

## Are You Going To Go God's Way?

As I was looking at the theme of this passage a song came to mind. The song was *Are You Going To Go My Way?* It was by Lenny Kravitz, and I was surprised to see it was released thirty years ago in 1993. I looked up a little bit of information on it, and read that Lenny Kravitz, in a Rolling Stone interview, said that his intent in the song was for people to hear the words of the song as if being spoken by Jesus Christ, who is asking "*Are you going to go my way?*" I'm not sure it worked that way for most listeners. But I thought, that's not a bad title for this message because, in this passage, it is as if the Lord is asking us if we're going to go his way or some other way.

This issue brings the apostle Paul to tears. Sometimes when you try to form an image of the temperament of the apostle Paul, you get the impression that with his fiery temperament, with his achievement-oriented personality, it probably would not be necessary for him to carry a box of facial tissues. He was the one who told a church that he was coming to visit and that if they didn't straighten out by the time he got there, he would use the rod to make a few attitude adjustments. (**1 Corinthians 4:21**) Paul was the one who told **Titus** that he should reject a person who was causing problems or division in the church after the first and second warnings. "*Don't let him do continual damage ... reject him after a first and second warning!* So, he could be very intense and firm in the things that he said and was willing to do. And yet, in this passage, he mentions his tears. He doesn't speak like this very often, but he does here, and so this should cause us to ask *why?* What we learn in this passage is that it is a sad and sorrowful thing that there are people in this world who are enemies of the cross of Christ, and some Christians are in serious danger of drifting off with them – joining them in a lifestyle as dishonoring to God as it is futile and empty. This reality breaks Paul's heart. It reduces him to tears... it is out of those tears that he calls us to live a different - distinctive lifestyle.

**Verse 17** *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*

*The first thing he tells us here is that...*

**I. WE NEED TO FOLLOW THE PATTERN SET BY PEOPLE WHO ARE PRESSING ON TO KNOW CHRIST.**

*Notice that this Scripture tells you...*

**A. There is a particular pattern that we should follow.**

The word example here in **verse 17** is the Greek word *typos* (τύπος). We get the English word *type* from this, as in the phrase *What type of person are you?* It is sometimes translated as a *pattern*; there is a type of life or a pattern of life that we are to follow.

If you look back over what Paul has been revealing about his own spiritual life, to discover what this pattern is. It consists of two things.

**1. An unconquerable determination to press on in your relationship with Christ.** What we saw earlier in Philippians, just a few verses before, is that the pattern consists of an admission of imperfection coupled with a commitment to perseverance. He said I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection in my life. I'm not perfect yet, far from it, but this one thing I do, **Philippians 3:14**, *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* In spite of my disappointments with others and myself, in spite of suffering, in spite of setbacks, In spite of the ebb and flow of my energies and emotions, I press on to know Christ and grow in him.

*That's the first part of the example or pattern. The second part is this:*

**2. This commitment to press on is sustained, not by an anxious uncertainty about my relationship with Christ but by the most profound assurance that I have already been inundated by his grace.** Again if we were to look just at a few verses prior to this, we would see where Scripture talks about renouncing any sense of earning God's favor by our efforts or by keeping the law of God. **Verse 9** says, *I want and am found in him, not having a righteousness of my*

*own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—.*

That is part of the pattern of a truly Christian life. There is humble confidence that things are all right between you and God! That confidence is not arrogance because the source of that confidence is not your behavior or character. In **verse 3**, we are told true Christians put no confidence in their own efforts to earn acceptance with God. The reason for this is that the Bible takes a radical view of human sinfulness. **Romans 3** tells us that there is no one righteous, no not one! I think of the prayer of the little boy who said, "Lord, forgive me for all of the bad things I did today, and also forgive me for all of the bad things I didn't get around to!" The Bible takes a radical view of human sinfulness.

The good news is that this view of our sin is complemented by an equally radical view of God's grace. If you turn to Christ and admit your need for forgiveness and your desire for salvation and help, and you put your trust in Christ, God promises to forgive you completely and accept you entirely. A righteous standing in the eyes of God is a free gift. It is freely given to you, not because it doesn't cost anything. It was actually very costly, but the cost was paid by someone other than you. In Christ, God came into our world, took on human flesh, lived a perfect life in our place for us, took that life to the cross where he sacrificed himself as a payment for our sins. He rose triumphantly from the grave as our Lord and Savior. Jesus paid it all. And so, we press on to know him not out of anxious insecurity trying to earn his favor but because he's already given us what is the most valuable thing ever, and he paid the price in love for you and for me.

Church Historian Dr. Richard Lovelace has written a great book on spiritual renewal called "*The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*." He studied all the periods in the Bible and in history where real spiritual renewal has taken place. He has tried to identify the primary elements of spiritual renewal. One of his discoveries was that in every period of history, Christians begin to live powerful lives of spiritual renewal with God when they learn how to wake up each day and say, "*I am accepted! I am righteous in the eyes of God, not because I'm trying, promising, or*

*working or earning it in any way! But because of the grace of God and the righteousness, forgiveness, and acceptance that God gave me the moment I turned to Christ and trusted in Him.”*

*To live your life God’s way is to live according to this pattern of commitment to Christ based on confidence in Christ. In that context ...*

**B. There are certain people who can help us go God’s way.**

**Verse 17**, *keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* There are people who live like this. Keep your eyes on them. Even in a world of imperfect people, there are good examples, and we ought to take note of them and learn from them. **Proverbs 13:20** *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.* Learn the value of finding and following good examples, And learn the importance of being a good example as well.

In **1 Corinthians 11:1**, Paul says; *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* That is something every one of us should strive to be able to say. Anyone who knows me will soon see my many shortcomings. My prayer has to be that they will also see my willingness to continually strive to press on and to know Christ and become more like him. Parents, you care so deeply about your children in this current world and culture. The most powerful thing you offer them will not simply be the words you speak, or the schooling you choose, but who you are, what you love and for whom you are living. Husbands, if you want to faithfully lead in your household for your wife and for your children, then lead in this. So live that you can say to them *“follow me as I follow Christ.”* In your circle of friends in your social circle, what kind of life do you model? What kind of example do you offer? The best way to become a good example is to follow good examples.

To follow *that* pattern and good examples, we have to resist the downward pull of a very different kind of lifestyle! This is what comes through in the verses that follow. **Verses 17-19** *Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup>For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of*

*Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*

*It's clear...*

## **II. WE NEED TO OWN THE UNIQUENESS OF OUR IDENTITY AS CHRISTIANS.**

*There are two parts to this. First,*

**A. We are surrounded by the bad examples of many who are *not* going God's way.**

He is saying we need to pattern our lives after good examples, for there are "*many*" who are such bad examples. It seems obvious that even in ancient days, long before social media this needs to be said because bad examples can exert strong influences. Some lifestyles celebrated in the world look deceptively appealing and seductive. So Scripture shows us the reality. In **verses 18-19**, five phrases describe the kind of person we should weep over but never follow after.

***First, don't follow those who are enemies of the cross of Christ.***

***Verse 18, many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.*** This may seem extreme but remember it was Jesus who started all this "*either-or,*" "*all-or-nothing*" talk! He said in the final analysis, you either are for him or against him. You can't serve two masters. Do not follow those who are opposed to all your Savior stands for and what your Savior died for.

***Second, don't follow those whose destiny is destruction.*** In the Bible, the word "destruction" is the word most often contrasted with salvation. The two destinies that all of us face are salvation or the destruction. There is no neutral in-between destiny. And destruction in the Bible does not refer to annihilation or non-existence. It refers to *hell* as an experience of eternal spiritual lostness and suffering due to an irreversible separation from God. Just as salvation goes with heaven, so destruction goes with hell. If we claim to have a different destiny, we ought to have a different lifestyle.

**Third, don't follow people who simply live to satisfy their appetites. Verse 19 uses a startling phrase "Their God is their belly!"** For some people, their appetites and desires dictate their lives. Some people live as if the ultimate freedom and fulfillment are to always affirm your desires and indulge your hunger. Follow your heart can very easily turn into feed your lusts.

**Fourth, don't follow people who glory in their shame.** It is possible to drift so far from God that people take pride in and celebrate things that are abhorrent to God. On March 10<sup>th</sup> of this year, dozens of House Democrats proposed that that day be recognized nationally as *Abortion Provider Appreciation Day*. Earlier this year president Biden hosted the largest ever Pride month event at the White House in the Rose garden. Are we called by God to love all people with the same love with which he loves us? Yes! But there is a perverse tendency in fallen humanity to actually glory in things God reveals to be antithetical to his will for humanity and destructive to human flourishing. Our former president boasted about sexually assaulting women and infidelity and lots of other ungodly ugliness. To recognize all these things is *not* claim that all things are morally equivalent and equally bad or even to tell Christian believers how they should vote. It is to point out the clarity we need to sustain in our hearts. In the days of Jesus, the Romans murdered innocent people in the Coliseum as entertainment, but Jesus didn't hesitate to condemn all kinds of inward lust, hate and hypocrisy for fear that to do so would suggest moral equivalency. The issue for us is spiritual clarity in an ungodly culture.

Issues relating to sex and sexuality may be at the forefront of our thinking when we come to a passage like this, but it's bigger than that. I looked a sermon that Charles Spurgeon, a world-renowned preacher from the late 1800s, delivered on this passage. I was wondered what he identified in his day as an example of people whose glory is their shame. Here's what he said *They boast of things of which they ought to be ashamed. Do you know there are some who can grind down the wages of their workmen and boast that they've done a clever and businesslike thing and then go and take a sacrament?* What I appreciated about that is the way it showed me that it's easy to see the

most glaring examples in our culture today and miss many things that are equally applicable in the eyes of God. Let's each ask ourselves if the things we boast about and celebrate truly reflect the mind of Christ and the beauty of the gospel and what it means to go God's way!

We need to shake our heads free of confusion and lift our hearts to Christ and glory in the things that deserve to be praised. ultimately, I think of the words of the apostle Paul in **Galatians 6:14**, *But far be it from me to boast (glory) except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

*Don't live like enemies of the cross of Christ who are destined for destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame.*

***Fifth, Don't follow those whose minds are set on earthly things.***

What God wants and what you need is that in the midst of doing a lot of earthly things like being friends, making money, having fun, and finding fulfillment, you choose to be primarily concerned with spiritual realities and, therefore, with practicing the presence of Christ and becoming like him. You have to ask yourself, *"Am I committed to a pattern of life that is based on the persistent pursuit of a deeper relationship with Christ, or am I, in my heart and spirit, conforming to a pattern that is contrary to what we learn from Jesus?"*

**B. As Christians, we are called to live God's way because we are citizens of heaven.**

**Verse 20-21** *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it, we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* The Philippians would have really understood this imagery because Philippi was a Roman colony settled primarily by Roman citizens and retired Roman soldiers. It was a city in what was in those days called Asia, and so they were in a colony from another country, and they lived not by the culture and the customs of the world surrounding them but by the culture and the customs and the laws of Rome. And so the Scripture says that's how we're to live on this earth. We're citizens of heaven. We live by the values and customs of God.

If you are a Christian, you should not for a moment even contemplate living according to the pattern that is so prevalent in the world around us because you belong to a different realm you are citizens of heaven. You belong to Jesus your Savior and your Lord!

**Verse 20** tells us that we await a Savior. He is our Lord! **Verse 21** tells us that he will *transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to Himself*. When Scripture speaks of the glorious body of Jesus, it's talking about the glorification of the body of Jesus after his resurrection from the dead. I told you recently about the conversion of Molly Worthen, the historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And how the thing that convinced her was when she discovered that she had been completely ignorant of the historical evidence for the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. She came to see, as a historian, it was absolutely, intellectually, and rationally compelling. There are many people like her in today's world who've never wrestled with the objective historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. What this Scripture is telling us is that the resurrection of Jesus is not only the evidence of the truth of the gospel but also of the nature of our hope as Christians. These lowly bodies we possess now are going to be transformed and made glorious - fit for heaven and eternity.

## Conclusion

If Jesus Christ was like any of the founders of any other world religions - if he had died and just stayed dead - living the Christian life would mean just trying to follow the pattern for life that he had left us. Scripture says that Jesus is not like that. He's someone who died for our sins and did not stay dead. He rose again from the dead, and he is alive, and that changes everything. In the Bible, the Christian hope is a joyful conviction about a glorious future that's based on compelling evidence. That hope enables you to face anything and everything. It's unsinkable. No matter how much the world piles on you that threatens to sink you, there's a buoyancy that enables you to rise back up again and press on. Where does this come from? It's not just optimism. It's



not just willpower. It's not an anxious, desperate, striving to earn God's acceptance. It's a relationship with the living Christ who indwells you. It's knowing him. It's knowing the hope that you have because of him and because of all of that, out of this tremendous confidence in the grace that has embraced you, it's pressing on and never giving up.

**Amen**

### **A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ**

Almighty God, I lift my heart to you to declare my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I want to be found in him, not having my own righteousness, based on my performance, but having the righteousness that comes from you through faith in Jesus. His death on the cross as a sacrifice for my sin is my only foundation for eternal salvation. His resurrection empowers my hope. Thank you for your saving grace freely given to me in Christ. Amen

### **A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal**

Lord Jesus, my Savior, and King, Grant me a humble confidence in your saving grace and an unconquerable commitment to pressing on to know you and become more and more like you. Enable me by your Holy Spirit to forget the things that are behind and to press on in my pursuit of your purposes in my life. Help me to live as one whose citizenship is in heaven and who is waiting in hope for the fulfillment of all your promises in Christ. Amen