

Be Like Me • Philippians 3:17-21

Do you remember the terrible dilemma of King Arthur in the story of Camelot? His dreams were unraveling. He had brought together the noblest knights of the realm to sit about a round table. They would join together might and right into a magnificent medieval kingdom. It would be the best kingdom that the earth had ever known.

It seemed to be happening until a fatal blow was struck by the adulteress affair of the two people he loved most in all the world: Gwenevere, his queen, and Sir Lancelot, his best friend. He had to make an impossible choice between the kingdom he ruled and the people he loved.

Desperate for a solution, King Arthur paced the floor and stretched his mind until he remembered Merlin. Merlin the Magician was the man whom Arthur said “had taught him everything he knew.” Reaching for a solution he asked himself, “What would Merlin say if he were here? What would Merlin do if he were facing this dilemma?”

Merlin was King Arthur’s mentor. A mentor is a that special person who powerfully impacts and shapes your life so that it can never again be the same. Mentors are the men and women who influence the way you think and speak and act and live for the rest of your life.

Some Christians disdain mentors. They superciliously claim that they are not followers of men but followers directly of Jesus Christ. While I understand their point, I regret the tremendous loss they inflict on themselves. The Bible is full of examples of mentoring relationships. Moses mentored Joshua. Elijah mentored Elisha. Ruth had Naomi. Timothy had Paul. I look back on the mentors in my life and praise God for the way they shaped my life and ministry.

So, it is not out of egotism but out of spirituality that Paul writes in Philippians 3:17, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”

Paul is saying, “Do you want to be a winner in your Christian life? Do you want to put it all together right? Then just watch me and you do the

same. Imitate me. Mimic (that’s the actual Greek word!) me.”

This guy is either insane or profound. I think he is profound!

He explains a little more fully in I Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Paul isn’t some Jim Jones-type religious maniac who seeks a string of robots walking precisely in step behind him. He is a man who has learned to follow Jesus Christ and now invites everyone else to fall into step with him.

There is a powerful, powerful implication here: the way we live our Christian lives is more learned from the mentors we follow than on our own with the Lord. The pastors and parents, the teachers and friends, the people we watch and follow have a life-shaping influence on the kinds of Christians we become.

In fact, it is such a powerful influence that Paul immediately pleads for a plurality of mentors in every Christian’s life when he points out, “. . . take note of those (others) who live according to the pattern we gave you.” If you really want to know Jesus Christ, if you want to really live a Christian life, carefully choose godly men and women and imitate them!

Or, the other side of it: Be a mentor! Be the kind of Christian who says with Paul, “Join in imitating me!” Tell the searching, seeking, developing people around you, “Come, be like me. Learn from me. Follow me as I follow Christ!”

I know that some Christians feel uncomfortable even thinking, much less saying, such seemingly proud words. Perhaps that level of discomfort is itself an indication of spiritual humil-

ity and that you are already a mentor in the making.

There is a sense in which every Christian should be a mentor. We all ought to model and mentor what Christ has done for us. Too often we are so keenly aware of our sins and weaknesses,

***If you really want to know
Jesus Christ, if you want to
really live a Christian life,
carefully choose godly men
and women and imitate them!***

of how far we have to go, that we are blinded as to how far God has brought us. Paul knew he wasn't perfect and that he hadn't arrived but he recognized the responsibility to pass along the lessons he had learned to other Christians.

How about it? Are you convinced? Hook on to those godly mentors who will grow you more like Jesus! Be a mentor to others who need to imitate you and grow like Jesus!

Having argued the merit of mentors, Paul illustrates his point in Philippians 3:18-21. He picks from the catalog of spiritual lessons he has learned and gives the two he thinks lead the list.

In verse 18 he says, "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tear, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ."

There is a sense in which everyone who is not a Christian is an enemy. There is Jesus' team and the Enemy's team. The line of faith has been clearly drawn and every person is on one side or the other: Friend or Enemy. Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me is against me."

It doesn't take the serious Christian long to recognize the distinctions. As a Christian you strive for morality when non-Christians at the office all seem to be on the make. As a Christian you are desirous to honestly do everything right, but unbelievers are constantly trying to get away with as much as possible. As a Christian you love Jesus Christ and worship God the Father, yet you hear the people around you using God's name in a very different way.

After awhile you find yourself classifying everyone you know as friend or enemy, believer or unbeliever, Christian or non-Christian. But you also find yourself angry with the enemy, put out with the profanity, disgusted with the lifestyle, until you become hardened to them—maybe even hating them!

"No! No! No!" Paul the mentor shouts. Enemies? Yes. Lost? Yes. Christians? No. But never become hardened to them. Not a response of hatred, but a response of tears. When you encounter enemies of Jesus Christ and his cross, imitate Paul who imitates Jesus who wept for lost men and women. It is precisely out of those tears that Paul became the missionary who so impacted the world in his generation.

Paul writes of tears for the enemies and tears for their destinies. In verse 19 he says that their

destiny is destruction. This means that their paths do not lead to happiness, fulfillment, peace and prosperity. Oh, the person outside of Christ may truly believe that he is on the right track, that he is getting all the gusto from life, that he is a winner. But don't be deceived by the external bravado. God says that outside of Jesus Christ all men and women are lost. This life is ultimately a life of difficulty, unrest, uncertainty, fear and misery—only to be followed by an eternity without God that is far, far worse.

Paul calls upon us to imitate him and shed tears for the destiny of those who are enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I find that hard to do. I read some slick magazine piece about the life of those who outwardly sin—they seem to look so good, to feel so great, to have it all together. I'm tempted to wonder, maybe even to envy. Then I'm reminded that in Christ I have everything and without Christ they have nothing. "Their destiny is destruction", and my eyes fill with tears: tears for the enemies; tears for their destinies; tears for the mixed-up lives they live.

Paul picks three key characteristics of the non-Christian lifestyle. First he says, "Their god is their stomach." In other words, those without Jesus Christ are driven by their appetites. They are not motivated by what they should do but by what they want to do. Right is not nearly as important as appetite. They live to eat or to get money or to have sex or to fulfill ambition. The things they want become their gods!

He goes on to say that the second characteristic of their lifestyle is that "their glory is in their shame." In other words, they do immoral things and are proud of it.

Roger Palms tells about two women at Cambridge University in England who made a bet to see how many men each of them could go to bed with in a five day period. The incredible score at the end of five days was 98 to 62. Then, not to be outdone, another co-ed at Cambridge offered to have sex with all of the men of her particular college. There were 400 of them. The crazy part of this is they were proud of it! They were glorying in their shame.

Finally, Paul says, "Their mind is on earthly things." They have little or no concern for what God says or about eternity. Here is the ultimate

humanist and materialist living for self and living for today. They don't even give a thought to what God says or what eternity holds.

How do we respond to such people? Do we wish they would all go away? Are we secretly pleased when they contract some awful venereal disease? Do we have anger and hatred in our hearts for such shameless and self-centered folk? Or, like Paul, like Jesus, do our hearts ache and our eyes well up with tears for those tragic souls. Paul makes a powerful and profound point. We must not be hoodwinked by the Christless life. It is sad beyond words!

Be like Paul. Be like Jesus. Be stirred to tears over the lost-ness, over the destinies, over the lives of those who don't know our Savior and who are enemies of the cross of Christ. When we shed tears for those who are without Jesus Christ we become motivated to reach them with the gospel and that changes them from enemies into friends.

To illustrate the mentoring process Paul moves his illustration from tears to theology, from the way we feel about the lost to the way we think about God. Beginning with the theology of heaven in verse 20 he says, "But our citizenship is in heaven." The Greek word here is *politeuma*. It refers to the capitol where citizenship records are kept.

To the Philippians that was particularly important because they were a Roman colony, a little chunk of Rome over in Macedonia on the Greek peninsula. The people were Roman citizens with all the powers and privileges. No matter how everybody lived around them, they ate Roman food, wore Roman clothes, thought like Romans, educated their children like Romans and lived as best they could by Roman customs. But their records of citizenship were kept in Rome. Their *politeuma*, their commonwealth, was in Rome.

Paul's whole theology of living is that as Christians our capital and our citizenship are not on earth but in heaven. We are Ets—Extra-Terrestrials! We live by the laws of heaven. We keep the customs of heaven. We believe the religion of heaven. We wear the clothes of heaven.

I've spent a lot of time overseas—Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America. I'm grateful to God for those experiences. I've grown and learned and had a marvelous time (and a few miserable times, too!). Yet, I've never been able to forget that I'm

an American. It is here that my citizenship is recorded. It is here that my loved ones live. It is here that I call home.

That's just the practical theology of heaven that Paul calls us to imitate. This world is a marvelous place created by God for us to know and to enjoy.

We are grateful for it and

for the experiences we have. But let us never forget that our citizenship is recorded in heaven. In heaven is the One we love. It is heaven that we call home. And, until we go home to heaven we are merely here as temporary representatives or ambassadors in an alien land.

Sometimes we as Christians look to heaven with reluctance rather than with the enthusiasm of going home. When I was a first grader my family moved from one community to another. It was less than a mile away but it was another school district. I didn't want to go. I couldn't imagine leaving my school, my home, my teacher, my friends. My parents assured me that I would like the new house better than the old house. They said I would like the new school better than the old school and I would have new friends waiting for me until eventually I would forget what all the old was like. I went reluctantly because I had no choice. And it wasn't long before I discovered that it was even better than they had promised.

So it is with this life and the next. We hang on and fight as long as we can, like little children clinging to our mothers' skirts. We go to heaven and leave earth with such reluctance and in spite of all God's promises. But then we discover how good it is. This life and this earth will seem so distant as to almost be forgotten amidst the fullness of heaven in the presence of God. Until that day, let us live with our citizenship in mind, imitating Paul's theology of heaven.

Assured of heavenly citizenship and anticipat-

When we shed tears for those who are without Jesus Christ we become motivated to reach them with the gospel and that changes them from enemies into friends.

ing the better days to come, Paul introduces his theology of hope in Philippians 3:20b-21 when he says:

And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

This is the theology that changes pessimists into optimists! Here is the promise that Jesus is coming back again to take us to heaven where we are citizens. Here is the expectation that our bodies will be transformed into resurrection bodies like Jesus'. Here is the assurance that our lives and our destinies are safely in the hands of a sovereign Lord who has the power to do everything he promises.

This is more than the hope of heaven someday. It is hope for living triumphantly right now! Paul says that no matter how bad things are now, Jesus Christ will return to correct every injustice, cure every disease and right every wrong. We need never despair or be discouraged because we have hope for the future in Jesus Christ.

Paul is also saying that no matter how good things are now, when Jesus comes they will be far better. The best of this life will be like a match compared to the sun in comparison to what lies ahead. If things are bad now, Jesus will make them good! If things are good now, Jesus will make them better!

Let me suggest a potentially life-changing prayer:

Lord, bring into my life godly mentors like Paul. Bring me men and women to imitate until I grow more like Jesus Christ—with tears for the lost that lead me to live and to share a theology of heaven and hope.

Then Lord, make me a mentor so much like Jesus Christ that others will imitate me to become like him. For the glory of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
©Leith Anderson