

Find Heavenly Minded Role Models to Imitate by James Jennings

by James Malachi Jennings

The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding heavenly-minded role models to imitate in order to avoid becoming enemies of the cross of Christ and to be influenced by their example.

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Philippians 3:17-20, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, Hebrews 6:12, Hebrews 11:7, James 4:4

Topics: "Heavenly Mindset", "Christian Role Models"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finding heavenly-minded role models to imitate, as Paul urges believers to follow his example and keep their eyes on those who walk according to godly examples. The warning is against imitating those who are enemies of the cross of Christ, characterized by their end in destruction, serving their own appetites, glorying in shameful things, and having minds set on earthly pursuits. The call is to imitate those whose citizenship is in heaven, eagerly awaiting the Savior's return for transformation.

Transcript

I've been away from this for months. And part of it has been I've been every other week in Austin for the last two months. But I want to go back to Philippians.

We're going to be in v. 17-21 today. Philippians 3. Let's read v. 17-21. Paul in prison.

And then he writes, brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction.

Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.

And from it, we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Let's pray. Lord, I just ask for some of that power that we just read right there.

Lord, You have the power to subject all things to Yourself. Lord, You sustain everything. You created everything.

Lord, I just pray You'd help me this morning that these sheep might be fed, and that if any do not know You, that they'd be saved. Lord, we look to You. In Christ's name, Amen.

So my title this morning is Find Heavenly-Minded Role Models to Imitate. Find Heavenly-Minded Role Models to Imitate. Paul says in verse 17, join in imitating me.

Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example. That's where I get fined. Then he mentions those who are enemies of the cross.

Their mind is on earthly things. He says right there at the end of v. 19. Then he mentions His mind.

His citizenship. His manner of life is of heaven. That's where I get heavenly-minded.

He's on His road to heaven. His thoughts are not on the things of the earth supremely, but they're on things of another world, of a Savior who's going to come back. And I get role models to imitate.

Obviously, v. 17, join in imitating me. And look for those who have this example among you. And all of us, our lives, are an example to others.

Even today, how we act, how we live this very day, we're putting forward a model before people. Is it a model where we're adorning the doctrine of the grace of God? Think of this. How did you learn to pray? My three-year-old, she's not a Christian, but sometimes we'll have her thank the Lord at the mealtime.

Who does she sound like when she prays? Who? Yeah, me and my wife. Why? Imitation. Imitation happens all the time.

Imitation is the act of becoming like another. It's copying the pattern of another. It's not talking about cloning a person and their personality and all of that.

But you're becoming like them and how they are towards Christ. The disciples themselves ask Christ. Teach us to pray.

They learn by watching Him pray. By Him even telling them some input on how to pray. Why do you do family worship the way you do? If you're married and you have a family and some night you meet with your family and you open the Scriptures, maybe sing a hymn, people call that family worship.

Why do you do it the way you do it? A lot of people would answer, it's because I was at another brother's house and I saw the way he did it. And I realized, wow, that's pretty good. I'm going to imitate that.

Why does your child dress the way they dress? I've noticed a lot of the children tend to dress like the parents. The boy dressed like the dad and the girls like the mother. Imitation.

They want to dress like mommy and daddy. So much of what we have learned is from watching the examples of others. We're just taking in information constantly as we observe the example of others.

So the issue is not if we will imitate, but it's who we will imitate. It's not a question of if. It's going to happen.

The question is who are we going to imitate? Who are we keeping our eyes on? What example are they putting forward to us of a manner of life? We're all being influenced by the examples of others' walk, for good or for worse. You look at the text. Paul says, verse 17, those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Verse 18, he says, many who I often told you now tell you tears, walk. Paul is thinking here about their walk, their life, their manner of life, their conduct. You know, one lost grandfather, I remember hearing the story.

He was sitting there smoking his cigarette at 70 years of age, and his little grand boy, a couple years old, went and took a toothpick and sat down and started to act like he was smoking a cigarette just like his grandfather. Again, imitation. It happens from our kids in the physical realm, and it happens obviously in the spiritual realm for us Christians.

Proverbs 13.20, whoever walks with the wives, is it a neutral thing if you walk with the wives? No. Becomes wives. But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

So when Paul is saying what he says here, he recognizes something. We're creatures of imitation. We're creatures who love to see examples of things being lived out.

And we love to follow that example. And if we don't have Paul's example, Paul realizes these people at Philippi are going to have other teachers, maybe even itinerant teachers coming through Philippi, and they're going to be here around this body of believers, and I don't want them to imitate those people. I want you to follow my example and the example of Timothy and Epaphroditus and of these other brothers.

Paul says elsewhere, bad company, is it a neutral thing? No. Corrupts. Corrupts good morals.

Bad company corrupts. Walking with fools, you suffer harm. These are not neutral things.

D.A. Carson said this, many elements are more easily caught than taught. And that's true. How much? We catch it.

You see it. You observe it. They didn't just sit down and teach it to you, but you watched their life.

And you caught a whole lot just by how they lived. We're influenced by the standards of others around us. All of us.

This happens whether we recognize it or not. So Paul, in view of this, in view of knowing we're creatures of imitation, in view of realizing you're going to imitate someone, Paul, he says to those at Philippi, brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. And I'm calling this example of a true Christian who's heavenly minded.

You look at them and you can see their mind is not on the things of this earth. Those saints have grown very dim in light of the glory and the grace of Jesus Christ. Their citizenship is in heaven.

They are living for Him who is coming back to judge the world with righteousness. That's their example. Now some in response to Paul, one of the first questions you get when you read this verse, brothers, join in imitating me, you think, why didn't he say imitate Christ? Why does Paul say join in imitating me? Join in imitating me.

Paul does not go the route here of saying just imitate Christ. He actually directs people towards himself, which that could appear to be a proud, carnal thing to call people to imitate yourself. Now, 1 Corinthians 11, what does Paul say? Imitate me as I imitate Christ.

Is our ultimate example Jesus Christ? You better believe it is. But, Paul's view of the Christian life is we need people living in the here and now who have Christ living through them for us to imitate. We don't just look at Christ in the Scriptures, but Christ living through people.

We observe their walk right now and glean from them. Another thing we can observe from Paul even commanding this, it shows Paul's idea of Christianity is one that Christians are not so far away from Jesus Christ that you would never imitate them. But Paul's idea of Christianity is Christians should be so obviously like Christ, where you can say, go look at their example and follow them.

So true Christianity, Paul realizes, is not something where you have to scratch to see is that a Christian or not? I can't tell. His life doesn't seem consistent with the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul recognizes true Christians, they're not perfect, but you're going to be able to look at them and see things in them that clearly show the Lord Jesus Christ is living through them.

They're living by His strength, by His power. John 13, Jesus said, I've given you an example that you should also do as I have done to you. Is Christ the greatest example? Absolutely.

Is He the greatest servant who ever lived? Absolutely. But, Paul doesn't dismiss that and say don't look at the example of other Christians. We get a minimum perspective on His life and the Scriptures.

There are a lot of real world circumstances that we can't turn to the Bible and look at a verse and it says this is what you do. But you can turn to a Christian who's godly their life, and you see as they walk by the Spirit with Scripture principles in their mind, they make a certain decision, and you recognize that was the Christlike decision. I should imitate them in that.

And again, Paul is not some proud man who's just saying imitate me. If you notice there, he says, walk according to the example you have in us. Us.

Timothy, probably for certain, he was thinking of Timothy. Timothy, Epaphroditus. He just talked about a brother in chapter 2, Epaphroditus.

Paul was thinking of Epaphroditus. Look at Philippians 2.26. He's even mentioning Epaphroditus to the church there. He says, he has been longing for you all, this man who has been sick near to death, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Distressed that you heard he was ill. So part of Paul, he's thinking, look at that guy Epaphroditus. You see the example he sets when he suffers? He's not distressed that no one doesn't know about his suffering.

He's distressed people do know about his suffering. And that's the Christlike response to have in the midst of suffering. So Paul is thinking of these guys, no doubt, when he says the example you have in us.

Timothy, Epaphroditus, and ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul says imitate me. Keep your eyes on those who walk.

Who walk according to the example you have in us. I don't think Paul's main idea here is doctrine. And we'll look at this a little more later.

I don't think his main idea is doctrine. He says example, and he says walk. And when he looks at those who are enemies of the cross, he says they walk in this manner.

That word walk could be rendered live. Look at how they live. Does doctrine affect how you live? Absolutely.

The good examples you find, they're going to have good doctrine because that's the only way they're going to truly be able to live holy. But there's certain people who have good doctrine and don't live holy. And they're not a good example to imitate.

Paul is thinking like he was in Philippians 1.27, let your manner of life be worthy of the implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You think of other places Paul mentions imitate. Hebrews 13.

Paul says there, consider the outcome of your leaders' lives and do what? Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. So the writer of Hebrews, whoever wrote Hebrews there, he says look at the leaders. Look at their way of life.

Look at the outcome, the end of that, which is going to be glory. Look at that destination they're going towards and imitate their faith. Imitate them.

Colossians talks about walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. So when you find someone to imitate, how do you even imitate them? We'll look at this more later, but he says, how do you do this? You observe. Look at verse 17.

Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Keep your eyes on them. You'll look at them.

You'll watch them. You see how they live. You're constantly observing them.

You're observing them at the meetings. Look at chapter 4, what Paul says in verse 9. He says, what you've learned, received, heard, and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. Paul is saying, there are things your eyes have seen in me.

Things you have heard and received and learned. And he says, practice these things. Practice these things.

Brethren, our lives make a massive impact, first and foremost on our kids, on our children. Missionary Dan Smith, when he was 12 years old, he was lost and his aunt was dying. And his aunt lived with them for two years as she was dying.

And he said this, before she died, the year or two she was with us, cast a very strong and fragrant influence over my life. The loveliness of Christ shone out of her. There was something there which I could not define, but which riveted my attention and drew me to her.

Her life like a fragrant rose rising out of its green leaves and casting a sweet smell. There was something there which I could not define, but riveted my attention and drew her to me. A 12 year old boy, witnessing his aunt as she's dying.

She was an example. She was a testimony. She was preaching something to Dan Smith about Jesus Christ.

So, Paul commands us, join in, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. What specifics am I to look for when I'm imitating someone? What specifics do I look for? Paul back in chapter 2, he's talking about the mind of Christ, and he says in verse 3, he says, complete my joy by having the same mind, and what's this mindset like? Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also the interest of others.

And Paul says that's the mindset of Jesus Christ. The thing you want to look for in someone to imitate is what makes them like Christ, and the thing that makes people like Christ is humility. Selfless humility is one thing.

You imitate those like Paul who endured in strong hardships. The Philippians saw Paul in prison suffering, and yet responding in a righteous way. They wanted to imitate that.

You imitate someone whose constant boast is in Christ. We see that in this letter to those at Philippi. Many other things.

Paul said this in 2 Thessalonians, he didn't eat bread without working, meaning he could have been supported by the churches, but he decided instead of being supported, he'd work night and day to provide his own money to get his own food. You know why Paul did that? Paul says to give you and ourselves an example to imitate. Paul actually consciously did things as a Christian because he wanted to give a good example for others to imitate.

And even in 1 Corinthians when he says, imitate me as I imitate Christ, the very thing he just talked about before that was doing everything he can to please people. To not take advantage of his rights. To not take advantage of his liberties.

He died to his liberties in order that he might be an example to imitate. So imitation is huge. Seeing someone's example, following their pattern, it's huge in that we should be looking for those that we can imitate.

Not just the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Christ. But Paul says himself and others who are imitating that example.

That's not human worship. Paul realizes how practical that is for us to have living people before us that we can imitate. Let me pray.

Lord, I pray for You that You would help our minds be focused. Lord, would You fill me with Your Holy Spirit? Lord, I'm weak and needy. Just pray You'd give me some grace right now that the sheep could be fed.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Now this is the next question we've got to ask. How important is it to have godly Christians to be imitating? How important is that? How high is that on your priority list? It can only be as high as the Scriptures make it.

We're about to find out how serious the Scriptures make this. But how high is that? Do you observe older godlier Christians and you look at their example and you imitate it? Younger sisters, are you around only the young sisters? Or do you make it a point to be around the older sisters to see their example that you might imitate it? It makes a massive impact. I've known of sisters who've wanted to go over to someone's

house just to observe the person and talk to them, and that changed them more than any sermon did just by observing the life.

How important is this? To have examples. Well, Paul, thankfully, he gives us two reasons that we should find heavenly-minded role models to imitate. He gives us two reasons.

So I don't have to make anything up. I'm going to the Scriptures and Paul gives two reasons why it's important to find a heavenly-minded role model to imitate if you're a Christian. If you're lost, this doesn't apply to you.

You need to go and trust Christ. But for the Christian, this is massively important. Two reasons.

Look at the text. The first reason is in verse 18. He starts with the conjunction for.

Meaning, brothers, join in imitating me because this is so. Now, we're going to look at that in a second. I want to explain something first.

The second reason is in verse 20. In your ESVs, what word do you see there? The word but. Meaning, Paul, he says their minds is on earthly things, but ours are like this.

The problem with that word there is in the original, it's again the same word for. It's another one of the reasons Paul is giving to have a heavenly-minded role model to imitate. So, I'm about to pull two reasons from 18 and 20.

In 18 and 20, both start in the original language with for. Meaning, Paul is saying imitate me, follow my example, look to others, and then he's going to give us two reasons. Two reasons why to do it.

Two reasons why this is essential. Two reasons why this is important. So, first one.

The first reason why you need to find heavenly-minded role models to imitate is that there is a danger if you don't imitate godly believers. And that danger is none other than actually becoming an enemy of the cross of Christ for yourselves. You hear that? That's his first reason.

If you don't find these, this is going to happen. Verse 18, For many imitate me, look for examples of godly men, because many of whom I've often told you, now I even tell you with tears. Paul is not saying this without emotion.

I've told you with tears. They walk. He just said look for those who walk according to our example, because there's many out there who walk and their example is that of a person who is an enemy of the cross of Christ.

They are hostile and opposed to the cross of Jesus Christ. Now, why would Paul even have to tell us about these many and call us to imitate him if not the very ones he's referring to are professing Christians? I don't believe these are non-Christians. Because Christians aren't looking to imitate all the lost people in the world.

We're looking to imitate people who are saying they're following Christ. So what's the danger? If you don't have godly examples, you have to have some examples. You can't have none.

You can't say that. You can't say as a Christian, I'm just totally unaffected by the lives of people around me. Bad company corrupts good morals.

Those who walk with the wise are going to be wise. We're not neutral. We are influential in seeing how people live.

And if I don't choose intentionally to set myself around those who are imitating Christ, imitating Paul, Paul is saying, guess what? If you don't actively do that, you're going to end up over here where you're going to be imitating those in the opposite category who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Imitating the godly life of a godly believer will prevent you from being deceived by an ungodly life of an ungodly professing Christian who is earthly minded. I mean, to illustrate, America, we have many people who are American citizens.

Just saying you're an American citizen. Just saying like Paul, I'm a heavenly citizen. My citizenship is in heaven.

What do you want to do? You want proof. Show me your ID card. Show me the proof.

Don't just show me the ID card. What does your life look like? If you're an American citizen, are you serving on the jury? When called upon? Do you defend the country if need should arise? Do you pay your income taxes? Do you respect and obey federal, state, and local laws? If you say you're an American citizen and you throw all that away and you set yourself as that example, you're not really that. You can be in this country, but in Christ's kingdom, you can't.

If you say you're a heavenly citizen and you're living for Christ, but you're earthly minded, Paul says, no, you can't do that. There's no such thing. Every true Christian, if they say they're a heavenly citizen, there has to be proof of that.

So he calls those at Philippi with tears to imitate him out of safety for their own souls' endurance in the race. He realizes that's what's at stake here. Because you're going to go after some example.

And you know, I think we'll look at this more specifically, but I think the idea is at Philippi, they were professing Christian preachers. Because it doesn't seem like Paul is dealing with directly anyone in the church there. But it seems like the idea is there's professing Christians who come in and they may be preaching the same thing as Paul, but their life, their walk, that's what he's talking about.

How they live. Their walk is contrary. So how important is it to have godly Christians imitate? It's very important.

And we should put a high standard on this. So the second reason Paul gives is v. 20. Again, it says, but... and I agree, there is he's saying in contrary, but at the same time, he's connecting it, I believe, as one of the reasons for our citizenship is in heaven.

So imitate me because of how I'm living presently. You want a good reason to imitate Paul and Timothy? Look at their final destination. Paul and Timothy's final destination is heaven.

You want a good reason not to imitate the bad examples? Where's their final destination? Destruction. Hell. That's a pretty compelling reason to imitate them.

Look at our final destination. So the second reason Paul deals with why you should imitate Paul and Timothy specifically is because they, unlike the other athletes in the race, are those who exercise self-control in all things and will cross the finish line to heaven. The others, no way you want to imitate them.

They're not going to get across the finish line. With that end of destruction, we'd be crazy to go and imitate those who live with an earthly mind. The one who lives now like a heavenly citizen is the only one that proves their citizenship is truly there.

So, am I saying there's a danger of becoming an enemy of the cross if I don't have godly Christian examples around me? I'm not saying that Paul is. I believe that's Paul's logic here. And until this week when I've studied that, I never would have said something as strong as that.

But Paul does. Brothers, join in imitating me. Keep your eyes on those who walk.

Why should we do this, Paul? Because, I've told you many times, even with tears, there are people out there that walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. These people walking contrary to true Christianity can deceive you and you can give in to their examples, be influenced by them, and as you continue down that path, your very life becomes one where you oppose Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ.

You oppose the cross. So who are these enemies of the cross of Christ? He gives four descriptions here. And before we look at this for a moment, one thing we need to realize is the main question in this text, in this message, is not who are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

If it mattered that much, Paul could have made it clearer for us. Paul's main thing is imitate godly Christians so that you don't end up being an enemy of the cross of Christ. So I don't want to get sidetracked from the main thrust here.

Who are they? I don't believe it's ISIS. You think of the Islamic State, people like that, they're killing Christians. They're enemies of the cross.

I don't think that's what he's talking about. Verse 4 has four things that he mentions. Verse 4, let's look at these four things.

And again, I don't think it's unbelievers, but professors, because a believer wouldn't feel temptation to imitate an unbeliever. Or even think about it. You just don't have Christians running around thinking where do these lost people imitate? It's the professing ones that have the lure.

Because they're under the banner of evangelical Christian. I believe the descriptions we're about to look at most likely point to a professing Christian teacher who by example was teaching you could serve your lustful appetites and be okay. That you could be a Christian, live in your sin, live a lustful lifestyle, and it's okay.

And Paul says it's not okay. You're an enemy of the cross. You practically deny that the cross is a redemptive work from sin's penalty and power by your life.

So these four descriptions. Verse 19, these enemies of the cross. Verse 19, Paul describes them.

The first thing he mentions, their end is destruction. Their end. Their way of life.

Remember, Paul's thinking about how you walk. He's thinking about your life. And he says that manner of life they're living right now, you know what the end of it is? It may not appear like it now, but the end of that way is going to be hell.

It's going to be destruction. Think of 2 Peter. Talks about false prophets there.

They bring swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality. And because of them, the way of truth will be blaspheme.

Many will follow their sensuality. We have a whole lot of that going on in our country today. People who have right doctrine, yet are living sensually, are compromising in all sort of moral areas of their life, and people are given into that example.

It must be okay. This guy's so famous and he cusses. And he's a Christian.

I must be able to cuss. Wrong! Paul says the next thing, their end is destruction. He says their God is their belly.

Their God. Who they serve is their belly. And that word, I think here, it's better rendered appetite.

That's where it's put other places. I don't think Paul is totally thinking these guys, their God is their belly, meaning their one sin is their gluttons. And they're just eating all the time.

Eating food. Yes, that's included. But I think his point is, their God, the one they serve, is their own appetite.

Their flesh, it says, I want that. And they say yes every time. Yes, I'll give my flesh that.

That's who I serve. I have no self-control. Yes to lust.

Yes to sin. Yes to earthly-mindedness. All these thoughts of earth and storing up treasure on earth.

I'm just going to think about this. I'm not going to say no. But the cross of Christ says if you follow Me, die! Die daily and pick up your cross and follow Me.

Paul says that man's an enemy of the cross. He's not dying. He's giving in to the lust of the flesh.

Then Paul, he describes a third thing. They glory in their shame. Now my initial take on this had been because at the start of chapter 3, he dealt with the Judaizers who were trying to add circumcision for salvation.

Months ago, that's what I took that to be. They glory in their shame. They should be ashamed of trying to get all these Gentiles circumcised and they're glorifying in that.

The problem is, if it was the Judaizers here, some of these other things don't line up with them. And, the Bible doesn't really speak of circumcision as being something that's shameful. It just speaks of it being irrelevant.

It's not a shameful thing. It's just not relevant. Don't be trying to add that to salvation.

What I think Paul means here, these people who you and I could actually imitate in some way, if we're not imitating those who are heavenly minded, these people, they boast in that which they should be ashamed of. They don't only mock holiness and self-control and godliness on the pulpit on Sunday, but they glory so much in their sensuality, they'll stick the video on YouTube and share it with the world. They're glorying in that which they should be ashamed of.

They're laughing over sin. Laughing over moral compromise. Laughing over being earthly minded.

Glorying in it. And Paul says you should be ashamed. When sin like that happens under the name of Christ, you should fall on the ground and have tears at the corruption of those who say they're Christians.

They glory in their shame. What they should be ashamed of. I mean, people say they're Christians and they approve of homosexuality.

What? We should be ashamed. Not glory in that. Ashamed.

You think of all the abuse of liberties, worldliness, divorce. They glory. I've been divorced a couple times.

No big deal. I'm a Christian. No shame.

No tears. I can't believe all that has happened. You think about Jeremiah.

They have healed the wound of My people lightly, saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No. They were not at all ashamed.

They did not even know how to blush. You think that's the idea? Paul's saying these people should be ashamed. They're not even blushing.

They're enemies of the cross. Enemies. And what's the fourth thing of these people who are enemies of the cross? Paul says their mind is set on earthly things.

It's set. It's not just there a little bit. It's set.

I mean, they've taken their mind. Forget the spiritual. I'm setting it on earthly things.

Love of the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you, John says. A mind that is focused on earthly things as opposed to heavenly things.

Earthly. Living in the futility of their minds. But as Christians, we shouldn't be living in the futility of our minds.

Earthly, meaning they're looking to store up treasure on earth. They say they're a Christian, and yet their whole focus is on this world. It's on the kingdoms of this world.

It's on the things of this world. It's on the money of this world. And Paul is saying that person's actually opposed to the cross of Christ.

You know, one thing from here. Paul says their minds are set on earthly things. He doesn't even necessarily say set on sinful things.

So Paul's idea may not even be they're actually thinking of sinful things. I think he means that because he just mentioned they glory in what they should be ashamed of. But just their minds consumed with things that are totally neutral to following the Lord.

It has nothing to do with Christ. Everything focused on this world. Now consider this.

He describes the enemies of the cross of Christ as those who are earthly minded. You know what that says? You can know whether you're opposed to the cross or for the cross by what goes on in your mind. That gives it away.

No matter what you say, Paul is pointing to something deeper. What's going on in your mind? What's going on in your heart? So, my present understanding of who these enemies of the cross are, that Paul is warning us that they are setting an example and you could actually go near that example if you don't look at the godly examples of those pursuing holiness without which no one will see the Lord. I think these enemies of the cross are enemies because the hypocrisy of their sinful life does more damage to the message of the Gospel than maybe those who come in and outright, totally deny the Gospel.

What's going to be more hostile? Those who say, I'm a Christian. I love God. But what does James 4.4 say? If you love the world, what does that make you? If you're friends with the world, love the world, enemy of God.

Similar language there. Enemy of God. Based on loving the world.

Loving things consumed with the things of the earth. When you see a professing Christian whose master is his own lustful appetite, and that's what he serves, he's actually an enemy of the cross. That's what Paul says.

An enemy. An enemy. I maybe haven't used strong language like that, but Paul does.

He calls them an enemy. You're opposed to the cross. We would tell that to someone.

You're opposed to the Gospel. You say you're a Christian, you're living in sin. Regeneration.

If you're a Christian, you're a new creature. The new has come. You're denying that.

We say it like that, but Paul, he says, you're an enemy of the cross of Christ. So, think of the importance of Paul's command to find heavenly-minded role models to imitate. Not earthly-minded, but those who, wow, their final destination is heaven.

Look how they're living. Look at the selflessness. Look at the Christ-likeness.

Look at the holiness. It's important because again, Paul gives the danger. If we don't imitate them, we could actually drift and fall away and become an enemy of the cross ourselves.

You don't think Paul's just shedding tears here about people he doesn't know? Of some whom I've told you and often tell you now with tears. Walk as enemies of the cross. No doubt, maybe even at some point, Demas, who was in love with the world, and deserted Paul.

In love with the world. He's an enemy of the cross. Demas maybe didn't even renounce his profession.

He maybe has still been saying, I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. But I can love the world and have Christ.

Paul says he's an enemy. Here's something we need to recognize. All of us could be deceived by someone with right doctrine, but a wrong life.

I mean, we cannot dismiss that and say that's not going to happen to me. It could happen. You could just start being around someone with all the right doctrine in the world.

And you know, their life, subtly they start to be more worldly, more compromised, justify sin, even joke about certain things and think they're funny that dishonor God. And you know what happens? All of a sudden, you're now imitating. You're now going after their pattern.

We need to recognize that could actually happen. As parents, as your kids grow up, you know how easily they imitate other kids. So you know how sometimes they're wanting to go hang out with the kid down the block and you're thinking, no way.

If they go with them, they're going to learn to cuss. They're going to learn to throw rocks at windows. It's going to be a nightmare.

Why on earth do we show such protection? We love the kids. We realize they're going to be impacted. But we need to realize us as adults, as Christians, the same thing.

It's not just our little kids, but us. It's a lot more subtle. Their God is their belly.

The One they serve is their appetite. Because again, the Christian life isn't always saying it's not this asceticism and severity of the flesh and no to everything of the earth and no chocolate and no food in the next weeks. That's not the Christian life.

So you see someone take that to an extreme where they just start to drift everything of the earth. See, it happens more subtly. Because as Christians, we're trying to find balance.

So you want Christians who take holiness seriously. Doctrine? Absolutely. But I think Paul, he says walk.

How they live. He's thinking about their life. Holiness.

Seriously. They're the ones who are going to heaven. Look, there are plenty of bad examples of those who live loose and justify sin.

Paul says flee from them. Don't imitate them. Don't be hanging around them being corrupted by them.

Because it's not just, well, you know what, they kind of justify sin here and there, and they're just different compromises. Paul says they're actually opposed to the cross. They're opposed to the cross.

They're an enemy of the cross of Christ. Get away from them. And just to clarify, obviously, when us in the church, when we start to struggle and drift, we need people to be rebuking us.

Look, brother, you're becoming way too earthly minded. The last 20 conversations I've had with you all you're talking about is new house, new car, job, all of these things. You haven't mentioned anything about the Bible in months.

Your mind is getting on earthly things. You're imitating those at work. You go to the meetings.

They talk about promotions. And you're starting to go in that direction. It doesn't matter they say they're Christian.

You're getting pulled in that direction, brother. And if you keep going in that direction, Paul says, you're going to be an enemy of the cross. The cross of Christ that says we're not just forgiven, but the power of sin is broken.

And we die daily and follow Him. We lose our life. So, do you put imitating godly believers this high on your list of importance? Do you put it there? Mark those whose life is holy and imitate them.

I mean, I can't tell you, when I was with my father-in-law the two months when he died as he was dying of cancer, that changed my life. Because I saw how he lived near death. I saw the pains he took to have a clear conscience.

And I couldn't but help to want to imitate it because it was screaming at me, this is how Christ would act. Three weeks before he died, he had given a message. And in his sermon to the church, he gave one point a little too hard.

The very next Sunday, he got up before the whole church and he publicly apologized for saying the point too hard and he didn't want to unnecessarily be too hard. I'm sitting there seeing that example of humility and what do I want to do? I want to imitate it. That's like Christ.

The humility, the selflessness. I want to be like that. It has an impact on us.

You look at Joseph's life in the Old Testament. You see Potiphar's wife trying to seduce him. You see him flee.

Imitate that example. Imitate it. Christ suffered and He left us an example that we might follow in His footsteps.

You know one great way to imitate godly Christians is to read really good biographies. I cannot tell you enough. If someone here after this message is thinking, boy, I wish I had one of the godliest Christians who lived that I could sit down with for ten hours tonight and hang out with, you can do that.

You go get the biography, and you sit down and you read that. And biographies that are well written, they will show how they lived. Ian Murray writes incredible biographies.

How they lived. Read good biographies. Hudson Taylor, Lloyd-Jones, Archibald Brown, Azazel Nettleton, David Brainerd.

I just read D.E. Hostess' biography. It changed my life. Seeing the humility he had.

It impacted me. Two days, just sitting, reading his biography. And I was so impacted by him, as if I was living with him in China when he was the head of the China Inland Mission for 35 years.

I got to have him back from the dead in my room for two days. And I saw an example there. That changed me.

It showed me. Imitate these things. Were there faults that the author brought out that I shouldn't imitate? Yeah.

There were definitely things. But above all, there was Christ-likeness about practical situations I face that I don't have a text to give me an answer for. But I have a godly man filled with the Spirit, and his life pointed me in that direction.

Speaking of that, and I was reading Daniel Smith's biography. That biography is so good, you can't put it down. It's like 160 pages.

Incredible. And he actually mentioned D.E. Host, because Daniel Smith was with China Inland Mission. Page 44 in the book, he says this, Another day, D.E. Host of China Inland Mission, the director after Hudson Taylor, invited me to pray with him.

It's a good thing. You can go see him pray and you can learn from his example, right? Mr. Host prayed and prayed for four and a half hours. Sometimes he would kneel, then stand, then walk while he prayed.

There were 800 missionaries in the mission. He knew them all by name without looking at a book, and he knew all their needs. And he knew all the 300 children of them.

As for me, my knees were riveted to the floor. I couldn't move. I was filled with the awe and reverential fear.

In the secret place of prayer, Mr. Host was at home with God. It was his chiefest pleasure. Smith goes on, he would even yet pray more after I left him.

He prayed for many in many countries, for men of every race, for all classes of people. The whole world was on his heart. And this prayer session was no special thing.

It was his daily exercise. And I was only in on part of it, albeit a four and a half hour part. Listen to what Smith says.

What a lesson. What a way of teaching it. What a lesson.

What a way of teaching. Hey, you want to come pray with me? You want to come over to my house for lunch? You want to come over and help take the kids to the park? There's so much you can imitate and example and see right there just by being around each other. Hebrews 6. Don't be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Imitators. Look at Hebrews 11. All these people there who had lives of faith, imitate their faith.

Look at them in the Old Testament. Imitate that which is Christlike. So a couple other observations as we head to an end here.

This verse of imitate me, one thing I think we can observe from this, this is one of the many vital reasons why it is so important to be part of a local church. You want a good reason to be part of a local church? Paul is saying there's a lot of bad examples out there who are enemies of the cross of Christ. You want to be part of a local church that's biblical in order that you have good examples that you can imitate.

This is a call to be hospitable in each other's houses. I've told many of you this. What changed my parenting was having a family that stayed with us for two weeks.

Just having them live with us for two weeks and observing their parenting, we saw a thousand errors that we had that we wouldn't have seen in observing people's parenting here on Sunday. Able to imitate that which is good. What an impact these saints can have.

And Paul even says that here. What does he say? Brothers, join in. Join in.

It's like if you haven't joined in on reading good biographies yet, Paul's saying hop on in. Go pick one up. Don't pick up the Lloyd-Jones 2 volume.

Start with something smaller. He's saying join in. If you haven't done it in the church, Paul's saying join in.

Join in. Get around people. Don't just young people be around young.

And ultimately, yeah, it deals with spiritual maturity, not age. But find those who are all out for the Lord. Their minds are on earthly things.

God is not their appetite. If anything, they're denying themselves all the time. And the challenge is you.

Look for those people. And Paul, that word there, find them. And his idea is you mark them.

You mark them down. I'm going to observe that person. I'm going to spend time around that person.

This is, again, a reason why young believers should be around the older. Older. Not just all the young hanging out around each other.

The young need to be around the older. Take time and be around the older. Even the Christians in the church, we have some believers who are 12 and 13 and 14.

And I've told them, don't be discouraged. You don't just need to hang out with people around your age. If everyone your age is lost, go hang out with those older ones.

We're not intimidating and scary. Come up to us. Pray in our group on prayer meeting night.

It doesn't matter if you're 12. If you're a Christian, come join us. So they can learn and imitate our example.

So, another observation. Does this mean we all need to go out there and have a one-on-one mentor? Imitating people? Yeah, the idea is discipleship. It is mentorship.

It is being around people's lives. But so often, these things, for a season, they're good. For D.E. Host, I got to spend two days with him.

That was enough. I'm not going to read that biography every week. I got what I needed from him.

There's different people we can glean from certain things with. It's one thing to sit down and talk. You can glean from someone's life there as you talk about their life.

But it's another thing to watch them live. To put yourselves in their home. Put yourselves with them out evangelizing.

Be with them on a trip to Nicaragua. Go with them to the prison. You learn so much there.

Yes, this is a call to have godly role models. It's not wrong to say, that person is a godly example to me. I mention my father-in-law Bob Jennings a lot.

I'm not trying to exalt him, but he was a godly role model to me. He impacted my life. What am I going to say? It was an impact.

His humility. We should have people like that. Dead and alive.

And the ultimate yes is Jesus Christ. Paul even says here, keep your eyes on those. Keep.

This isn't just a glance. There's a constant observance of how they live over time. Keep your eyes on those.

So, does this mean mentorship? Christian discipleship? Yeah, I think this idea is a good reason to be discipling one another, be mentoring one another. How that looks is going to vary and change often. But however it looks, you're around them and able to observe them.

Whatever that takes is your answer. Another thing to observe. Notice the quantity of those who are of a sinful example.

Verse 18, For a few? No, what does he say? For many. For many. There's a massive quantity of many out there who are a bad example.

And this is my exhortation for you and me. Let's not add to that. There's already enough professing Christians who are earthly minded and they serve their own appetite and the lust of the flesh and compromise, and they don't care at all about holiness.

They even glory in that which they should be ashamed of. Let's not add to that. That group's big enough.

Let's not add to that. Let's not let that be us. Paul says to Timothy, let no one despise you for your youth.

Don't, by how you live, give people a reason to despise you. But set believers an example in speech, conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. I just heard recently someone saying there's some Christians who were using profanity.

And I mean, that was dealt with a year and a half ago or two years ago. That person is giving you a reason to despise them. You should despise them.

If they think it's okay to use profanity or listen to stuff that's using profanity, you should despise them. Because they're going down a path where they're going to be an enemy of the cross of Christ. You should run.

Not imitate them. So we need to set an example. And that's a big thing.

What example does your life set right now? What example does mine? What fragrance, like Dan Smith's aunt, put forth? What fragrance do we put forth? What example do others have in the way I live? Paul says that. The example you have in us. We're all giving forth an example in how we live.

We should feel the pressure. Again, parents feel the pressure. When you get a bad habit as a parent, say biting your nails or something like that, and then all your kids start biting your nails, you feel the pressure.

I don't want to do that anymore. That doesn't matter whether someone bites their nails or not, but when you go to the Christian faith, these things deal with your soul and your final destination. We should feel the pressure of being a good example.

And one thing you want to be a good example in is an example of someone who's helplessly dependent upon God for the strength to live out the Christian life. And Paul is a good example of that. He said, I worked harder than any of them.

It was not I, but the grace of God that is in me. And you know one thing godly Christian examples do, they teach you all the more how proud you are and how self-reliant you are as you see how dependent they are on God. I mean, D.E. Host would be praying four hours for 800 missionaries and they didn't have a notebook.

By name, and their kids, and he knew all their needs. I mean, what a thing to imitate. I don't know all the members of our church's names.

I mean, I have read about so many missionaries and pastors who knew everyone in their congregation by name and would be praying for all of them. I wouldn't imitate that. But you know, I guess I'm too selfish right now and I'm not breaking through and doing that.

But I want to, like Paul, press on to higher ground, press on to the end. Think of it. Think of the horrible example it is to other believers and to the lost world.

When one says they're a Christian and yet by their example of their life, they store up treasure on earth and that's their whole life. Jesus said of the Pharisees, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do, for they preach, but do not practice. They preach, but don't practice.

Paul is saying don't imitate someone who just preaches. Look at the one who preaches and they practice. That's the person that should be your example.

Okay, a couple more things. We're almost done here. I did go long, I'm sorry about that.

Well, notice the frequency real quick. Notice the frequency of Paul's warning here. Verse 18, I've often told you, this often happens.

Well, maybe we could close here. Brethren, find heavenly minded role models to imitate. In the church, in biographies, that's a real good place.

In the church is the best place to start because they're living. But biographies, it's more condensed. You're not just seeing them on that day.

You see 50 years of their life. And then if you're lost here today, think of this. If you're an enemy of the cross of Christ, Christ died for His enemies.

And some of those enemies are professing Christians who are living in sin, and their God is their belly. And He came to save His enemies. He came to give you life.

But if you follow Him and you bear your own cross, and you're not hostile to the cross of Christ, Jesus says you've got to die daily. You've got to die every day. You've got to lose your life and follow Me.

But guess what? Paul says you want to find godly examples? Here one reason is, their citizenship is in heaven. They're awaiting the Savior, and they're going to be gloriously transformed one day. So it's all worth it.

All this death itself, all this living for the Lord, I'm going to be transformed one day. These momentary sufferings are nothing compared to that glory. Let's pray.

Lord, thank You for all the godly examples that You've given us in Your Word above all, Your blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve. And He served us by giving His life as a ransom sacrifice that we could be freed from being hostages under the wrath of God. Lord, thank You for that.

I just pray, Lord, You would keep us growing and becoming more like Jesus Christ. Lord, help us. Lord, help those here who are really truly needy and have areas in their life where they need someone to be a good example to them.

Where they have blind spots that they or we don't even see. And so, Lord, I just pray You'd help us. Move us on as we press on to heaven.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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