
HOW TO LIVE UP TO YOUR POTENTIAL

Happy Wednesday! I don't know about you, but I was excited about yesterday's study. To know that we have been placed in the unique position of being in Christ by our faith in Him as our Savior, a position that presents us to the Father as holy and blameless, a position that empowers us with the resurrection power of His Spirit. What a place to be. No wonder Paul could proclaim, "rejoice, again I say rejoice." We have much to rejoice about. God has even provided us with instruction and examples in living up to our potential. In fact, Paul exemplified the proper attitude when he said: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

As excited as I was yesterday, I have to admit I am not thrilled about today's text. It's heart breaking really, but God's word presents it, and we need to be aware of it, for it exists still today.

If you remember where we left off yesterday, Paul tells the Philippian church to follow his example, not just his, but also those that are like his example, those who are like-minded, then in parentheses he adds these words in Philippians 3:18-19

"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." (NASB)

Paul wants them to be very careful of who they are following as their example. He had frequently warned of false teachers, those teaching heresy, wolves in sheep's clothing, ones

full of hypocrisy. This time, he warns them in tears, once again showing his deep love and concern for this congregation. (I wonder if we have that same deep concern for those that may be led astray? Or is it easier just to condemn them for their poor judgment?) Paul warns them, in tears, to not follow the example of these others.

There were two basic groups of people who would fit this description at that time in Philippi. On the one hand there were the religious Jews (Judaizers). These were the Jews who rejected Christ as the Messiah.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7.

And then, on the other hand, there were the libertine Gnostics who had a dual philosophy that appealed to both the ascetic (do-gooder) and the sensual person (licentiousness.) The Judaizers were enemies of the cross, ignoring Isaiah's declaration that their own righteousness was "filthy rags." The lawless libertine Gnostics were enemies of the cross in that they abused the grace of the cross, shaming themselves in conduct that is unbecoming "born-again" believers and ignoring Paul's admonition in Romans 12 to continually "present your bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God." They held the position that the mind and body were separate, so they could do anything with their body, sin all they wanted, as long as their mind was knowledgeable and enlightened. Combining the sin of their prideful head knowledge with using their body to commit whatever sin they desired, they should have known better!

Neither group was ones that should be followed after, not by their instruction or their examples. And Paul makes clear just what will happen to these false teachers.

Look at Galatians 6:7 - What will they reap?

Look back at Phil. 3:19. Who is their god?

The etymology of the word means it's their own ego - pride is their agenda and they have elevated themselves as god. They are satisfying themselves. Those whose god is their ego develop a program of works so they can have pride in their own accomplishments. Is that something we find ourselves doing?

Remember our earlier studies when we talked about the fine line between motive when doing good works? We must be careful to not glory in our own works.

Take a look at Romans 10:1-11, also written by Paul.

These ones in Phil. 3:19 that Paul is talking about have their glory in their shame, meaning their character is revealed in the shame of them rejecting Christ. But those who believe (mentioned in Romans 10:11 KJV) won't be ashamed, why?

We see the importance then, in choosing wisely those whom we follow and learn from. They need to be those who believe, and not just believe, but those who are like-minded to Paul, those who are like-minded to Christ. It's incredibly critical to choose carefully who we imitate and learn from if we are to keep maturing then we need to be sure to follow mature believers. That would include those who we choose to trust, to confide in, to believe. Extremely vital to always "Test the spirits," are they from God? Only way we will know that is to know God's Spirit and His word, so I commend you for studying.

The fifth way Paul describes these ones that we shouldn't follow, is that, they have their minds on earthly things. This is a reference to human view-point. Human view-point says that salvation and the Christian Life are works programs. Human view-point places value on the things of this life rather than the things of God and eternity. The things of this world are fleeting and perishable, soon to be destroyed, so why would we follow after them? Human viewpoint is thinking as the world thinks, which negates God, elevates man, and generally is 180 degrees off of what God says.

It's good to be friends with unbelievers for how else will they learn of Christ, BUT we must be careful not to try to learn from or imitate them. Their view of things comes from this world, and as sage as we may think their advice is, if it's not from God's word it is dead wrong. Tread carefully where unbelievers are concerned. Guard yourself from following after them and make sure your closest friends are believers who uphold the word of God in their lives.

We need to know God's word so well that we recognize when human viewpoint sneaks in. It happens all too easily in our circumstances as we rationalize sin, shirk our own responsibility, and follow after our lusts.

Again, Paul's example is "to live is Christ, to die is gain." If we are to grow spiritually mature, that must be our mindset also.

Please heed the warning to be careful who you place as an example in your life. Test them up against the word of God and if there is any human viewpoint found, run the other way. Too often we are led astray by those who sound good, look good, appear good, only to find out that their way leads to destruction. Be diligent to seek out those who follow hard after God. (A hint: they will be the ones who know His word and live according to its standard.)

Guard yourselves. And "Let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." (Philippians 3:16 NASB) Spiritual maturity is the goal. Praise God, Christ has made it possible, and has sent His Spirit to help us move in that direction.

REVIEW

- ~ Paul's words warn us to be careful who we are following and imitating.
- ~ Don't follow those who are enemies of the cross. We can tell who they are because:
 - a. They are enemies of the cross (rejecting Christ)
 - b. Their end is destruction (reaping what they sow, in this case, unbelief sows destruction)
 - c. Their God is their appetite (ego, works based)
 - d. Their glory is in their shame (character revealed by their rejection of Christ)
 - e. Their mind is set on earthly things (human viewpoint)
- ~ Paul is a much better example of one to imitate. Other believers who are spiritually mature are better examples to follow. Christ, of course, is our standard and highest example, and the only way to truly know Him is to continue to be in His word.