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## Philippians - The Blueprint for Joy #12

Welcome to OIC. We are glad you are here. We're in the midst of studying the letter that Paul has written to the church at Philippi. It is a deeply personal and sincere letter displaying his love and care for the people there. He displays a pastor's heart as he gives them instruction for Christian living. He has already told them that real joy comes from a relationship with Jesus and only then can we live a life that, regardless of circumstances, allows us to focus on the big picture – namely, that God has called us out of darkness into light and that we are destined for eternity in heaven and that gives us a continuum of joy. Our life here on earth is really a vapor (James 4:14). This week our lesson will concern itself with following earthly leaders. There are excellent Christians that God has placed in our lives and conversely and unfortunately there are others that are directed by Satan that we must avoid while pursuing the prize of Christlikeness. Our support text today is Philippians 3:17-21.

### Philippians 3:17-21

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

<sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

<sup>21</sup> who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

The Christian life is really a process of pursuing Christlikeness. Within that scope we learn and do what is pleasing to God. We utilize our spiritual gifts. We let the Holy Spirit bring conviction to us. We stay away from things that pull us away from God and we learn to love each other and work in harmony. Jesus told the disciples to "follow Me" and now in this passage Paul is really saying "follow me because I am following Jesus". The pursuit of Christlikeness is why God called us from darkness into light.

### Romans 8:29

<sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*

So why did Paul urge the Philippians to follow his example? I found 3 reasons.

### Reason #1 It points to Christ

#### Philippians 3:17

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us

Every time we see Paul encouraging the church at Philippi to follow him, there should be a real understanding that Paul is following Jesus and so are we. If we want Christlikeness, we better figure out who Jesus is. Our God is not a clinical God. He does not take a clinical approach to our lives. My doctor takes a clinical approach to my life. I'm glad that God is not that way. To help us understand who Jesus is we must also know the Bible and what it tells us about the love, mercy and compassion of our Lord! Paul already has said "I am pressing on toward the goal." Paul was an excellent example of someone who modelled patience, suffering and endurance. He was an example of someone who

modelled interpersonal relationships with people like Timothy and Barnabas. He showed us his transparency as he admitted struggling with his own flesh. Jesus is the perfect example but we all need flesh and blood and tangible living and breathing people to be our examples. Too often in our universal church we tolerate a lower standard of leadership than the bible would ever allow. I hope you have set for yourself some examples of Christians who are following Jesus. They, like Paul, are not perfected yet. We've already examined Philippians 3:12 which helped explain that better for us. Sometimes we make mistakes but Godly people are worth our effort to follow. Christ was everything to Paul – he literally ate, drank, slept and breathed Jesus. Many have been led to a saving knowledge of Jesus by watching the lives of Christians who are imitating Jesus. It's a common expression we may be the only Bible the non-Christian reads. So the #1 reason we can follow godly leaders is "it points to Christ".

Secondly, he urges the Philippians to follow his example because

## #2 It points to the opposing enemies of God

Philippians 3:18,19

<sup>18</sup>For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup>whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things

Paul continues his very practical approach to guiding the church at Philippi. He identifies some people as "enemies of the cross of Christ". Jesus used the parable of the wheat and the tares to help us understand the enemy is not always so obvious to us.

Matthew 13:24b, 25

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup>But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed <sup>lb</sup>tares among the wheat, and went away.

Some of the people were the Judaizers who wanted to water down the Gospel. I want you to understand Paul is not talking about people who have differing opinions. We are all different. We have many denominations represented here at OIC. Why is that? Even though we are all Christians, it doesn't mean we all interpret the Scriptures in the same way. As long as we all understand there is only one way to God and that is through Christ. Paul is referring to people who want to change the process of salvation, who want to discount the meaning of what Jesus did on the cross. Paul reiterates that in verses 18 and 19.

Philippians 3:18, 19

<sup>18</sup>For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup>whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

They have a taste for things that do not please God. In other words, they are not for God and if they are not for Him, we must boldly oppose them. This doesn't mean we don't love them. It means we are trying to love them into a right relationship with God. So reason #1 that we follow earthly leaders is that it points us to Christ and reason #2 it points us to the enemies of the cross.

Finally the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason. The 3<sup>rd</sup> reason we should follow the example of Paul is

## #3 It points to a Blessed Hope

Philippians 3:20,21

<sup>20</sup>For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

<sup>21</sup> who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Notice how much confidence Paul speaks with when he says “our citizenship is in heaven”. Paul’s final and glorious reason to follow his example is this; our blessed hope and promise that the Lord Jesus Christ will someday change this old and corrupt and sinful and decaying body that we are all forced to live in into one like His own. Paul reminded them that they are citizens of heaven. Our hearts are already there and someday our bodies will catch up. Of course, we get glorified bodies to live in there.

### **Conclusion**

Who are the examples we should be following? Where are the holy and truthful men and women? Where are those who model meekness and gentleness? Where are those who show us how to handle trials and difficulties? Seek out such people and follow them for they are most certainly following Jesus. I see many Christians in our congregation who are excellent examples of people we should emulate. I thank God for people like you who can be the standard bearers for Christ.

Christ is our supreme example but it’s ok to follow the example of Christians like Paul or whoever God has placed in your life. So where do we find people like Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus in our world today? Well, if you look around, you’ll see many of them sitting right next to you. Wouldn’t it be great if we all strived to be an example that others would follow.