**Lesson 11: Be Careful Whom You Follow!**

Text: Philippians 3:17-19

**Introduction**

Have you ever tried to follow someone while driving through a large city that was unfamiliar to you? Inevitably, you will become separated at some point in the process. A stoplight could turn red and separate you from the lead car. Changing lanes on the interstate in heavy traffic can pose a problem. Vehicles that look similar can leave you confused. You have to be careful whom you are following because it will determine your direction and destination.

In Philippians 3, Paul emphasized righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus’ finished work (v. 1-8). He also stressed the pursuit of Christlikeness that is to follow one’s salvation (v. 9-16). The Philippian believers were to follow those who were following Christ. There are two reasons given in this text as to why they were to be careful whom they were following. First, Paul knew that they were in danger of following those who would lead them in a wrong way (v. 18-19). Second, as citizens of Heaven living in Philippi they were to exemplify Christ (v. 20-21). We will consider the first reason in this lesson. As a modern day believer, let me exhort you to be careful whom you are following.

1. Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to follow those who were following Christ. (v. 17)
   1. Paul was an example they could follow and imitate. (v. 17a; 1 Cor. 11:1)
   2. They were also blessed by the example of other believers. (v. 17b)
      1. They were to *mark* these believers and their pursuit of Christlikeness.
      2. This means they were to keep their eyes on believers who are living for Christ.
      3. This approach to discipleship is emphasized in many other passages. (1 Th 1:6-7; 1 Ti 4:12; Tit 2:7; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pt 5:3)
   3. There are positive role models at Hillcrest Baptist Church who provide a God-honoring pattern of life. Scope them out and pay attention to their example.
      1. Name someone who has been a positive role model in your life.
      2. Can you encourage others to follow your example because you are following Christ?
   4. Paul was concerned about the influences on their lives.
      1. False teachers were a problem in their day just as they are today. (2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 1:4)
      2. The next verses demonstrate Paul’s concern.
2. They should be careful to follow those who were following Christ because they could be influenced by wrong examples. (v. 18-19)
   1. He had warned them on numerous occasions regarding this danger. Constant threats demand constant reminders! (v. 18a)
   2. It grieved Paul that there were those who were *enemies of the cross of Christ*. (v. 18b)
   3. The actual identity of this group in Philippi is difficult to discern. It is obvious that they were not true believers and followers of Jesus Christ. There are two primary possibilities.
      1. It is possible that Paul is referring back to the same group that he described in 3:1-2. Those who emphasized the law as necessary for salvation were negative influences on the churches of Paul’s day. They were enemies of the cross of Christ because they advocated works rather than grace as the basis of salvation. “Jesus had broken down the wall that stood between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14-16), and the Judaizers were rebuilding that wall!” (Wiersbe)
      2. On the opposite end of the spectrum were those who claimed that they had liberty to live as they pleased without regard for morality. Their lawless lives were marked by sensuality and indulgence. They were enemies of the cross of Christ because they stood for a way of life that the cross of Christ condemned.
      3. We will analyze both possibilities because both cause problems for those following Christ.
3. Paul provided a four-fold description of those whose example they were to avoid. (v. 19)
   1. Their *end is destruction*. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23a). Whether they were relying on their own good works or living in self-indulgence, the person who has not trusted Christ will spend eternity apart from God in the lake of fire. (Matt. 25:41, Lk. 16:23; Rev. 21:8)
   2. Their *God is their belly*.
      1. If this is a reference to the Judaizers, it is saying that they give more attention to dietary laws than to the God who first gave them.
      2. It could also be a reference to self-indulgence. There were many in their day who were given over to the appetites of their flesh. Lacking self-restraint, their lives were characterized by gluttony, drinking, and wild parties. (Tit. 1:12; 2 Pet. 2:13)
   3. Their *glory is their shame*.
      1. This could be a reference to those who boasted in their strict adherence to the law. Ultimately, they will find that it profited them nothing. (3:7-8)
      2. It could also be taken as a reference to those who gloried in their sin. Flagrantly disregarding God’s standard for morality may be popular in today’s culture, but it leads only to shame.
   4. They *mind earthly things*. They have their minds set on this earth.
      1. The Judaizers were focused on the rituals and symbols related to the Jewish faith, but failed to see how they had their fulfillment in Christ.
      2. The self-indulgent were enemies of the cross because they lived strictly for the moment. Consumed with materialism and an endless pursuit of pleasure they failed to deny themselves, take up their cross, and to follow Christ (Mark 8:33-34)
      3. Believers are exhorted to set their minds on things above (Col. 3:1-3).
4. Application: You should be careful to follow those who are following Christ because following enemies of the cross of Christ will lead you in a wrong way.
   1. Are you following those who are following Christ?
   2. Are you leading others to Christlikeness?
   3. What influences are leading you away from Christlikeness? Avoid both extremes!
      1. Beware of those who emphasize rituals and rules over a relationship with Christ.
      2. Beware of those who emphasize liberty over responsible Christian living.

**Conclusion**

We have seen Paul’s great concern for the believers in Philippi. He earnestly wanted them to follow the example of Christ. There were many distractions from this goal. The same challenges exist today. Religious ideas, forms of entertainment, and ungodly associations all have the potential to lead you away from Christ. You must be careful whom you are following. Evaluate the influences on your life and make sure they are godly. There is joy in following Christ!