



World Christian Fellowship

www.wcfondon.com
wcfondon@gmail.com

Philippians 35 Be an Example!

Philippians 3:16-17, *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

The theme is pursuing the prize. That is that the goal of the Christian life is to be like Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a process of pursuing Christ's likeness. The Christian life is a process of pursuing Christ's likeness, that in simple terms is the direction of the whole matter of sanctification. We must become more and more like Jesus Christ.

Pursuing Christ's likeness.

Jesus called His disciples, He said, "Follow Me."

Matthew 4:19, *Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

This command has not been replaced or improved upon.

The whole matter of the Christian life and Christianity is this matter of following Christ to become more and more like Him!

The Apostle John said that s precisely in his epistle.

1 John 2:6, *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

The Apostle Paul had intense pain in himself for the same goal.

Galatians 4:19, *My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you,*

That is why Paul was able to say follow me as I follow Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:16, *Therefore I urge you, imitate me.*

1 Corinthians 11:1, *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Ephesians 5:1, *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*

Most significant passage is in Romans 8 which states why God saved us.

Romans 8:28-29, *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Christ called us to be like Him¹

God's purpose in the beginning, that we be made like Jesus Christ.

V 14, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

The goal of every Christian is to be like Christ.

That is the goal.

That is the goal we pursue!

That is the purpose of our time here and that is the pursuit of our sanctification.

Becoming like Christ becomes the life-long objective of every Christian.

Paul writes to Philippi that he has not achieved perfection.

V 12, *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*

Paul says

I haven't arrived at perfection,

I am not like Christ.

That's why God laid hold of me and that's what I desire.

But I press on.

V 13, *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,*

What does Paul do?

One thing.

Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.

What's the goal?

Christ's likeness.

For the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The goal and the prize are being like Christ.

The goal is Christ's likeness, we pursue it, we don't ever reach it in this life.

But it becomes the prize that God gives us in the life to come. What is our goal here on earth is becomes our prize in Heaven!

We will someday be made like Christ. Until that day when we receive the prize, we pursue that as the goal.

There's no perfection here.

Don't we have more things to do than that?

Aren't we supposed to be glorifying God?

Yes, and the more you glorify God, the more you are like Christ.

Aren't we supposed to be evangelizing the lost?

Yes, and the more you do that the more you are like Christ.

The goal of the Christian life and the pursuit of sanctification is simply reduced to Christ's likeness.

How is that going to happen?

1. Word of God.

If we are going to become like Christ, we must know what Christ was like. If we want to know what Christ is like, then we must go to the Bible, the Word of God.

Bible is the revelation of Christ.

- The Old Testament sets the scene for Him, creates the need for Him, and announces that He is coming.
- The gospels record His arrival and fulfilment of the Old Testament.
- The book of Acts records the immediate impact of that.
- The epistles describe the significance of His life and ministry.
- The Revelation talks about the fulfilment.
- Christ is the focus of it all.

So, we study the Word of God in order that we might know what Christ is like.

Please do Not read for the following reasons:

- For the sake of theology.
- For the sake of answering someone's questions.
- For the sake of argument.

We study the Bible in which we get revelation about who is God and in that we understand more about Christ.

If you study the Bible for anything less than understanding more about the Christ whom you are to be like, you have missed the point.

2. Holy Spirit

If we are going to be like Christ, we are dependent on the spiritual work of changing us into the image of Christ which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18, *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

We, as Christians, are committed to the deep study of the Word, and committed to submission to the Spirit of God.

A Spirit-filled believer who lets the Word about Christ dwell in him richly is one who progresses toward the goal.

Colossians 3:16, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

We are to be like Christ.

That is to consume us.

Paul says, "One thing I do, I press toward that goal of Christ's likeness."

That's the one thing I do.

Does that simplify the focus of your spiritual life?

How can you reduce life to that one focus?

Paul had a very complex life before he was a Christian, he was trying to keep all the laws and traditions and formulas of Judaism both divine and human. He was trying to follow all the privileges and all that they deposit into his account.

On the Damascus Road he was confronted by the living Christ and immediately coming to the realization of the fact that Christ was everything.

Philippians 3:7, *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.*

Once I met Christ, I realized that everything in my asset column was a liability. Everything I thought was gain I counted loss, I found all I needed in Christ.

Philippians 3:8-10, *Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*

Colossians 2:3, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

The more I know about Christ, the more I know about wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:6, *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*

Pattern your life after Him.

Colossians 2:9, *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*

Remind yourself to strip away anything that clouds that or covers that and get back to that basic glorious reality that we are pursuing Christ's likeness.

When you study the gospels, you study them in order that you might know Christ better.

We must be focused on the person of Christ.

When you read the Word of God,
let it speak to you of Christ,
let it reveal the glories of Christ to you.

You yield yourself to the Spirit of God in obedience, let it be with the desire that He mould you and shape you from one level of glory to the next until you are more and more made like Jesus Christ.

V 16, "Whatever standard you've come to, move on from there, keep pursuing Christ's likeness."

The purpose of all your bible reading is to mould you into the image of Jesus Christ.

- It is to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.
- It is to let the Spirit of God fill you so that that Christ shaping may take place.

V 17, *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

If I am to pursue this goal of Christ's likeness, then I need to follow some example to show me how.

"Brethren," this is the third time Paul calling them in this chapter.

Paul is feeling very loving and warm-hearted toward them.

Paul is not putting himself on a pedestal, or as perfection.

What Paul is not saying that I am perfect, be like me.

What Paul is saying is that I am imperfect, follow the way I move toward that perfection.

From verses 12 to 16 that he has not obtained it, or perfect or arrived.

When we read the New Testament, we can understand that. God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from being too proud because he was prone to pride.

Paul had to be rebuffed and rebuked significantly for letting his mouth flow against the high priest at the end of the book of Acts and say things that he never should have said.

Paul was not a perfect man.

This is the significance of his example.

1 Timothy 1:15, *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

Paul is not sinless.

He has not reached perfection.

He has not had his sin nature eradicated.

Paul is saying that I am sinner, I have problems with my flesh, but I am pursuing the goal, follow my example.

Example of someone climbing the top of the mountain before you and someone dropped by helicopter at the peak.

What you would need when you are climbing up on the mountain you will have person who had gone ahead of you rather than having a person dropped at the peak.

We would love to have person who had gone ahead of us and who would say, "Follow me, I know the way up."

What I need is somebody who models the way up, who shows me the process.

How do I deal with my fallen flesh?

How do I deal with the struggles of life?

How do I deal with disappointment?

How do I deal with trials?

How do I deal with pride?

How do I deal with temptation?

How do I deal with sin?

Only in the overcoming of our sinfulness that we move toward being like Christ, so we need to follow somebody who is battling to overcome sin.

Paul put himself in that position numerous times.

I am not the perfect model for Christ.

I am just somebody you can follow on the path of victory.

V 17, *"Join in following my example."*

Literally the Greek says, "be fellow imitators of me, or keep on being fellow imitators,"

All of you be fellow imitators of me, mimic me, follow the way that I live my life.

V 14, *"I am pressing on toward the goal, you watch how I do it."*

There isn't any better historical example than Paul. This is one of the reasons, why the Holy Spirit filled the New Testament with that one man.

Paul dominates everything after the gospels.

Paul dominates the book of Acts from chapter 13 on.

13 of the epistles came out of his heart and his life.

Why?

Because we can pattern ourselves after Paul.

We can see how he struggled with the flesh.

Paul is a model for us of

- virtue,
- morality,
- victory,
- temptation,
- worship,
- service,
- patience,
- endurance,
- suffering,
- temper,
- handling possessions,
- handling relationships.

In so many ways he shows us how godliness deals with fallenness, something Christ could never show us because He was never fallen.

This is one of the reasons the Holy Spirit has loaded the New Testament with Paul because he is such a marvellous pattern.

So, as we study the New Testament and we can see through the life of Paul so much that helps us.

The number one model has been Paul for my ministry personally and I earnestly request every one of you have him.

Paul is the pattern of the pathway, the pursuit.

V 17, *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

Note/Observe, it means fix your gaze on.
It's like looking at a goal and fixing on it.

So, he is saying fix your gaze on those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

"us our pattern"

Plural designed to manifest humility.

1 Thessalonians 1:6, *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord whom we imitate."*

It could refer to Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus and it wouldn't be wrong to assume.

What Paul is saying that is not only follow me but observe others who walk according to the pattern that I manifest.

Paul probably does have in mind Timothy and Epaphroditus but beyond them, they have already been mentioned in the epistle, they were known to the Philippians, he is saying follow other people who follow me.

We can all follow Paul because in the bible gives details about him. But that has its limitations.

Timothy and Epaphroditus and the others never wrote New Testament books. We have no historical record.

So, if we can sum it up, the idea here would be this, Christ is the goal, Christ is the standard, Christ is the model, we are to be like Christ.

In order to know how Christ is, we study the Word of God. We study it until the Word about Christ dwells in us deeply, then we have a deep understanding of Christ, so we know what He's like, so we know what we are to be like.

We yield to the Spirit of God who keeps moulding us into that likeness which we understand.

Now in order to get on that path and have someone to follow, we follow Paul who literally is revealed to us in a replete way in

the New Testament, so we have plenty of data in order to know how he lived and how he acted.

But beyond that, we need some flesh and blood tangible living breathing people that we can also follow. Paul takes a step further and says that observe those who walk, that is daily conduct, who daily live their life according to the pattern you have in me, or in us.

How do we apply this practically?

We have the same situation today.

The goal is Christ.

We have a wonderful pattern for pursuing the goal in Paul. But we need some flesh and blood examples.

We don't have Timothy.

We don't have Epaphroditus.

They didn't write anything.

So, we have nothing to follow by way of written material.

But we do have godly pastors and elders. I believe the responsibilities of the Timothy's and the Epaphroditus of that age are the responsibilities of the pastor-teachers, elders of this age.

We have that great responsibility of following Paul toward Christ in such a way that we become the flesh and blood that others can follow us!

This is our responsibility!

This is the responsibility of those elders and overseers and pastors and teachers who lead.

We are to set the pattern!

Paul in writing to Timothy about being an example.

1 Timothy 4:12, *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

Titus 2:7, *in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,*

Be an example in

- speech,
- conduct,
- love,
- faithfulness and
- purity.

Live an exemplary life.

Why?

You are showing people the path.
They see the perfection of Christ.
They can read about the path of Paul.

The followers of Christ need,

- somebody they can touch,
- somebody they can watch,
- somebody they can feel,
- somebody they can talk to,
- somebody they can know, and
- somebody in their world in their time in their place they can follow.

Paul is not saying imitate my,

- gifts,
- calling,
- privileges,
- achievements.

But what Paul says is that, "Imitate and others who also are imitating mine, virtues, our humility, our unselfish service, our willingness to suffer, our devotion to Christ, our courage, our effort in spiritual growth,"

For every

- ❖ Pastor,
- ❖ Teacher,
- ❖ Leader,

- ❖ Elder,
- ❖ Christians,

This is the call! My prayer and request is that you be an example.

That is a God-ordained mandate.

It is essential and important for us to teach the Word of God, that we be true to the Word of God. But it must be sustained, supported, surrounded, undergirded by a virtuous life.

You are coming up that same mountain and you can see the goal at the top, but you need somebody whose rope you can hang on to, somebody you can touch and grasp so that you can follow the path.

This is one of the most serious failings in the church today. So many spiritual leaders failing miserably I am not sure what the history of the church will be in future.

The standard of expectation was lowered, and many thousands of people lost their way on the path to Christ's likeness.

That's the tragedy!

Where do you go to find the Timothy's and the Epaphroditus?

Where are the holy men?

Where are the truthful men?

Where are the kind of leaders those who manifest the meekness and gentleness of Christ?

Where are the powerful?

Where are the humble?

Where are the unselfish models of virtue?

Where are those who show us the path of victory over temptation?

Where are those who walk that holy walk?

Where are those who show us how to handle trial and difficulty?

Who can we observe?

Who can we hold on to?

Whose rope will help us climb?

Who lives the truth?

Who are the leaders that can say, "Imitate me, don't just listen to me, imitate me?"

That is the mandate.

Another reason that the whole process of spiritual growth toward Christlikeness is so blurred and marred today is because the leadership has fogged up the issue.

The pattern is very simple. Christ is the goal!

Scripture reveals what Jesus is like.

The Spirit of God is the power to move you into His image.

Paul has given you a path to follow.

We have a sick and distorted church because we have lost our way. We have lost our way simply because we have lost sight of Christ. We have lost sight of the Word and the Spirit.

We have lost sight of the crystal-clear patterns of teaching in the Apostle Paul's revelation. We don't have the leadership that we so desperately need to follow. We tolerate a lower standard of leadership than the Bible would ever allow.

The simplicity of Christian living is to be like Christ.