

Intro The importance of having good examples to follow cannot be overstated. This is especially true in the ever glorious task of advancing the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God intended for his people to have models and examples to both follow and be influenced by. It is our responsibility to both provide good examples and to follow good examples.

Of particular concern in the Bible is the example provided by those in leadership in our church. To impress on our thinking the importance of finding and following Christ-like examples, consider the following statements from scripture . . .

Remember you leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7

So I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly . . . not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1Peter 1:1-4

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 1Timothy 4:12

The principle of imitation or following the example of someone is a key part of a growing partnership in the gospel. Not all gospel ministry is verbal, prominent or planned. The follower of Christ must include the spiritual discipline of hanging out with godly people, following the example of others farther down the road and setting himself up to be influenced by the right people.

Note that Paul already has taught us to model our attitude after the example of Jesus Christ (2:5). In the passage before us today and over the next few weeks we will focus on identifying and exposing ourselves to people who will influence us to follow the example of Christ. Last week we looked closely at the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus. We learned the importance of finding and following gospel partners like these who put others interests ahead of their own and have proven their obedience under stress. While today we are looking at 3:1-11, we need a quick glance at 3:17 to set our course.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

This command teaches us that God uses people to help us follow Christ. God wants us to look for, honor and imitate other believers. The 'lone ranger' approach, the 'I can or should be able to figure it out myself' mentality and the 'it's just me and God' attitude are proud, wrong and dangerous. Let's ask God to help us hear him well about finding and following gospel partners who will influence us toward greater Christ-likeness. It is a major way the gospel advances.

Our study over these four weeks, we hope in the Lord Jesus, will look like this:

Find and Follow gospel partners who . . .	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Value serving others. 2. Have proven obedience. 3. Boast in Christ alone. 4. Continue to grow in faith.
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Philippians 3:1-11

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This clear warning (1-3) and compelling personal testimony (4-11) help us to find and follow people who boast in Christ alone. We face major challenges when it comes to placing and keeping our confidence and focus on Christ rather than ourselves and our achievements. Our church struggles to keep Christ central rather than finding our joy in our achievements, faithfulness and status. You as individual Christians know how easy it is to place your confidence in how much you know, how long you have known it and how long it has been since your thinking has changed.

Hear God on this. He tells us to find and imitate people who have done a complete reversal in their way of doing life. Their values have been reversed. Their achievements, status, self confidence and works have been replaced with Jesus Christ. We need examples that talk about, rejoice in, rely on, suffer for, and glory in Jesus Christ and righteousness that comes through faith in him. Of all the things that we cannot get enough of or are 'coo-coo' over . . . Jesus Christ takes our supreme attention.

Finding & following gospel partners who boast in Christ alone begins with a warning about people who may confuse you (v 2). Paul issues a strong, repetitive and biting warning to pay close attention to the kind of people you let yourself be influenced by. The three names all refer to one group or kind of person that you find in every church – people who claim Christ as savior but still hold on to their own self righteousness.

Note what the self righteous are called . . . v2

- The dogs despised, insolent, impure – derogatory title
- The evil doers so called good works are really evil; 2Cor. 11:13, deceitful
- Those who mutilate the flesh the concision; circumcision necessary to righteousness

Gal. 1:7 – these are enemies of God who deceitfully distort the gospel from within

Note what the self righteous look and sound like . . .

- Christians with a strange absence of Christ.
- Christians with a few extra important beliefs.
- Christians who appear harmless, but are not.

With that stern and strong warning, we now proceed to learn the three identifying marks of a person who boasts in Christ alone. These characteristics are listed (3) and then illustrated through the personal testimony of the Apostle (4-11).

Finding and following gospel partners who boast in Christ alone involves finding a person who lives his relationship with Jesus Christ in a certain way. In contrast to the self righteous, the gospel focused person is obvious to all by these life dominating characteristics:

1. A genuine change of heart and life direction.
2. A radical treasuring of Jesus Christ.
3. A deepening detachment from self righteousness.

1. A genuine change of heart and life direction. 'who worship by the Spirit of God' v3

The basic meaning of this is that worship or service is now offered to God with the enabling of the inner ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Note what the scriptures teach regarding the change of heart by the Holy Spirit in conversion.

- You are born into God's family by the Holy Spirit Ezek. 36:25-27; Jn 3:4-8
- You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit Romans 8:1-11
- You are a new creation in Christ 2Cor. 5:16-17

New heart, new indwelling presence and new identity

Note what this change of heart and life direction looks like in real life:

- Consider former trusted values as unimportant and harmful. V.7
- Continuing consideration of all props and supports other than Christ as worthless. V.8
- Consider anything I gave up for the Lordship of Christ to be rubbish. V. 8

Christianity is measured by a radical change of operating values.

2. A radical treasuring of Jesus Christ. 'glory in Christ Jesus' v3

To glory in something or someone means to exult, boast or rejoice in them. Paul refers to this in 1:26.

Romans 5:2-11 teaches that a person's 'glorying' changes as a result of being justified by faith.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 teaches that rather than boasting in wisdom, strength or wealth, we should boast that we know and understand God.

Galatians 6:14 teaches that our only boast should be the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ rather than our achievements or accomplishments.

Note what this radical treasuring looks like in real life:

- Acknowledge Christ as the decisive difference in the changed life. 'for the sake of Christ' v7
Because of, on account of . . . Christ was the ground or cause of this amazing change
- Treasure a close personal relationship with Christ greater than all else. V.8
'surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord'

The experience of knowing Christ more than compensates for the loss of all things

- Looking forward to being with Christ more than present things. 'that I may gain Christ' 8
That I may gain him perfectly, totally, completely . . . 1:21

3. A deepening detachment from self righteousness. put no confidence in the flesh 3

Confidence is a conviction that serves as a basis for further thought and action. The issue of self righteousness must be understood and addressed by any person who becomes a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible is clear that our works are worthless, our hearts are completely corrupt and our ability to move toward righteousness is dead. Yet our sin and pride argue that we are not that sinful, our accomplishments must mean something and our service surely draws merit from God.

Our works, service, knowledge, faithfulness, sacrifice, attendance, giving, teaching, status, achievements and accomplishments are certainly valuable enough to place our confidence in for right standing or favor with God. Confidence in the flesh means all the things people place their trust in other than Christ.

Note what this deepening detachment looks like in real life . . . 4-8

- Self righteousness, once the basis of my confidence, is now seen as harmful.
V5-6 seven advantages; four inherited privileges; three personal achievements
It was painstaking effort, exemplary way of life, better than others, but without Christ.
Gain I had . . . counted loss and continue to count it as loss
- Jesus Christ, once seen as important, is now seen as absolute and essential to righteousness.
Being found in him . . . not a righteousness of my own, but . . . v9
Gain is Christ and righteousness that comes through faith in him.
Approval and acceptance secured by Christ not own effort.

Find and Follow gospel partners who . . .

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2. Have proven obedience.
3. Boast in Christ alone.
4. Continue to grow in faith.

1. A genuine change of heart and life direction.
2. A radical treasuring of Jesus Christ.
3. A deepening detachment from self righteousness.

Conclusion With God's help . . . let's determine to . . .

- Continue to consider our old values as worthless for the purpose of knowing and treasuring Christ.
- Turn from our self righteousness and place our confidence in Christ – receive his righteousness by faith.
- Find and follow Christ treasuring, self denying people.

Study Questions

1. What impressions or decisions did you come to as a result of the teaching of God's Word today?
2. Read Philippians 3:1-11; 3:17-18 as a group. Give/develop paragraph titles for v1, v2-3 and v4-11.
3. Share with the group an example of how you were influenced in some way by the example of another this past week. Who are the people in your life that count on you to provide an example of Christ-likeness?
4. How can you encourage the elders and church leadership to be better examples of Christ for our church family?
5. What are some practical ways that you should watch out for the dogs of self righteousness? Who are they? Why is it challenging to identify and resist these people?
6. Review main point #1. What are some of the props, achievements or values that you had before your new birth that you now consider useless and dangerous? How did that happen? Do you ever struggle with those old ways? How do you keep counting them as loss? Why?
7. Review point #2. What does it mean to 'glory in Christ Jesus?' Share practical ways from your life that you could do what is taught in the three bullet points. Example . . . how can you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the decisive difference in your life in your average daily experience?
8. Review point #3. Discuss the meaning of the term 'loss' (3x v7-8) and what is meant by the addition of the term 'rubbish'? What is it about you that you are supposed to move from the 'gain' column to the 'loss/rubbish' column?
9. Denying self and exalting Christ is hard . . . you need the help of examples. How can you help each other find and follow examples who boast in Christ alone?