

**“Follow (& Be!) Good Examples”  
Sermon on Philippians 3:17-4:1  
Saint Mark's Watertown  
Pastor Karl Walther  
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The Apostle Paul once wrote to the Philippians – and these are our sentiments exactly: *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration today is Philippians chapter three, verse seventeen, through chapter four, verse one. There the Apostle Paul writes:

**Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.**

**For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.**

**But 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 lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

**Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!**

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction: The Importance of Examples in Our Lives**

Dear fellow Christians—who endeavor to follow, and to be, good examples:

How much have you considered the importance of personal examples in our day-to-day lives? Have you thought how much it is that other people influence your life, moment-by-moment?

I want to illustrate that for you this morning. And you'll have to forgive me for being rather autobiographical here—but the examples that influence my life are the ones I know the best.

First of all, some good examples.... I've gotten to thinking: Why is it that whenever there's a church service, I'm here at church? Well, largely it's because of a good example: that of my mother. Whenever there was a church service, my mother was at that church service. I've simply followed her pattern. Actually, I don't know any other way to live. ...Or another example: Why is it that I'm very dedicated to my kids? Why is it that I love them so? Well, largely it's because of the good example of my Dad. In many ways, I'm the Dad that my Dad was—much to the benefit of my kids. And really, I don't know any other way to act as a parent.

Of course, there are also bad examples. A guy hopes to learn from them. Again, I've got to be autobiographical here.... I'm blessed and privileged to teach a lot of classes on the Scriptures here at church: Catechism Class, Bible Class, Bible Information Class—also all of those in Spanish. I hope the people I'm privileged to work with in class would agree: I go about my teaching in a very thorough way, and I go about my teaching in a very even-handed way—I don't play favorites; I even mix up the alphabet, just to be fair to all the letters! Now, do you know why maybe I'm a pretty thorough and even-handed teacher? Well, when I was a student – especially in my younger years – I had some teachers who never got more than halfway through the book, and it always

bothered me. So, I decided to be thorough when I teach. And I had some teachers who did play favorites, and it bothered me. So, I decided to be really fair in my classes.

It all goes to show – doesn't it? – personal examples are very important....

## **Theme: Follow (& Be!) Good Examples**

Well, the Apostle Paul knew that. That's why he starts our sermon text saying: *Join with others in following my example, brothers.* Literally, he says: *Imitate me! And take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* Literally, he says: *Copy them!* And so, on the basis of this Word from God today, I want to urge you to: (\*) FOLLOW (& BE!) GOOD EXAMPLES. Paul will point out to us that finally: (1) BAD EXAMPLES HEAD TO HELL DUE TO THEIR SIN. On the other hand: (2) GOOD EXAMPLES HEAD TO HEAVEN DUE TO THEIR SAVIOR. At the end Paul will treat the Philippians by personally reminding them how much he loves them.

## **Part One: Bad Examples Head to Hell, Due to Their Sin**

As Paul writes this epistle to the Philippians, some thirty years have passed since Christ died for our sins and rose for our righteousness. It's about the year sixty AD. And those three decades had been some very busy ones for the gospel message. Already Paul had taken three missionary journeys—in just the past fifteen years. And now Paul is in Rome, in the capital city of the world—albeit: imprisoned. He's writing back – some six hundred miles, across a sea – to a congregation he had founded about ten years earlier. It was the church in Philippi, in Macedonia, in modern-day Greece.

Like I mentioned before, Paul is taking the opportunity to talk to the Philippians about personal examples. Now, there are good personal examples, and there are bad personal examples. Paul starts with the bad ones.

He says: *As I have often told you before*, because Paul was pastor to this congregation, *and now say again even with tears*, it gave Paul no pleasure to write this, *many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

How does a person live as an enemy of the cross of Christ? Well, anybody who lives with a life's philosophy that doesn't have at its center the cross of Christ is an enemy of the cross of Christ. Now, were there any such people having much of an influence on Paul's Philippian congregation in his day? Yeah! Especially some folks called the Judaizers. The Judaizers, you see, were willing enough to acknowledge Jesus. But they also insisted that real Christians had to keep all the Old Testament laws to be real Christians. So: these Judaizers were, in effect, enemies of the cross of Christ.

What does Paul say about them. It's not pretty! *Their destiny is destruction.* They're heading to hell! because they've rejected the only way to heaven: Jesus! *Their god is their stomach* and not the true God, because the Judaizers were failing to listen to him. *Their glory is in their shame.* What they most boasted about was their false teaching, rather than Jesus. *Their mind is on earthly things.* Religion to the Judaizers was more a right way of living than a right relationship to God.

So, do we have any such people around today? Of course! Right? Who are they? Who are the enemies of the cross of Christ today? Oh boy! I could spend the whole rest of the day listing them, couldn't I?!

How about believers in Hinduism and Buddhism: all of whom barely give Jesus a thought? How about believers in Islam and Judaism: who might allow for Jesus to be prophet or rabbi, but not the Savior? How about Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses: who put Jesus near the center of their religions, but he's not the Jesus (the Rescuer from sin) whom you and I know?

Who are the enemies of the cross of Christ today? How about many athletes: who are very caught up in their own capabilities, and fail to acknowledge Christ? How about many entertainers: who are very caught up in their own artistry, and fail to acknowledge Christ? How about many politicians: who are very caught up in our need for them, and fail to acknowledge Christ?

But how about that neighbor with the nice new house down the street, who never attends any church? Isn't he an enemy of the cross of Christ? How about that dear friend of yours, with whom you have such a hard time having a conversation about religion, because she essentially says to you, "Don't bother me with that Jesus stuff"? How about that relative of yours, who is a member of a church (maybe even ours), and wouldn't think to mention Christ when he tells you what he believes? And how about you and me?—at least according to our sinful nature!

All of those are *enemies of the cross of Christ! Their destiny is destruction. Their god is their stomach. Their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.* Don't follow their example! It leads to hell!!!

## **Part Two: Good Examples Head to Heaven, Due to Their Savior**

How about a better idea? Transform these people by your example! Isn't that what Paul is urging you to do? Isn't that what God is urging you to do?

Listen to what comes next! ***Our citizenship is in heaven.*** Better translated: *Our homeland is in heaven.* A Christian is never quite at home in this world. We are foreigners here. Our homeland is in heaven. According to this Word from God: you are heading to heaven! Isn't that wonderful?

***And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Ever since the time of the Apostle Paul, and even before, the clock has been ticking. And with every tick of the clock a Christian's eyes rise to heaven, and we wonder, "Is my Savior coming now—to take me home? to take me home to heaven?"

After all: he has ***power that enables him to bring everything under his control***—it's power greater than that of any athlete, any entertainer, any politician: because it's eternal capacity, limitless in quantity. And that power going to raise you to paradise!

And get this: by this power Jesus ***will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*** Jesus' body: which was always free from sin—we will get a body like that! That's Christ's promise! Jesus' body: which glowed with righteousness on the Mount of Transfiguration—we will get a body like that! That's Christ's promise! Jesus' body: which walked and talked and ate and drank—but also appeared and disappeared and passed through locked doors and ascended on high—we will get a body like that! Jesus' body: which John saw in Revelation (*his head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow! his eyes were like blazing fire! his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace! his voice was like the sound of rushing waters! his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance!*)—you and I will get a body like that!

We are united to Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian! So, the death of Jesus' body for sin counts as the death of our bodies for our sins. And the resurrection of Jesus' body from death guarantees the resurrection of our body from death. That's Christ's gospel promise!

So, now I ask you: What kind of example are you going to follow in your life? Given that Christ died and rose for you—what kind of example are you going to follow? Well, you've got to find good Christian examples and follow them! The best ones are in the Bible itself! Let me give you some examples....

Do you work in a factory—say, on an assembly line? Follow the example of Noah: who for all those years patiently built the ark, all the while comforted that he was doing God’s will.

Or: are you the patriarch of a family—with children and grandchildren following after you? Take as your example Father Abraham: who rescued Lot a couple of times and offered him the best part of the land.

Is your station in life that of a wife? Follow the example of Sarah: who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. (Oh, and ladies: if your independent American womanly spirit – which I respect! – recoils against those words, well, you’ll just have to take it up with the Holy Spirit himself in First Peter, chapter three.)

Or: is your lot in life especially that of a husband? Follow the example of Isaac: who found comfort in Rebekah, and prayed for Rebekah, and caressed Rebekah, and listened to Rebekah and followed her advice. (And guys: if you’ve grown comfortable with the American notion of being marginalized and thinking you don’t need your wife and she doesn’t need you, get over it—you’ll just have to start reading Genesis chapters, twenty-four through twenty-eight.)

Do you have a bad boss? Follow the example of Jacob: who always took Boss Laban’s loss on himself.

Are you a child? Follow the example of Joseph: who, when his father sent him to his brothers, went right away—and, in accordance with God’s will, walked right into a trap.

Are you a leader in God’s church? Follow the example of Moses: who took the sins of his sinful people on himself, and confessed them, and petitioned forgiveness; follow the example of David: who personally attacked and defeated Goliath for the sake of his people.

Again, I ask you: What kind of example are you going to follow? You’ve got to find good Christian examples and follow them! And if you can use – in addition to the Bible – modern-day, flesh-and-blood, Christian examples: honestly, why not get into a Bible Class around here this fall? I guarantee you good Christian examples to follow! I benefit that way every week in Bible Class. Or why not start volunteering to work with some of our other volunteers around here soon? Again, I guarantee to you good Christian examples.

And do you know what the best benefit of all of that is? When the Holy Spirit acts on you – primarily through the Scriptures, secondarily also through your interaction with other Christians – you will find yourself transformed into a good example: for everyone else you know!

### **Conclusion: Good Examples Are Marked Especially by Their Love**

So, My friends: Follow (& Be!) Good Examples! Do it: because bad examples head to hell due to their sin. Do it: because good examples head to heaven due to their Savior.

And why do I care? The Apostle Paul expresses exactly my sentiments as your pastor. *Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

Look at those words! You are *my brothers*. I am a brother to each one of you. Each one of you is my brother or my sister. God is our Dad—together! Jesus paid the price of our adoption—together! The Holy Spirit inhabits us—together!

You are *my brothers, whom I love and long for*. And I do. I love each one of you. I’ve been one of your pastors now for nine years, and every year I even love you more. I don’t even know how that’s happened. It must be God doing it. And do you

know what I long for—like it says here? My highest yearning is that this family circle of ours may become an unbroken heavenly circle someday—as we trust in Jesus Christ together.

You are *my joy and my crown*. I wake up every day, joyous to serve you folks. Do you believe that? It's true! And you are my crown. Back then, that's what you got when you won a race. If I win my race to proclaim the gospel, your redeemed souls are my crown and reward.

*That is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.* And you are my dear friends. I don't have better friends in all the earth than all of you.

Well, enough of that, right? Or we might all end up in tears, like the Apostle Paul did! It does get you thinking, though, what a marvelous inheritance of love – love between us, transcended by God's love for us – Christ's love has won for us! Amen.

The Apostle Paul once wrote to the Philippians – and these are our sentiments exactly: *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... I want to gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.* Amen.