

Guided, Guarded, and Guaranteed

Philippians 3: 17-21

A young boy looked up at his grandfather and wondered aloud, "Grandpa, how do you live for Jesus?"

The respected grandfather stooped down and quietly told the boy, "Just watch."

As the years went by the grandfather was an example to the boy of how to follow Jesus. He stayed rock-steady in living for Him. Yet the grandson often lived in a way that was not pleasing to God.

One day the young man visited his grandfather for what both knew would be the last time. As the older man lay dying, his grandson leaned over the bed and heard his grandpa whisper, "Did you watch?"

That was the turning point in the boy's life. He understood that when his grandpa had said, "Just watch," he meant, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." He vowed that from then on he would live as his grandfather did - striving to please Jesus. He had watched, and now he knew how to live.¹

At this point in his letter, Paul has shared much with the Philippian church. He has spoken at length about the believer's obligation to live a life of complete surrender to Christ, and offered many examples of those who have lived a life of submission, including Christ Himself. These closing verses of chapter three continue to deal with our examples in the faith and the responsibility we have to imitate the examples set before us. Let's discuss the [challenges](#) within the text as we consider: [Guided, Guarded, and Guaranteed](#).

I. A Pattern to Follow (17) – [Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample](#). Paul speaks of the godly pattern they are to follow. Consider:

A. The Audience – I know it seems elementary, but I think it profound that he addressed them as brethren. He has proven his love and devotion to the church. His care and compassion for them cannot be denied, and yet he takes another opportunity to embrace them, affirming their closeness in Christ. Nothing compares to the bond believers share in the faith.

- We can also sense the expectation of Paul within this address. He is not writing to the world at large; he is writing to the body of Christ. While he doesn't expect the world to live for

Christ, he does expect that of the church. The words to follow are given specifically with the church in mind.

B. The Appeal (17a) – *Brethren, be followers together of me.* Paul unashamedly appeals to the church to follow the example he had faithfully lived before them. He genuinely desired them to imitate the life he had lived for Christ. He longed for them to develop the same commitment and passion he had for the Lord and the church. He doesn't imply that he had lived a life of sinless perfection, but he knew his life had been lived pleasing to the Lord. There is a great difference in arrogance and confidence. While none need to be arrogant, healthy confidence is beneficial.

- This posed a great challenge for me. What type of character and commitment would be revealed in our congregation if others imitated the life I lived for Christ? What if they imitated your walk with the Lord? Are we setting a godly example and leaving anything of lasting value behind?

C. The Attention (17b) – *and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.* Paul conveyed he is not the only one who had been faithful to the Lord within the church. Others in the church were worthy of their attention and imitation. They were challenged to mark those who walked by faith in the Lord. This has the idea of "*spying out; looking toward; contemplating; or giving attention to.*" The church was to look for those who walked with the Lord, studying their lives, while contemplating their faithfulness and commitment.

- I know that Christ is our supreme example, and that ultimately we are to imitate Him, but I am thankful for some heroes in the faith. There are many who have made a tremendous impact on my life and ministry. Granted some are preachers, but many are lay-people who humbly and faithfully live their lives for the Lord. I have marked many who have walked the path ahead of me!

II. A Posture to Resist (18-19) – After speaking of the example they were to follow, Paul dealt with the defiant posture of some and the need for believers to resist such activity. Notice:

A. Their Defiance (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.* There were those who were defiant to the very fundamentals of the faith. It appears these were possibly members of the church, professed believers. They were not merely opposed to the church and her work, but also the Gospel itself. They rejected the sacrificial atonement of Christ for the remission of sins. These may have enjoyed the sense of community within the church, but they rejected its core doctrine.

- This rebellion and defiant attitude has permeated society since Paul's day. Even now we deal with those who have their own ideas of what "church" should be, and are committed to promoting and enforcing their agenda. They enjoy certain aspects of "church life," but fail to promote or endorse the Gospel. I have learned that I can fellowship with others, as long as we can agree on core doctrines, but I refuse to submit to those who call for watered down theology that abandons the eternal truths of the Gospel.

B. Their Dominance (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.* Paul was broken over the number of people who were willing to reject truth and deny the faith. Philippi was a strong church, but even she was not immune to the apostates. This was such a problem that Paul was compelled to speak to them of it often. He wanted to keep it before them so they could resist such apostasy.

- As we get closer to the Lord's return, these will continue to increase in number. The church is viewed as the last stronghold against modern ideology. Those who oppose us are not content with the ability to carry out their sinful lifestyles; they are determined to infiltrate our churches and force us to embrace their way of life. If we are unwilling to admit the great needs of our day, and formulate a plan to continue in a post-Christian era, many congregations will not survive the onslaught to come. Those who fail to prepare will be reduced to social gatherings, without the promotion of the Gospel, if they survive at all.

C. Their Depravity (19) – *Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.* Paul speaks candidly about the rebellious. He declares their God is their belly, literally referring to their fleshly appetites and determination to feed their lusts. Their focus is solely on earthly things, and they glory in their shame. There is no remorse for their actions. These literally parade their activities publicly, and pride themselves in their depravity.

- You will have to agree this attitude is prevalent in American society, and unfortunately, many professed Christians are engaging in such activity. Nothing is off limits any more, and there is very little that brings shame in today's culture. We have developed an "anything goes" mentality, and those who oppose it are viewed as homophobic bigots.

D. Their Destruction (19) – Paul also reveals the dreaded end for those who are enemies of the cross. Their rebellion will end in destruction. They chose to satisfy the flesh at the expense of the Gospel and the salvation of their souls. They rejected the only means of salvation, and they will stand accountable to God for their sin in judgment. These will face eternal destruction in hell.

- Paul took no comfort in their dreadful end and I don't either. It saddens me that people will tread upon the sacrifice of Christ, choosing to satisfy the flesh at the expense of their own soul. This life provides an opportunity to come to Christ in salvation, embracing the finished work of the cross by faith. Apart from that, death and eternal destruction are certain.

III. A Position to Enjoy (20-21) – Finally Paul offers a word of encouragement to the church, challenging them to consider the position they enjoy in Christ. Consider:

A. Our Citizenship (20a) – *For our conversation is in heaven.* This literally speaks of the believer's citizenship. Those in Philippi were citizens of Rome in body, but that was not their true home. They belonged to the family of God, placed within the body of Christ, citizens of heaven. Their loyalty was to their sovereign Lord, not the Roman authorities.

- I am thankful to be an American citizen, but my loyalty is to my Sovereign. While I live in the United States, in reality I am a citizen of that heavenly country! This life is brief, and difficult at times, but I am not a permanent resident here; I am just a pilgrim passing through!

B. Our Confidence (20b) – *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* While they were outnumbered, and often persecuted, they were not without hope. Being citizens of heaven, they enjoyed the promise of the Lord's appearing. They were bought with a price, belonging to the Lord, and He would call come for them!

- That provides great confidence and boldness in the faith. Life often leaves much to be desired. We are living in a world that is increasingly hostile to our faith. However, we must not despair; we are not without hope. Those in Christ have the promise of a brighter day ahead! He will call for the church on that appointed day, and we will rise to meet Him in the air!

C. Our Comfort (21) – *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.* These faced great adversity and pain. Many suffered for their faith. They lived in bodies of flesh, prone to sickness, disease, and the effects of aging. Paul reminded them of the promise of a new, glorified body in Christ. He would change their vile, mortal bodies, to an immortal body, fashioned like His glorious body. Christ alone could do such a marvelous thing, and they could rest assured in His power and ability to perform it.

- That sums it all up nicely, doesn't it? We too deal with the adversities of life. As we age we deal with the effects and limitations of the flesh. However, we have the assurance of a heavenly home and an immortal body. Christ our Lord is gone to prepare a place for us, and He will come again to receive us unto Himself. We will inhabit the glories of heaven, in the presence of our Lord, dwelling in glorified bodies that won't wear out or decay!

Conclusion: Paul has left us another inspiring challenge. I pray we will follow the example of Paul and countless others as we strive to live our lives for Christ. As our world continues to change, the challenges will increase, but we are more than conquerors in Christ. We must resist the rebellion of modern culture, staying true to the Lord, while we anxiously await His appearing!

If there are needs in your life, bring them to Jesus. He alone can equip you to endure for Him. If you have yet to respond to Christ in salvation, come by faith to Him. There is no other way.

ⁱ <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-sermon-central-staff-stories-fathersday-82106.asp>