

The Canadian Broadcasting Company has a science program called Quirks and Quarks.

The host... one day... was interviewing Dr. Kathleen Wermke... director of the Center for Pre-Speech Development and Developmental Disorders... at the University of Wurzburg in Germany. ... She was flush with excitement over a new discovery. ... She had just published results from her research project... comparing the cries of newborn babies in Germany... with those of newborns in France. ... The research involved extensive and precise recordings... in maternity wards of infants... Dr. Wermke digitally graphed the pitch and cadence of those cries... and then painstakingly compared... baby for baby... those cries along ethnic lines.

What they discovered stunned them: babies cry with an accent. ...In France... babies consistently inflect from a low to a high pitch. ... It's a wah-ayyy! ... In Germany... it's the opposite... high to low. ... It's an ayyy! wah.

The revolutionary element in this discovery... is that the intonation pattern exactly mimics the "melody" of the mother — or... more precisely... the patterns of speech characteristic of the mother's national language The womb-bound baby hears this... and copies it at birth.

A baby eavesdrops on its mother for nine months. ... It puts its ear to the rail of her bones... and listens to the tones of her sorrow and gladness... The child emerges from its mother's insides... with her voice ringing in its

ears... her music echoing in its own bones As a result... the baby's first instinct is to sing its mother's song.

But... you know... our inclination to imitate doesn't stop at birth. ... Have you ever started talking in the same distinctive manner as the person you are talking with... automatically... without thinking about it... or intending to...?

When I had just graduated from college... I went into a management training program for a large retail department store company. ... My boss was from Virginia. He was a stern man... a man you would never want to anger. One day... he had all three of his management trainees in his office and was presenting us with various business problems and asking how we might address them. ... At one point I was mortified... as I caught myself... only after I heard myself say... "Well... here's an idee-er..." The other trainees (who competed with me for the next management opening) snickered... and his eyes flashed a "You-didn't-just-mock-me-did-you?" look.

We imitate others both intentionally... and sometimes un-intentionally. ... But here is a scary thought. ... We probably all have someone who has imitated us this past week... and others who will imitate us this week. It may... or may not be intentional. ... Do you offer much... that is worth imitating...? ... Maybe at the end of every day... we should ask ourselves... what did I do today... that I would not want others to imitate...?

What attitudes did I exhibit...? What actions did I do...? ... What un-God-like behaviors did I proclaim to others... is perfectly acceptable...? And then we need to confess anything that comes to mind... as sin. ... Are you the kind of person that a new Believer in Christ should imitate...?

What Is the Gospel According to You?

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.
I'd rather one would talk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing: but example's always clear.

The best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds;
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.
I soon can learn to do it, if you'll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.

The lectures you deliver may be wise and may be true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do.
I may not understand the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

- Author Unknown

The first thing that strikes me about our passage this morning is how Paul **invites** other believers to imitate him. Wow! That's bold!

John 3:17

The man who wrote the great hymn... Amazing Grace... John Newton said,
"I have ever to confess with sorrow... that I am far from being what I ought to be... and far from what I wish to be... but also... blessed be God's name... I am very far from what I once was."

Every man is an example that someone else will follow. ... As Christians, we need to know exactly what kind of example we are setting for others. ...

If it strikes fear in your heart... to offer such an invitation... as Paul did... then pay attention... to what needs to be fixed in your Christian walk.

“Well...” you may be saying... “I would never say that to anyone... because I am far too humble. It sounds boastful... ‘look at me!’ ... and I would never dare to say... ‘Be like me!’ ... Doesn’t the church have enough people who enjoy having the spotlight placed on them... By the way... how does Paul get away with such a prideful sounding statement...?”

To casual readers... this may not sound like the voice of humility. ... However... there is **no** self-promoting ego here... calling everyone to focus on his example... as the sole model for action... because the call to imitation is larger than Paul himself. ... Notice that Paul says, "and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in **us**"—the "us" includes Timothy and Epaphroditus whom Paul had just held high as spiritual models in chapter 2. ... They... like Paul... pursued hard after Christ.

Also remember that Paul had just written... in this very context... just five verse earlier... *“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on...”* Then he continues in verse 13... *“forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*.

It is his **pursuit of Christ**... that he encourages others to follow. ... What does your pursuing to know Christ better and better... look like...? Are there strong patterns that others should imitate...?

No believer should ever claim... or think... that he/she has come anywhere close to perfection. But every believer should follow Christ with so much commitment and diligence... that he/she is a dynamic example for others. Every believer should be able to say follow my seeking after Christ — my seeking to be like Christ.

Paul's challenge to follow his own pattern or example... did not mean... of course... that they should copy everything he did; he had just stated that he was not perfect. ... But as he focused his life on being like Christ... so should they.

Paul also encourages them to look at multiple examples... here in verse 17... not just himself... *“and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us...”* ... His word for “keep your eyes on” is one word in the original language of the New Testament... it is “σκοπειτε.” We get the words “telescope” and “microscope” from this word. This word... and the tense that Paul used with it... means “set your sights intensely and constantly on those who are in your midst and are pursuing to know Christ better and better...” In other words... regular study of such people... is to be a frequent practice for the believer.

We learn by seeing truth lived out... and modeled. ... We learn by imitation. Some things are caught... not taught. ... Some things are caught **and** taught.

Philippians 3:17 is a very practical verse. It is telling us two things of critical importance. ... We must set the most perfect pattern possible... for others to follow. ... But it also says something else... we must follow after those

who live on the highest plane of life. ... We must mark those who walk as examples... and follow after the great traits of their lives. ... We must take those who live as examples... and dissect the traits of their lives... and apply those traits to our own lives.

Let me get REAL practical here. ... Devour the biographies of strong believers who have accomplished great things for the kingdom of God. Follow Paul's instruction here... and do this regularly. You can find many of them online... or at the Christian bookstore. Read Christian biographies of men and women of God.

Many Christians have learned a great deal from reading about Dietrich Bonhoeffer... Bonhoeffer was a Christian theologian in Germany during Hitler's time. He was executed for resisting the Nazis. During his life... he was greatly moved by reading a book entitled Heroes of Everyday. ... It was filled with stories of courageous young people who... with selflessness and clear thinking... often saved others' lives... sometimes at the cost of their own. ... And... apparently... shortly before his execution... Bonhoeffer was also reading Plutarch's Lives... a book that explores the courageous character of ancient figures. ... Based on Bonhoeffer's example... can we doubt that Bonhoeffer's reading shaped his own behavior... including his decision to risk his life to save others?

Ethics are more formed by the stories... with which we surround ourselves... than by the rules that are drilled into us. ... Tell me what stories you value... and I will have a good start on knowing who you are... and how you will act in the world.

I will say this again... *We learn by seeing truth lived out and modeled. We learn by imitation. Some things are caught, not taught. Some things are caught **and** taught...* Ethical behavior is mostly learned this way!

How sad for the believer to fill his/her mind with the latest news from the most recent **gossip** magazine. You can be like the majority of our society... and seek to imitate movie stars... and other famous entertainment people... whose lives are vile and godless. ... Intentionally... and un-intentional... etical behavior is being formed. ... But Paul and other heroes of the faith... are certainly better models to fill our minds with... learn from... and follow.

Now... just because a person goes to church regularly... and even if they are active there... this alone does **not** qualify them... as someone you are encouraged to watch closely and imitate. Paul warns us with tears... (and many commentators think Paul cries because they are in the church)... so many are professing to be Christians... but they should **not** be imitated. They **walk**... as enemies of the cross. Their mouths might proclaim that they follow Christ... but their **actions** (their day-to-day walk)... they do just the opposite. Copy those like Paul and others... who constantly pursue Christ to know Him better... not those... who Paul now... in the next two verses... warns against.

Philippians 3:18-19

There are several things we should take note of... about those Paul did not want believers to follow. Verse 18 says that there are “many.” It is a crowd... who are not actively pursuing Christ. The fact that there are many... can be very motivating to live the Christian life with mediocrity. “If

so many are not following hard after Christ... It must be OK... ... But Paul says... *"I tell you this while weeping."* ... It broke Paul's heart to know that MANY were professing Christ... but declining spiritually and in character. Then he goes on to describe their decline.

First of all... they were LIVING... (or as Paul says it... they "walked") as enemies of the cross. ... Now I am sure that if you ask anyone who attends church regularly... but does not actively pursue spiritual growth for their life... *"Are you an enemy of the cross...?"* They would vehemently deny it. ... Even the most carnal Christian of any church would deny the title of being an enemy of the cross. But that doesn't mean they're not!

These that Paul warned the Philippian church about... were probably first century Judaizers. Paul was constantly badgered by these enemies of the cross. They followed Paul from town to town insisting that Paul was wrong. The Judaizers demonstrated a hostility to the redemptive message that Paul brought... by insisting that faith alone in Christ was not sufficient to save. They expressed that it was necessary to believe in Christ... but **also** circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law was needed to receive justification. In essence they negated the value and the sufficiency of Christ's death.

Although I don't think we still have Judaizers in our churches today... we **do** still have enemies of the cross. How does a person live as an enemy of the cross...? Answer: They have little or no regard for what stands behind the cross – **grace!** ... The cross is all about God's grace toward us. None of us deserve the provision that Christ made... so that we can have our sin forgiven... and be brought into His kingdom to serve Him.

We live as an enemy of the cross if we have an attitude that we are somehow more **deserving** of God's favor... than non-believers... and even some Christians. ... We live as an enemy of the cross if we think that God saved me... because He saw something good in me... that I was **worth** saving. (*"...I can understand how grace was needed in order to save a depraved person like Rick... but God knows all my potential... He saw that He could use me... THAT'S why He saved me..."*) ... Anyone who sees themselves as deserving... or more deserving than someone else – is living as an enemy of the cross.

We live as enemies of the cross if we accept God's grace toward us... but we are unwilling to extend it to others. (*"...People have to earn my favor! You have to earn my respect...! I won't accept you... I won't overlook any wrongs you commit against me (unless you duly convince me that you're sorry) ... even though Christ continually has to pour out His grace toward me."*)

We live as enemies of the cross if we accept salvation by grace... through faith... but we try to **maintain** our relationship with God through **works**... or we try to get God to grant our requests... by making Him obligated... owing us. Perhaps we think that we can barter with God... *"God... I have something I need for You to supply for me... and if You do... here is what I will do for You... I will sit and listen to Pastor Jim's sermons for a whole year... I'll even try to stay awake...! How's THAT, God!? Now... here is what I want You to do for me..."* ... Thinking that you can make God behold to you... thinking that He owes you something... is to disregard the ONLY means by which we are accepted by Him – totally unmerited... unearned... undeserving favor... which is known as "grace."

And finally... we live as enemies of the cross... if we accept our free gift of salvation... and then pretend that He has no call on our life to serve Him.

“Thanks for the salvation, God. I’ll call You if I need anything else...”

These are just some of the ways... that people who go to church... can live as enemies of the cross. There are many... but don’t follow them. Their end is destruction.

Paul also uses the description that their “God is their belly.” ... What does he mean by that...? ... Their appetite... their desires... are for the physical pleasures of this world. They are led by these appetites. Although they claim to be Christians... they center their lives around: possessions and property... houses and furnishings... food... comfort and plenty... position and success... pleasure and sex... acceptance and social standing... money and wealth... honor and fame.

Just take a moment and think upon any of the above... how some persons center and focus their lives upon such things. ... Some persons spend more time in front of a mirror... or eating... or thinking about acceptance... or success... or possessions... or some business deal... than they do in prayer... Bible study... or pursuing Christlike behavior through their actions.

The point is this: when a person has a craving and an appetite for such things... they become his/her god. ... The craving begins to consume his/her thoughts... energy... and effort. ... Before long this craving is taking up so much energy... that he/she has very little... if **any** time... for God or for anything else. ... His craving... his belly... becomes his god.

Today... the professed Christian whose own physical and personal needs come before the Lord... whose bodily comforts (what and where he eats... how and where he lives... and what he spends to satisfy his own pleasures) displace the cross... had better take note... because his god has become his belly. ... Beware of any pleasure that impedes your passionate pursuit of Christ.

I am not saying that believers cannot enjoy nice things. But when these things become our glory... when we pursue them more vehemently than a closer walk with Christ... treasuring them... more than Christ... then... these glories have become our shame. ... *“They glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”*

Sad to say... that there are those in our churches today... like the Judaizers in Paul's day... who profess to be citizens of heaven... but whose lives do not show it. ... They may be zealous in their religious activities... and even strict in their disciplines... but there is no evidence of the control of the Spirit of God in their lives. ... All that they do is energized by the flesh... and they get all the glory. ... It is bad enough that they are going astray... but they also lead other people astray. ... No wonder Paul wept over them.

Those of whom Paul says we are not to follow... have their eyes set on the things here on earth. Down here is what they live for. Next... Paul contrasts their wrongful motivations... with the motivation that leads those we **should** imitate. ...And they have much better prospects!

Philippians 3:20-21

Believers have better prospects than anyone else. ... The unbeliever... and those who profess Christ... but who live just like an unbeliever... have a far **lesser** prospect... for which they aim their lives.... The fleeting pleasures of this earth... is the best their limited minds can hope for. But in contrast... the models we are to study and imitate... are motivated by far more exciting and glorious prospects.

There is tremendous energy... and available power to us... in our future hope. ... Look how this is played out in the lives of Abraham and Moses...

Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:24-26 (ESV)

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

(LISTEN) The fact that Jesus Christ is returning... is a powerful motive for dedicated living... and devoted service today. On the subject of Christ's return... John wrote:

1 John 3:3 (ESV)

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The spiritually minded believer does not live for the things of this world... he anticipates the blessings of the world to come. ... This does not mean that he ignores or neglects his daily obligations... but it **does** mean... that what he does today... is governed by... (he is motivated by)... what Christ **will** do in the future. ... He/she is living for the things that really matter.

Paul mentions in verse 21 of today's passage... that when Jesus returns... He will "subdue all things unto Himself". ... That word "subdue" means "to arrange in ranks."

Isn't that our problem today? ... We do not arrange "things" in their proper order. ... Our values are twisted. ... Consequently... our vigor... our energies are wasted on useless activities... and our vision is clouded so that the return of Christ is not a real motivating power in our lives.

Living in the future tense means letting Christ arrange the "things" in life according to the proper rank. ... It means living "with eternity's values in view," and daring to believe God's promises about our future.

The Judaizers were living in the past tense... trying to get the Philippian believers to go back to Moses and the Law... But the believers we are to follow... live in the future tense... anticipating the return of their Savior.

Every citizens of Philippi... a Roman colony... enjoyed a distinct and rare privilege. ... They were automatically citizens of Rome... sharing all the rights and privileges of Roman citizens. ... Now the vast majority of them had never even been to Rome. ... Paul's readers in Philippi... therefore... would have understood quite well... what it means to be citizens of the supreme city... while not yet living there. ... The Philippians felt that it was their responsibility to take on the behaviors and characteristics of those who lived in Rome. In Philippi... the laws of Rome were enforced. ... The people wore the same kind of styles... that were worn in Rome. ... They spoke Latin. To the greatest extent possible... everything in Philippi was like Rome. ... The point to see is this... the Philippian believers knew exactly what it meant to live in one place... and to be a citizen of another place.

This makes sense for why Paul used the word for "citizenship" that he did... "Our citizenship is in heaven"... The word he used is "πολιτευω." It means the total way of life... it means the total life-style. ... Believers who you and I are to imitate... have a total way of life... behaving as a citizen of Heaven. They live for the future with Christ.

This morning our very practical passage of study has encouraged us to imitate a good spiritual model... as our own pattern for living. These verses have warned against... and shown us... what a poor model to imitate looks like... and what a proper model looks like. ... You and I would pursue Christ more effectively... if we followed Paul's exhortation.

For some reason... human beings cannot physically walk in a straight line. There's just something about our inner orientation... that causes us to walk in a crooked or warped way. ... That's the conclusion of Robert Krulwich, science correspondent for NPR. ... In an interview on Morning Edition... Krulwich cites a study from Jan Souman... a scientist from Germany... who blindfolded his subjects and then asked them to walk for an hour in a straight line. ... Without exception... people couldn't do it. ... Of course everybody *thinks* they're walking in a straight line... until they remove the blindfolds and sees their crooked path.

Krulwich observed...

This tendency has been studied now for at least a century. ... We animated field tests from the 1920s... so you can literally see what happens to men who are blindfolded... and told to walk across a field in a straight line... or swim across a lake in a straight line ..., and they couldn't. ... In the animation... you see them going in these strange loop-de-loops in either direction. ... Apparently... there's a profound inability in humans to [walk] straight.

According to this research... there's only one way we can walk in a straight line. ... It is by focusing on something ahead of us — like a building... a landmark... or a mountain. ... If we can fix our eyes on something ahead of us... we can make ourselves avoid our normal crooked course. ... Kurlwich concludes... "Without external cues... there's apparently something in us that makes us turn [from a straight path]."

This is apparently also true about our spiritual walk. We need external cues. We need examples to follow... to keep our spiritual walk straight. Every believer needs to study and imitate other believers who actively pursue Christ... and are motivated by the future Christ has promised us. And then BE that model for others.