

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Walking With Jesus Philippians 3:17-19

Intro: In v15-16, Paul is exhorting the mature believers to have this mind, the mind that seeks to know Jesus Christ so intimately that it changes your behavior; the mind that understands the powerful results of His resurrection and is willing to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, even to the point of being conformed to His death (10). He goes on to describe the goals and aspirations of his own life – letting the past be the past, striving to apprehend Christ’s purpose for his life, constantly moving forward, reaching for the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ. This is the mind Paul possessed and he’s confident that any mature believer would have the same mind and if they didn’t Lord would eventually reveal to them the necessity of it.

The underlying theme of Paul’s letter to the Philippians has been to call for them to be in unity and now to walk in unity. That was Paul’s desire for them because that was the Lord’s expectation of His people. Unity is important in the church. It is the evidence of our collective status as children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ. But, as important as unity is in the church, it is not to be accepted as an all-encompassing importance. As we will see in our text today, there is a logical limit to Christian unity. There is a line that Paul was not willing to cross for the sake of unity; a line that is of greater importance to the church than even unity. (17-19)

Clearly, the limit to Christian unity falls on the point of truth! Nowhere in any of his letters does Paul (or any other author of Scripture) ever suggest or promote the compromise of truth for the purpose of unity. When it comes to the truth of God’s Word or the truth of the gospel, there can be no compromise or else you’ll end up with something that is no longer Christianity. Anything that is less than the truth or is other than the truth is not the truth. Likewise, anything that is less or other than the gospel is no longer the gospel but a cheap and ineffective counterfeit. Yes, we should always strive for unity among believers in the Body of Christ but that unity must have it’s foundation in the clear truth of God’s Word or it will not be Christian unity and it will not be effective in reaching the world for Christ.

17 – Have you ever noticed that the way a person walks often reveals their character? A confident person walks erect with their head held high. A busy person walks quickly and confidently on to their next task while a busy body flits around from one place to another trying to get into everyone’s business. Sometimes authors use this to describe their characters. Heroes walk with confidence; villains are skulking, sneaking, or creeping. The Thesaurus lists dozens of synonyms for walking. All this simply shows that the way people walk reveals something of their ambition, state of mind, and values.

This is probably why the Bible frequently calls for the believer to have an exemplary walk. We are instructed to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called (**Eph 4:1**). We are to walk circumspectly or wisely (**Eph 5:15**); walk properly or with respect (**I Thess 4:12**); and, of course, we are to walk in the light (**I Jn 1:7**). Paul encourages the Philippian believer’s to have a similar walk. From **v16-19**, Paul speaks twice of the believer’s walk and once of the unbeliever’s walk and his emphasis is to teach us that the walk of the believer in Jesus Christ is supposed to reveal the true nature of our calling.

Now, Paul isn’t being egotistical when he calls believers to join in following his example. Paul understands that he is not a sinless or perfect example, but he was still a good example. He could say here just as he did in **I Cor 11:1**, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” The truth is, we need concrete examples to model our Christian walk after. You can fill your mind with all kinds of spiritual truths and concepts and still not know what they mean or what they should look like in your life. It is immensely helpful to surround yourself with spiritually mature Christians so that you will have a better idea how biblical truth should impact your conduct and lifestyle. Now, it is completely wrong to put your trust in any person, no matter how spiritually mature they may be. We are all just sinners saved by grace. But, by the same token, it’d be hypocritical for any Christian to just say, “Do as I say, not as I do” especially a minister.

We should also note that Paul wasn’t so proud to think that he was the only one around who could be that good example. He encouraged them to look around and take note of those who so walk in their own fellowship and he was quick to point out that they had us (not just him) as a pattern to follow; a template to model their lives after. One of my father’s favorite exhortations to adult Christians was the simple truth that, “the youth of today don’t need

critics, they need examples.” How many generations have been lost to the influence of the church simply because the previous generation was quick to criticize their behavior while failing to provide solid examples for them to follow? It’s impossible for us to calculate the value of a life lived well for Jesus but Paul knew the value and encouraged others to pursue this because they would eventually become the examples that the next generation would need to see.

The first thing we need to understand about the walk of the Christian is that it’s to be different from the walk he had before becoming a follower of Christ. This means the standards you had before you became a Christian are to be replaced by new standards now. Why is it that Paul speaks here of those who are enemies of the cross of Christ? It is because he knew that this is the way we all were before we became followers of Jesus Christ, and he wanted to stress it. He wanted his Christian readers to know that their new calling was to be entirely different.

Paul says that the non-Christian is first an enemy of the cross of Christ; meaning they’re an opponent of the gospel. They resist the gospel and want others to resist it too. Paul had to contend with people like this in both Corinth and Rome; people who believed that salvation could be had without repentance or conversion. They believed that as long as your soul was saved, it didn’t matter what you did with your body. So, when Paul says they are enemies of the cross, it doesn’t mean that they are adamantly opposed to the physical representation of the cross. It simply means they are enemies of the Biblical of the atonement that Jesus made for us on the cross and the ongoing power and effect it should have on the lives of those who claim to accept it. These people were truly enemies of the cross because they refused to follow Jesus by taking up His cross of self-denial

Next, Paul says that their end is destruction. This means that his path does not lead to peace, happiness, success, or self-satisfaction—in spite of what many think—but to misery, discontent, unrest, and eventually to a permanent separation from God. The word translated destruction is the same word used for perdition in other places in the NT. This could refer to their ultimate damnation or to the inevitable present destruction of their lives. Neither is an enviable position to end up in but one lasts a lot longer than the other – forever!

3rd, Paul says their God is their stomach. The KJV and the RSV both say belly. The New Scofield says "appetite." The meaning is identical. The phrase indicates one who is possessed by his own selfish appetite and who sees no need for God as a higher principle beyond it. It's not that they were necessarily focused on what they eat. The term belly has a broader reference to sensual indulgence in general. It means that these individuals live for the pleasures of the body, mind and soul. They live to please their fleshly appetites because they know of no higher calling.

Finally, the non-Christian takes pride in things that should be to their shame. This means their values are reversed, they declare to be good what God calls evil and call evil what God declares to be good ([Isa 5:20](#)). The focus of their entire lives is on earthly things. There is not concept in their daily lives of pleasing god or even of worshipping Him. Why would you seek to please or worship someone that you don't even believe in? All they desire to do, all they live for is to get along in this world as they seek to get along with this world.

These misplaced priorities are clearly visible in the contemporary standards of American society today. Americans are preoccupied with sex and self; they are committed to a level of materialism that is designed to satisfy one's selfish desires. Our values are so reversed that honesty is rare, chastity is despised and mocked, and support of law, justice, or personal integrity is often laughed at or even protested against. Sadly, this is the way things are, but it shouldn't be a surprise. The Bible says this is the natural walk of humans apart from Christ and God calls the Christian away from this natural walk to a walk that increasingly emulates Christ.

This is the true meaning of conversion. Some people speak of conversion as if it were synonymous with justification or being born again. Actually it means to turn around. It implies not only regeneration but also discipleship. Before you believed, you were going down a path that led away from God to destruction. Then God saved you. He reached down and in grace turned you around, reversing your values to His values, and setting you on a path of His choosing. Because of this reorientation we can truly say old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" ([2 Cor 5:17](#)). If you're going to walk as a Christian, you must begin with this basic reversal of standards.

Another important aspect of the proper walk of a Christian is seen in v17. Here, Paul implies as clearly as he can that the walk of the believer must always be a walk with, and therefore in harmony with, other Christians. The same truth is taught in v16, though it's hidden in the English translation. Paul's charge to walk by the same rule is written in a phrase based on a Greek word that means in a row; as in a row of houses, a rank of soldiers and is even used for the alphabet since it's composed of an orderly row of letters. In all these instances the words imply an ordered and harmonious arrangement. In using this of Christians, Paul is implying that their life together should be harmonious. The successful walk of the Christian depends not only on his own goals or on his own doctrine; it also depends upon the success of his walk with other Christians.

Of course, this isn't meant to imply that the Christian ceases to be an individual before God. We are all still responsible and will be held accountable for what we have personally accomplished with the talents that the Master has entrusted into our keeping. But it does mean that we must be conscious of the other individual Christians. We must be concerned for them and cooperate with them in our common Christian objectives.

This brings us to the most important aspect of our Christian walk. Yes, our walk should be completely different from our manner of living before we came to Christ. Our lives should be noticeably different from that of the unregenerate around us. And yes, we should also seek to walk in harmony with other believers. But, the most important aspect of our Christian lives is how closely do we walk with the Lord? After all, He is the one that we take our marching orders from, not anyone or anything else! The naval ship sailing in battle formation doesn't take its directions from the ship next to; the orders only come from the admiral on the deck of the flagship. In the same way, Christians must only take their orders from the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, how does this work? Is there a booming voice from heaven? Does it come through dreams or visions? I won't say that it is impossible for that to happen but it is certainly not typical. Direction from the Lord doesn't normally come through a mystical experience. It normally comes only through a knowledge of God's Word. The opening passage to one of the greatest sources of wisdom in all literature indicates this very truth (Ps 1:1-2). The psalmist contrasts the futility and confusion of pursuing human

wisdom against the immense value and blessing that comes from meditating on God's Word.

Think of the blessings that are promised to an individual as the result of a personal study of God's Word. First, we become Christians by exposure to the truths in the Bible. Peter said that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). He's using the basic facts of sex to illustrate how we are born again, saying that the Word of God operates on our heart as the male seed does on the egg in the uterus. The uterus is our heart; the egg is our faith. The seed of God's Word penetrates our hearts to bring forth the life of eternity.

Has God's Word done that in you? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom 10:17). Nothing else will do it, not the word of a person, however wise, not philosophy, not history, not science. John 3:6 says, that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. If you're going to experience the divine life, you must experience it in the only way possible—through the Word of God as the Holy Spirit penetrates your heart through Scripture. This is the first great blessing of Bible study.

The second is our sanctification. It's by a study of the Bible and fellowship with God that we are increasingly made into what and who He would have us to be. John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them by Your truth; Your word is truth." The phrase to sanctify means to make holy so when Jesus asked God to sanctify His followers through God's truth, He was praying that they might become holy through a study of God's Word. Sadly, Christians often seek holiness from anywhere but God's Word. They seek it through reading other literature, by attending religious services, by special emotional experiences. Sometimes these things are helpful (some more than others). But they're not the straight path to an upright and holy life. God's methods of sanctification are all wrapped up in Scripture.

Third, the Word of God is the primary means by which God reveals His will to us. God's Word contains unshakable facts and great principles, and through these God teaches us that certain things are His will for us and other things are not. Do you want to know how relevant the Bible can be to your life and how God can use it to reveal His will to you? Then you must

spend time reading it daily. If you are a Christian, God has a path marked out for you. You will find it only as you discover His will for you through His Word.

A final function of God's Word, as we fellowship with Him in it, is to keep us from the counterfeits of truth. Whenever the truth of the gospel is preached, the devil will immediately set about to erect a counterfeit beside it, an idol that looks like the real thing but that is dead because it omits the life-giving heart of the gospel. The author of Hebrews faced a similar problem as he wrote to the people of his day. He was writing to those who had some knowledge of true Christianity but were still clinging to a form of Judaism that taught that one is made pleasing to God by good works. They knew some of the Bible, but they did not know it well enough. Thus, they weren't only fooled by the counterfeits; they were unable to receive the deeper teaching the writer desired to share with them. ([Heb 5:11-14](#)).

There is still much we need to learn about the Christian life, but we do have the Bible. Will we neglect it or not? Let us fill up our souls with the Bible. For only then shall we continue to walk as we ought to walk with God. Only then shall we see clearly the way we should go.

There's one more thing to point out in this passage. As Paul begins to mention these enemies of the cross, notice that he does so with great sadness, even weeping ([18](#)). This is interesting to me because we never hear of Paul shedding any tears when he was beaten and abused for the cause of Christ. When he was wrongfully cast into prison in Philippi, there was no groaning that escaped his lips – only singing! This must have been an extraordinary sorrow for a tough nut like Paul, one who seldom shed a tear even under grievous trials. Why was Paul so sad?

It's clear that the disregard of these people for the holiness of God gave ammunition to the Judaizers who falsely accused Paul of preaching a cheap grace that required no commitment of life. But, while Paul no doubt wept over the guilt of these enemies as well as the negative effects of their unholy conduct I believe most of all, that Paul wept over their eventual and eternal doom. As much trouble as they caused him and the church, he still was emotionally concerned for their eventual salvation. Do we allow the plight of our enemies to effect us as deeply as this? ☺