of your affairs today? Look at your checkbook. Look at your calendar. That'll help you know what you're most concerned about, really.

A faithful, committed Christian. If you look at their, pull out their phone, look at their financial apps. Look at their calendar. A faithful Christian will demonstrate they are investing their life, their time, and their money in the kingdom of God.

The church of Jesus Christ. Things that will pay eternal dividends. Fake Christians. Fake Christians are the kind of people, it's all about me.

I'm going to spend my money and my time on me, mine, mine as the mood strikes. That's a fact. So what does your time and money say about you?

[29 : 23] Think about this. Are you more concerned with growing in Christ's likeness, developing Christian character, or just growing in wealth and power and influence and popularity or material things?

Here's a good one. What are you most concerned about for your children and your grandchildren? I mean, what are you most concerned about?

We're concerned about a lot of things for our children and grandchildren. That's a fact. But are you more concerned with their spiritual well-being, or with their grades or popularity or athletic or musical abilities or their careers?

What are you most concerned about? That they get a job? They get a big house? They have a nice salary if they live comfortably? Or that they have a close relationship with the Lord that just grows and continues throughout their life, regardless of what kind of house they live in?

What Paul is describing is serious because these fake Christians end up in hell. Their end is destruction. They're not true Christians.

[30 : 40] Now, don't misunderstand the point here. We all struggle and have a problem at times with maintaining a proper focus and proper priorities. We all do.

And we all battle temptations to do sinful things, to just be selfish. What should concern you is if you never have these kind of struggles or battles.

What should concern you is that you don't struggle or battle because you don't care about pleasing God. If that's true about you, you cannot be a Christian. You are an enemy of the cross of Christ.

If you just don't care about knowing and pleasing God. Your only hope this morning is to admit that. Admit that's who you are. And cry out to Jesus to save you, to change you.

Do that now. One more thing about fake Christians. Leave them alone.

[31 : 49] Don't let them influence you. Bibles fill with warnings about following the wrong example. I want you to look at two. Proverbs 13. Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.

But the companion of fools will suffer harm. And then look at this. 1 Corinthians 15. Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character.

Bad company corrupts the good character. I want to encourage you to avoid following the example of anyone whose life ignores or dishonors the Lord.

Don't let them rub off on you. Leave them alone. That applies to all of us in here, but especially young people. Be careful who you allow to influence you.

And parents, do all you can to prevent your children from being led astray by bad company. Because sooner or later, bad company corrupts good character.

[32 : 57] Now, very quickly. By God's grace, everybody around us is not a bad example. There are many good examples that we can follow as Christians in this church and in many other churches.

Paul emphasizes this in the next section. That's what we're really going to look at next week. But let's look. One thing. The right example. Note one thing. We need to identify faithful Christians in our church and learn from them.

He says, Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. There are many things about the Christian life.

You know this. It's better caught than taught. That's why Paul tells these people, look around for good models. He's not an egomaniac.

He's taught about his shortcomings. But he's trying to provide a positive example. We need to make sure that we are following the right example. Final thought here now.

[34 : 02] We need to make sure that we are providing the right example for other Christians to follow us. We're all influencers for good or bad.

Which are you? Are you by your example leading people to Christ and eventually heaven? Or are you pushing people away from Christ, which will ultimately be held by your bad example?

Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.