

Paul Says, Follow Me

By Linda Rex

March 16, 2025, 2nd Sunday in Preparation for Easter or Lent—One of the questions I often come across as a follower of Christ is the contradiction which people experience between what we as Christians profess and how we actually live our lives. As those who follow Christ, we are held to a standard—Jesus—which we cannot genuinely attain by any human effort. Our best efforts so often fall short of his perfection, and this is why we must remind ourselves that it is all of grace. Even though those who know us may not offer us the grace which God gives us, we are called by our Lord to continue to “stand firm” and trust that God will finish what he has begun in us through Jesus and by the Spirit.

In the New Testament passage for this Sunday, Philippians 3:17–4:1, the apostle Paul encourages the believers to follow his example. These believers were being impacted by a culture which, on the one hand, encouraged an atheistic view of life which embraced self-indulgence and pleasure, while on the other hand, embraced a self-salvation via rigid observation of rules, rites and rituals. The emperor cult saw the Roman Caesar as being the savior of the people, and no doubt, the believers had to face the challenge of their community expecting their participation in emperor worship. To follow the culture would have placed them at odds with all they had come to see and believe in when they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s encouragement that they follow his own example actually comes after his admonishment that they follow the example of Jesus Christ. Earlier in this letter, the apostle Paul reminds his readers that the Son of God humbled himself, emptying himself to join us in our humanity, to live a truly human life, and die at the hands of those he created. But the Father exalted Jesus, raising him up and seating him at his right hand in glory. This gives a great basis for the rest of Paul’s letter, which encourages the believers to be willing to follow Christ’s example. Great humility comes before exaltation—and God will exalt those who humble themselves before him (Phil. 2:5–11).

Paul goes on to show all of the human glories that he once had as a religious leader of his people. There was a time when he had all of the special marks of the cream of the crop, holding to the righteousness which was by the law of Moses. But now, as he wrote this letter, he considered every one of these things which made him look good to others, seem good to others, as loss for the sake of Christ. The apostle was willing to suffer the loss of all these things for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ as his Lord. This was what mattered most to him—and everything else was worthless in comparison (Phil. 3:7–11).

This concept is what sets the stage for our passage for this Sunday. Paul begins by helping the believers see that they need to follow Christ’s example. Then he shows the profound difference between following the expectations of the culture and the religious leaders around them, and following Jesus Christ. Paul had left all that humanly gave him worth and value behind to find his value and worth in Jesus Christ alone. How he lived his life was no longer based on his pleasure or expectations, but solely on following Jesus Christ, and doing his will. So, when Paul told his readers to follow his example, he was encouraging them to live in the grace that was theirs in Jesus. He was trying to help them turn away from their culture, away from themselves, and to turn back to Jesus.

Even though these believers may have been Roman citizens, as citizens of the lesser region of Philippi, they were part of an even greater kingdom which would last forever—the kingdom of God. They needed to start living in the truth of who they were as citizens of this divine kingdom, rather than citizens of the broken culture in which they lived.

This is our struggle even today as those who seek to follow Christ in our own broken culture. On the one hand, we are given many ways to live that are supposed to save us, make us successful, and enable us to achieve and acquire all that we seek in this world. On the other hand, we are told to live life however we wish, to indulge our flesh and seek our pleasure. God's word to us today is to turn away from all these things and to turn to Jesus Christ—to do things his way, not our way. And when we fall short, to turn to him in faith, and ask for the grace that is ours in him.

The good news is that we probably won't get it right, but Jesus Christ stands in our place on our behalf, as we trust in him. We follow him, down the road to humility and suffering, so that one day we will be lifted up into glory, given new glorified bodies in the new heaven and earth. We look expectantly toward that day when we will see our glorified Jesus face to face. Meanwhile, we follow him. And we do our best to be the kind of Christ followers who are a true reflection of his goodness and love where we are, right now.

Father, thank you for giving us your Son so freely, and thank you, Jesus, for your great humility in joining us where we are in our darkness to bring us into your light. Grant us the grace to follow you in faithful obedience as we longingly wait for your return in glory. Amen.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 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. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” Philippians 3:17–4:1 NASB

“Let me be your example here, my brothers: let my example be the standard by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you. For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction—their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the saviour who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will re-make these wretched bodies of ours to resemble his own glorious body, by that power of his which makes him the master of everything that is. So, my brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, do stand firmly in the Lord, and remember how much I love you.” Philippians 3:17–4:1 JB Phillips