

PATTERNS

The Book of Philippians #26

In last week's study of Philippians we spoke of pressing on toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, living by the standard of righteousness to which we have attained, and the citizenship in heaven which is ours by faith. We also spoke a little on the example that Paul and his fellow workers provided. As they followed the example of Christ we were asked to follow their example of living to the standard of righteousness which Christ proclaimed and demonstrated to us.

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

Paul and those who traveled with him to spread the gospel had established patterns of living which exemplified and glorified Christ. As we would say today their walk matched their talk or they “walked the talk”. They did not say, “Do what we say not what we do.” They said, “Do what we say AND do what we do.” They are examples for us to follow. They have created a pattern which we can imitate.

When I think of patterns I think of sewing because both my and Wendy's mother liked to sew clothing, especially for their grandchildren. Some of these items have gone by the wayside either because they were too time specific in design or because they were worn so much they had to be thrown away. But there is one particular item which we have tried to keep in good condition. It is a dress that Wendy's mother made for our oldest daughter Corrie. This dress is precious to us because it was one of the last items she made before she died. It is still in good condition and Corrie has now passed that dress down to her daughters. It is a thrilling thing to see that something Wendy's mother poured so much love into while she was in the beginning stages of cancer is still being appreciated and worn 33 years later.

My mom used patterns when she made clothing and she taught me that following the pattern was just as important as following the directions. If you did not cut the fabric according to the pattern then, even if you followed all the instructions correctly, you would not end up with the product you were expecting. Patterns mattered. And just as with a pattern for making clothing, if you follow the pattern of someone whose life honors God you will be better equipped to honor God in your own life. The finished product will match the pattern.

Like those who came to Christ because of the preaching of Paul and his living example of Christ's love I too came to Christ because of the words and the lifestyle of someone. To this day he remains my best friend. Whenever I think about an example of Christian living that honors God and cares for people I look to him. I think to myself, what would this person do and then I try to emulate it. He is not perfect. He has his struggles and imperfections. But he lives a life that is consistently pleasing to God. He follows the pattern of Christ and as he follows Christ I follow Him.

God sent me this friend when I first sought after the power to overcome sin. His compassion, humor and kindness gave me a sense of acceptance that I had not experienced before. And his faith was something I had not seen in action before. At the very first I wanted to copy his behavior yet I could not. Without the same Spirit in me that was in him that was not possible. But once I accepted Christ the playing field was even. So with the Word for direction and my friend as the pattern I started my journey of faith. Though I have traveled many miles with him I still look to his life as the pattern to follow.

When Paul asks the Philippians to follow his example he also says to observe others who walked according to the pattern they had seen in Paul. Who were these people that Paul would point to them as examples to follow? Here is a list of believers that Paul could possibly have pointed to as those whose lives held patterns worth following. Some names you will recognize right away, others you may not remember reading about.

In 2 Timothy 4:9-21 Paul mentions Timothy as his beloved son, Crescens who went to Galatia and Luke who was always with him. He mentions Mark whom he formerly rejected as unworthy of traveling with him but now says is useful to him for service. He speaks of Tychicus whom he sent to Ephesus. He also greets Priscilla, Aquila, and Onesiphorus in whose homes people gathered for worship. Erastus, Triphimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia are also mentioned in the context of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

In Philippians 2:25 he mentions Epaphroditus as his brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier.

In Acts 15:32 Silas is mentioned as a prophet who encouraged and strengthened the brethren. We know that later he was chosen by Paul to go with him on his second missionary journey.

In 2 Corinthians 1:19 Paul mentions Silvanus as one of those who was preaching the gospel of Christ to the Corinthians.

In Titus 3:12-13 Paul speaks of Artemis and calls Titus his true child in the common faith, whom he had left in Crete to appoint elders in every city. He also speaks of Tychicus, Zenas, and Apollos as those who need to be sent on their way so they may continue to spread the gospel.

Paul calls Philemon a beloved brother and fellow worker. He also mentions Apphia and Archippus a fellow soldier, and calls Aristarchus his fellow worker.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15-17 he speaks of Stephanus as one who has devoted himself to the Lord, and of Fortunatus and Achaicus as people who have refreshed his spirit.

And in Romans 16:1-23 Paul commends Phoebe and greets Epaphroditus, Mary, Andronicus, Junias, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodian, Narcissus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Phililigus, Julia, Nereus, Olympas, Lucius, Jason, Sospater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, Quartus. He calls these people his fellow workers, his beloved, his kinsmen, fellow prisoners and apostles, saints in the Lord and the approved in Christ.

This is a lengthy list of 60 people so when Paul says to observe those who walk according to the pattern, he is talking about quite a few people to observe. Yet all of these people followed the example of Paul's life. It was his pattern which they could point to as a living example of Christ in this world. How many people can we point to that have followed our example as we followed Christ?

It think it's important to remember that prior to Paul none of them had any knowledge of Christ. So their spiritual father became their model and pattern for living this new life granted to them by faith. Though Paul was the spiritual father to the Philippians he could also point to any of these people as examples to follow. All of them walked according to the pattern they saw in Paul. So Paul had every reason to point to them as well as himself as people who patterned their lives after Christ.

But these are just names and descriptions. They alone cannot tell us what pattern to follow. We must look at what they did and what they said in order to see the pattern unfold. Unfortunately there is very little mention of how they lived out their faith beyond what Paul himself says. But since it all started with Paul we can look at his life to see what example he gave to the Philippians, to those who were his fellow workers and in turn to us. We'll start with a few scriptures then follow up with a list of attributes with only their Scripture reference as support.

GALATIANS 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

ROMANS 15:17-18

"Therefore in Christ I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed."

GALATIANS 6:14

"But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

First and foremost Paul says he lives by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself up for him. This was the foundation for Paul's life. As one who previously lived by works and boasted of all he had accomplished, Paul now says He boasts only in the cross of Christ. He says that all that he was and all that the world held for him has been crucified on the cross with Christ. As a result he no longer boasts in himself and his accomplishments but boasts only of what Christ has accomplished through him.

We live in a society which expects us to toot our own horn, to put together a resume which highlights our strengths and accomplishments and downplays our weaknesses. What we do defines who we are. This is not all bad. Even Jesus said that our good works should be seen by men so that our Father in Heaven is glorified (Matthew 5:16). So displaying our good works can be glorifying to God.

But you may remember that when Paul boasted of his accomplishments for the purpose of establishing his apostolic credentials to the Corinthians, he said it was foolishness and not something the Lord would do. He also said that he would rather boast about his weaknesses instead of his strengths and that he counted all that he could boast about, all that was previously considered gain to him, as loss for the sake of knowing Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:17

"What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence in boasting."

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9b

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

PHILIPPIANS 3:7

"But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

So Paul chose to boast of Christ and what He had done for him rather than boasting of anything he himself had accomplished. Paul understood that without Christ whatever he had accomplished was worthless. Only what Christ did through him had any eternal value.

In light of this here's a question we should ask of ourselves - do we follow the example of Paul? If Paul has set this as a pattern of behavior what is our pattern? Do we boast only in Christ or do we boast in our own accomplishments? Do we boast about our weaknesses or our strengths? And are we, like Paul, willing to put aside as worthless all we have accomplished for the sake of knowing Christ and glorifying Him? These are tough questions to ask but I think necessary if we are to know Christ more completely as Paul desired to do.

Every Sunday after service I ask Wendy what she thought about the sermon. I do this so I can gauge if I communicated the message effectively or if there is something I can do to improve the delivery or explain the word more clearly. A question like this can be a sign of an insecure person seeking affirmation or it can be a sign of a humble spirit truly seeking to be better at what he does.

I have to admit I have been in both states. Sometimes I need affirmation because I am feeling insecure and need someone to boast about what I have done in order to make me feel better. Then at other times I am seeking help in order to become a better preacher of the word, trying to find the best way to communicate in the most effective manner. This seeking is not boasting. This is understanding your weakness and seeking to improve so that Christ may be better served.

But what should be my overriding motive? It should not be to boast in what I have done for myself or for others, but rather in what Christ has done in and for me. If I was to boast in anything it should be to boast in my weakness so that the power of Christ may dwell ever stronger in me.

Perhaps a good test of whether or not we are boasting in our weakness or in our strength is to examine the emotional motive behind the boasting. Are we seeking to fill an empty spot with human praise or are we seeking to bring honor and glory to Christ? Both come from weakness but only one results in praise of Christ. The next time something you say or do borders on boasting check your emotions. Your true motive will most likely be revealed through your desires.

So boasting only in his weakness and in Christ who strengthened him was one of the patterns to which Paul was pointing. Here is another. Paul made it his goal to give no offense to anyone, be they Jews or Greeks or the church of God. He did not seek after his own good but the good of many. Why? So that they may be saved. Using Christ as his pattern, he imitates the ways of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:32-11:1

"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God; even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Not causing anyone to stumble or trying to please everyone in every way does not mean that Paul did not have strong words to say to others. Like Jesus he was not afraid of confrontation. He spoke harshly yet truthfully to Elymas the magician. He also confronted Peter in his hypocrisy before the church in Galatia and certainly had a strong disagreement with Barnabas over the taking of John Mark on their second missionary journey. Let's take a look at these disagreements as reported by Luke and Paul to see what we can learn.

ACTS 13:8-11

“Elymas the magician...was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him and said, ‘You who are full of deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.’ And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.”

GALATIANS 2:11-14

“But when (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to (Peter) in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

ACTS 15:37-39

“Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.”

These lessons in confrontation show us one thing –righteousness cannot tolerate evil or put up with error but it does not have to be offensive in its approach. Some make take offense because they do not want to be confronted with their sin or challenged in their thinking. But that is different than being offensive in your behavior toward them. In all of these examples of confrontation Paul was not concerned about himself but rather about the eternal destiny of others. He did not want others to be led astray or lost due to the behavior or example of others. In this way he was an imitator of Christ and one worthy to be followed.

There are many other examples which we can point to see how Paul followed the example of Christ and so established a pattern himself for us to follow. For example:

In 2 Timothy 3:10-4:2 we see that Paul conducted himself properly as a representative of Christ. He was an example of faith, patience, love, and perseverance. In his persecutions and suffering he did not dishonor the name of Christ. He instructed Timothy to follow his example by preaching the word, in season and out and to reprove, rebuke and exhort others with great patience and instruction.

Paul tells us that he acted in a disciplined manner toward others by laboring day and night and paying for what he ate so as not to be a burden to anyone (2Thessalonians 3:7-9). He stated that the goal of his instruction was love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. He also entrusted his work to others by delegating authority over the churches he had founded to gifted and trusted men, instructing these men on how to handle the difficulties each church had (1Timothy 1:3-5 and 12-17).

He instructed others to avoid worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge” (1 Timothy 6:20); He told them not to wrangle about words, which he considered useless and leading to the ruin of the hearers. Instead he said they should be consistent in their

efforts to present themselves as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:14-15), speaking sound words of faith and love (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

Paul also encouraged others to suffer hardship with him, including imprisonment as a good soldier of Christ. His purpose in enduring all these things was so that others may attain salvation (2 Timothy 2:3, 9-10). Again, he was looking after the end result. His behavior was not to limit anyone's access to truth. His pattern was to establish truth in his life so that others would be able to follow and receive the same inheritance which he had – that of forgiveness of sin resulting in eternal life.

And in our previous studies of Philippians we discovered this about Paul: He did not want to be put to shame in anything because he desired Christ to be exalted in his body both in life and in death (Philippians 1:21). He also counted as loss all those things that were gain to him before Christ. He left the past behind with all its accomplishments and reached forward to what awaited him in heaven. His purpose in life was to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and to be conformed to his death so that he might attain the resurrection of the dead. Leaving behind the search for a righteousness of his own derived from the law, he pressed on toward that which was found through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:7-10).

So let's wrap this up by putting everything in a nutshell. If we were to follow the example of others what should we emulate?

When I look to my friend for a pattern of the Christian life to follow this is what I see: A father who plays with his children, who builds special items for them that match their age and abilities, who helps them with their homework and, even as adults, is there to provide guidance and advice; A man who cares about his community and tries to bring the grace of God to his city and county; A leader who brings together the ministers of his county to pray for, support, and have fellowship with one another; An organizer who brings together believers to pray for the problems in the county such as the rising rate of crime, domestic violence and drug use. And a giver who starts scholarship programs for needy youth in his community.

I also see a husband who has learned through the difficulties of married life how to love your wife in spite of your feelings and a man who makes a practice of humbling himself before God and before others. I can't be my friend. I don't have the same personality or gifting which God has given to him. But I can emulate many things about him because they show me the very attributes of God. When I have questions about how I should act or how I should respond to a certain situation I know I can always look to him and what I have seen him do to provide the guidance I need for myself and for my family. If I need a pattern I need only look at his life.

When Paul wrote to the churches that he had visited and the men and women with whom he had worked, he knew they, like him, had no previous experience with the Author of Life. They had no way to know how to live in faith or how to walk by faith and not by sight. They had not walked with Jesus for three years as the twelve and others had done nor had they met the Lord face to face as Paul had. So they needed someone to look up to, someone to follow who was following the example of Christ.

Paul and the other Apostles fit the bill. They were around for others to observe how they lived, how they responded to the difficulties and trials of life, and how they rejoiced when others came to faith. They were there for advice and direction. They were those who pointed the way to the Savior not just by

their words but by their deeds as well.

And when they looked, what did they see? What could they emulate? Not all were called to preach the gospel all over the world but all were called to be followers of Christ. So what could they observe from these godly men that would be relevant to their own lives and ministry?

They saw them rejoice when they suffered (Acts 5:41). They saw they were not surprised that suffering came their way (1 Peter 4:12-14) because Jesus had warned them it would come (John 15:20); They saw them treat others with kindness and compassion, often bringing healing to those who were sick or lame (Acts 3:1-8); They saw them fulfill the call which God placed upon their life and encourage others to do likewise (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

They also saw them delegate tasks which they either could not do or should not do because it would take them away from their primary ministry (Acts 6:1-6). They saw them reprove, rebuke, exhort and preach the gospel with great patience whether it seemed appropriate or not (2 Timothy 4:2) because they understood that the gospel contained the only power and the only name available to man by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

They saw them take the anger and opposition of others, suffering imprisonment and beatings for simply releasing a slave girl of her demon (Acts 16:16-24). They saw them refuse the adoration of men and their attempts to make them out to be gods because the power of the one true God was working through them (Acts 14:8-18). They saw them sing right after they were imprisoned and beaten with rods and remain in jail even after God had supernaturally opened the prison doors for them (Acts 16:25-30). They saw them endure many hardships and difficulties, being treated as sheep to be slaughtered, yet overwhelmingly conquer those things through Christ, because they were convinced that nothing could separate them from the love of God found in Christ (Romans 8:36-39).

These are the things we can emulate. These are the patterns we can follow. But how can we apply what they did to what we should be doing? Paul himself gives us the answer when he says in Philippians 3:16 that we should keep living by the same standard to which we have attained. And what is that standard?

We are to make Christ known to others through the lives we live and the decisions we make (Philippians 1:27). We are to conduct ourselves with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of every opportunity to share the love of Christ. When we speak our speech should be seasoned with grace so that we will know how to respond to each person when they inquire about the hope within us (Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15).

In Hebrews Paul also gives us the example of Abraham. Like him we are to obey when we are called by God to do something, even if we do not know where we are going or understand everything about the journey. We are to receive God's promises and act on them. We are to believe God even when the promise does not come true in our lifetime. We are to look for and desire a better country than the one in which we currently dwell, knowing God is preparing a place for us (Hebrews 11:8-16). Paul called this "pressing on toward to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

And finally, Paul says we are to lay aside everything that hinders us and weighs us down, including the sin which so easily entangles us so that we may run the race that has been set before us with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). Our goal is not a sprint; it is a cross country marathon. And if we want to

know how to do that, how to persevere so that we do not give up, we need only look at those who came before us – Paul, Timothy, Silas, Luke, Peter, James, John, Stephen, Phillip, and Timothy to name a few.

We can also look to Saeed Abedini who, for nearly three years now, has suffered beatings and been imprisoned because of his faith in Christ yet he has not lost his faith and continues to encourage others with the hope of the gospel; Or Meriam Ibrahim who, while in chains, had to deliver her baby in prison before she was to be executed. Yet God delivered her and her baby from prison thanks to the prayers of many and the efforts of Christian organizations here in America.

These people did not give up in the face of adversity. They are modern day examples of how to persevere under trial. They too are providing a pattern for us to follow. If we wish to be like them then we should follow their pattern to the letter. God has given them the strength to persevere and He will do the same for us, no matter what the future holds. The God they follow is the same God we follow. If God is able to sustain them through their trials God is able to sustain us as well.

Scripture says that we have a choice of which pattern to follow, the pattern of this world or the pattern of those who have travelled the road of faith before us. It's a choice of whom to serve, the gods of this world or the God of the next. Even in this choice Paul gives us the answer and sets the example.

ROMANS 12:1-2

“I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

This is what Paul did and that is why he was able to say to us:

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

“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.”

As to how to tell the difference between those who follow Christ and those who are enemies of the cross, we will look at that next time. For now, let me leave you with this thought. Just as children imitate the pattern of their parents, so do fellow believers follow the pattern of those who inhabit the church. If that pattern is not the same as that established by Christ then that pattern will not result in holy living.

For this reason we must be careful whose pattern we are following and what pattern we ourselves are creating for others to follow. Just as bad company corrupts good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33), a bad pattern can corrupt the beliefs of others and prohibit them from coming to faith in Christ. We must do as Paul did, following his example and his pattern of living so that not only others but we ourselves are not disqualified from receiving the prize of eternal life.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a

man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (NIV)

This was Paul’s pattern. May it be ours as well.