

Lesson 18

Following Those Who Follow the Lord

Philippians 3:17-21

An unknown person has written these words of wisdom. “There are four classes of men:

1. He who knows not, and knows not he knows not—He is a fool; shun him.
2. He who knows not, and knows he knows not—He is simple; teach him.
3. He who knows, and knows not he knows—He is asleep; waken him.
4. He who knows, and knows he knows—He is wise; follow him.”

God’s wonderful servant Paul shares with us in this next passage of Scripture words of wisdom on who we are to shun and who we are to follow. Pay close attention as he sketches for us two pictures—one of those who are friends of the cross and another of those who are “the enemies of the cross.”

Philippians 3:17-21

- ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.
- ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:
- ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.
- ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Out of God's Word...

1. Paul begins by first instructing the Philippian believers to do two things (verse 17):

- a.
- b.

Who does Paul suggest the Philippians should imitate (verse 17)?

And why were they to follow the example of these people (verse 18)?

2. Paul, the ever-faithful teacher, next describes and warns his fellow believers against those he labels “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (verse 18). List the four facts about these “enemies” that so mark them (verse 19).

- a.
- b.

c.

d.

And how do we as true believers differ from this group (verses 17 and 20)?

3. Did you know that this passage of God's Word also tells us some marvelous truths and facts about our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Name as many as you can here (see verses 20-21).

...and into your heart

- Sobering words, aren't they? Paul is telling us that the cross of Christ should make a difference in our daily life. In a few brief words, where should we as Christians place our focus and outlook?

After jotting down your own thoughts, consider these words about "the friends" and "the enemies" of the cross, which are also quite sobering!

If the friends of the cross are those who show in their lives that they have caught the spirit of the cross, namely, that of *self-denial*...then surely the *enemies* of the cross are those who manifest the very opposite attitude, namely, that of *self-indulgence*. The *friends* of the cross do not love the world. In fact, the world is crucified to them, and they to the world, and this because they glory in the cross (Galatians 6:14). The *enemies* of the cross love the world and the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15). They set their minds on earthly things (Philippians 3:19).

- Paul spoke of looking to an example and patterning our lives after those who are faithfully and earnestly following Jesus Christ, those who are friends of the cross. Do you currently know Christians whom you watch and follow as they follow the pattern set by Jesus and Paul? You may want to name them here and thank God for them, praying for their continued strong Christian walk and example to you and to others. Also consider what you might do to follow their Christlike pattern more intently.
- Jesus' return and His glorification and perfection of His saints obviously meant a lot to Paul in his suffering. How do verses 20 and 21 encourage you in yours?

Heart Response

Dear follower of Christ, there are many messages for you and me in these few verses:

- ☞ *Be following.* How blessed you are if you were able to name someone in the exercise above, someone God has given you to follow, someone who is a true friend of the cross, someone who shows you how to follow in Christ's footsteps! If perhaps you are new to the faith, or new to your church, beseech God to lead you... quickly!...to someone who is looking to the Lord and following hard after Him (Psalm 63:8).
- ☞ *Be modeling.* While I hope you have someone to follow, I also hope and pray you'll take on the challenge of being one who models for others what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. I pray that you, too, will be able to say along with Paul, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- ☞ *Be alert.* We have been warned so that we can recognize those who are "the enemies of the cross" of Christ. Paul wept when he warned his friends (and us!). Let us take heed!
- ☞ *Be encouraged.* As we've just contemplated, the friends of the cross are called to self-denial along with a lifestyle of reaching and pressing, of straining and enduring. But we're to be encouraged, too: We will see Jesus, the one we wait for from heaven, and we will be changed into the image of Him, transformed into a likeness of His glorious body. As Paul loved to say, "Rejoice!"