

Who do you see as the most looked-up-to and followed Christian role-models??? I don't have an answer for you – I'm just wanting us to start thinking about the sorts of people, who **you** would consider to be “really good examples of disciples of Jesus”, whom you could be emulating...

Now, I usually find, when I directly ask someone a question like this, usually they'll give me the name of a somewhat unknown Christian, often from their own local church, and usually, they're quite elderly, but their characteristics are usually:

- Has a strong faith in Jesus;
- Live simply;
- humble;
- faithful;
- has a servant heart;...

And so, when we take the time to consider it, that's probably the sort of answer many of **us** would give... And yet in reality, the most followed Christians in the world, are nothing like that...

Some of the most popular (and most followed) Christians in the world, are pretty much exactly the opposite. Some of those, who have the biggest following, aren't much more than glorified motivational speakers, with a message of how to be blessed with health, wealth, and happiness in this life. And it seems, their key talent, is to being able to make their listeners feel really good about themselves, and all the while, raking in the \$ that helps them to enjoy **their** life of health/wealth&fame....

Some of the most followed Christians might be:

- motivational speakers;
- recording artists;
- tele-evangelists;
- movie stars (who happen to be Christians)...
- sports stars (who happen to be Christians);

Who's getting followed???

- Someone like Joel Osteen has 22,000,000 followers on Facebook...
- Joyce Myer 11,000,000
- In Australia, Brian Houston 350,000

Now, compare the celebrity Christians, to this person:

Let me tell you about a young lady, Robyn and I know: As a young single Christian woman, she has moved to a North African country, to learn Arabic, and to share the gospel with Muslim women... I can't even tell you her name, because that could put her life in greater danger, and she'd most likely be deported...

What sorts of Christians do we truly want to model our lives on???

Someone like this unknown servant of Christ, who's given up everything? Or a celebrity Christian???

In V7, Paul makes a pretty big call, and it's not the sort of thing that I'm in the habit of saying...

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

Now, usually, the last message I want you to take home from one of my sermons is “I should become like Michael Brumpton”.... Imagine if we had a church full of people who were just like me... Robyn couldn't stand it...

I mean, any preacher with the tiniest skerrick of humility would have a great deal of difficulty in ever suggesting, that their congregation should try and be like them...

But, that's what Paul's said...

Now, he has said it in the past, but when he's said it in the past, he's qualified it:

1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV) Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Alright, so when he said that, what he's really saying, is imitate Christ, like I imitate Christ... Which is a very different to saying “Imitate me”..

Now, in the immediate passage that we're studying today, he doesn't put that qualifier in (in the same way),,, But within the overall context of Philippians, “imitating Christ” is **exactly** what he's talking about...

- Disciples of Jesus, should be modelling themselves on Christ.
- And as a disciple of Jesus, Paul imitates Christ; And

- Earlier in the letter, he gave the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus – the way these blokes lived, they also were imitating Christ...

And so when he's saying, "You lot should imitate me", this isn't some kind of ego-trip for Paul – it's basic discipleship 1.0.1 – What's it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? – Well, a disciple of Jesus follows Jesus, because "following the Teacher", is what a disciple does...

OK, so we're following Christ, and there's an important place here, for Christian role-models:

Does it really matter, who we look up to as role-models???

Too right, it does.

Paul's telling the Philippian church, there's some in their midst, who are truly worth following, and they're worth walking with...

Last week, we had a bit of an image of a race, or a journey – he's striving for the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And choose whichever image you want: (Running the Christian race, or walking the Christian walk) – And this **isn't** something we do on our own – we journey together, which is why he says "imitate me" and **keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us...**

Alright, so in the church, there are those who are following the example of Paul – and in this, they’re following the example of Christ, and we should watch; and learn; and do likewise...

But there’s also those we should definitely **not** follow. He says there’s many, **who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.**

Now, that ‘puts the cat among the pigeons’ – We would generally think of enemies of the cross of Christ, as being the **non-Christians**, and especially the persecutors of Christians – perhaps the people who are responsible for Paul being locked up in prison... , but I’m pretty sure that’s not what Paul’s talking about here...

In this section of the Letter to the Philippians, that we’ve been in for the last few weeks, he’s been developing our understanding of what he said, right back in Chapter 1, when he said: **^{1:21} For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**

Alright, he’s been talking about living with an eternal perspective, instead of having our eyes fixated on our current earthly existence...

And he’s said in **^{1:27} Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ**

2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

And along the way, he's also talked about the humility of Christ, and how we also should be humble and seek the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And he's talked about righteousness and blamelessness, and tied this to having a circumcised heart, where the flesh is pruned away, and we begin to value things that God values – things of eternal significance...

This is what the cross leads us to, such that we can **also** say “^{1:21} For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

And in **this** context, when he's talking about those who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ he's actually talking about people who are in the church... As disciples of Jesus, we should be **embracing** the cross, and embracing all of what it represents:

- sacrifice;
- humility;
- **a letting go** of all that this life has to offer, because our eyes are focused on eternity;
- a putting to death of sin;
- a putting to death, of our old sinful person (& our old sinful ways) (which are the ways of the world), to be raised up anew (with Christ)...

As disciples of Jesus, we embrace the cross. It's about having an eternal perspective...

But tears well up in Paul's eyes, when he considers the position and the fate of **many** (notice that) **many** in the church, who walk as enemies of the cross... That means, they're no different to the world... And this isn't an unthought-out thing that he's saying without thinking... He's told them about it before – in fact, he said “I've often spoken about this”

You know, a lot of what we read in the New Testament Letters, reflects teaching that Jesus gave, often in the form of Parables... And one of my favourite parables (probably because I come from a farming background), is the Parable of the sower.

Alright, the seed that's getting planted, is the word of God...
Some seed:

- Falls on the Road, and the birds gobble it up before it gets a chance to germinate...

That's like when the Gospel is preached, and a person hears it, but they never respond to it... Satan's done his job of stealing away the word;

- Falls on stony ground, and it gets up and growing real fast, but when it gets hot and dry, it just withers away, because it has no root...

And that represents those who hear the gospel and respond to it, but as soon as troubles and persecutions come, they don't persist...

- Falls on weedy/thorny ground, and it gets up and growing, but then the weeds grow up amongst it, and choke it out...

And that represents those who hear the word & they start off with Christ, but the things of the world become more important to them, and what they began, never goes through to bearing fruitⁱ.

Jesus told a parable about it, and now, with tears welling up, Paul's saying "I'm seeing way too much of this going on." – people who start out following Jesus, but the things of the world become more important to them, and instead of walking as disciples of Jesus, they're walking as enemies of the cross.

Now, anyone who stands by the human teaching of 'Once-Saved-Always-Saved', are going to have a fair bit of trouble with this verse: V¹⁹ **Their end is destruction....**

There are many people in the church today, who are not walking as disciples of Jesus... They're walking as enemies of the cross... And those who walk as enemies of the cross, will die as enemies of the cross... He can't be more clear -
¹⁹ **Their end is destruction....**

There is a terrible, terrible version of the Gospel being preached today – I call it easy-believism – it's the Gospel that

says “Just believe in Jesus, and that’s it”... And those who live by this, often embrace worldliness....

We spoke last week, about the dangers of the prosperity gospel... Why are many such churches growing so quick?? I’ll tell you why. It’s because essentially, the road that they’re encouraging their listeners to walk, is the same as the road that enemies of the cross walk. And when one treads the path of the prosperity gospel, they **want** to believe that they’re walking by the Spirit, but in fact, they’re on the highway to hell...

That’s one example of what it means to **walk** as an enemy of the cross? But it goes broader – Paul says:

their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

I told a bit of a joke last week, and I didn’t hear a single person laugh... Now, I don’t know whether you were half-asleep and didn’t hear it, or whether it just wasn’t funny – either way, I get discouraged when I think about it (traumatised), but I said:

If their god is their belly, well some people’s god is bigger than others...

Is he talking about fat people??? I don’t think so. I think it simply means, “They’re priorities, and what they crave for, are physical cravings”...

- In a poorer society, a person who’s god is their belly, might be more worried about getting a good feed...

- In a wealthy society, they're probably more worried about 'body image'...

And so, for your god to be your belly, could mean:

- You're a gourmet – and you only want the very finest food;
- You're a glutton – and all you think about is food;
- A health freak, and you're very picky about what you're willing to put into your body – organic kale, grown on the slopes of an ancient Buddhist monastery;
- Or, you could be like me, and just enjoy your wife's cooking way too much;

And yes, it can include all of these things, but it simply represents “being fixated on physical stuff”, instead of having your eyes on the goal of eternity with Christ....

And we drew this out last week – to be fixated on physical stuff, isn't just to crave more money or more stuff... it can even relate to health and life itself – where these things become the most important focus of our lives...

For some people, when they talk about 'faith', their biggest faith is that they might be physically healed, or that they might live on to have a long life... and yet, even these things, are a craving for earthly things... To crave health and a long life, is no different to what enemies of the cross crave...

Physical stuff is going to pass away:

- Wealth
- health (or lack thereof); and
- even physical life

Let these things not be our god...

And a second indictment of those who live as enemies of the cross, is: **they glory in their shame**

As disciples of Jesus, we're not the same as we once were – we are changed – transformed – renewed... To become a Christian, is such a radical transformation, Jesus described it as 'being born again'...

And stuff we used to think was pretty-good-alright, well, much of it, is now shameful...

And yet, in the church:

- There are those who delight in riches... But didn't Jesus say:
Matthew 19:24 (ESV) 24 ... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."
- There are those who glory in promotion of health and long life, and they hold on to life, as if it's the most valuable thing that we could ever have... But didn't Jesus say:
Matthew 16:25 (ESV) 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
- And in the church, there are those who know that God calls us to a higher ethic,, but "Naah, that doesn't matter... Look at the freedom we have..." And they act as if:
 - Drunkenness doesn't matter

- Ignoring the plight of the fatherless/poor, doesn't matter
- Young men and women shacking up together (not yet married)
- And there are even churches who celebrate the marrying of same-sex-couples...

they glory in their shame

Why??? Why is this happening in the church??? Why do some, who profess to being Christians, walk in the same way as enemies of the cross walk??? Well, there's a very simple reason... They have a very short-term view, and their minds are **set on earthly things**.

And if our minds are set on earthly things, our mindset is the same as the mindset of enemies of the cross...

But hasn't Jesus saved us from this???

V²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven

Now, that's probably not the greatest translation... The Greek word here πολίτευμα (politeuma) relates more to the place of citizenship, rather than the citizenship itself...

And so some translations (such as RSV) get it a bit better by saying "Our commonwealth is in heaven"... Nation-State/Kingdom

Basically we are strangers – we are aliens, in a foreign land...

In the last few years, we Australians have gotten used to a thing called “Dual Citizenship”, and a local example is when a prominent ‘used-to-be local’ was told he had dual citizenship, and poor old Barnaby Joyce never had any idea he was a kiwi, until he was told that he couldn’t be a member of parliament because of it...

And he had to renounce his NZ citizenship, to serve in the Australian parliament...

And as Christians, our nation-state – our commonwealth, is not on this earth... And in fact, we renounce our earthly ways – we renounce our earthly passions and desires – we die to all these, and we’ve been born again, and our new nation-state/commonwealth, is in heaven...

Now, if there’s one thing I’ve learned about travelling to a different land/state/nation, it’s important to have the right equipment when you get there...

- *Alaska – T-shirt & thongs;*
- *India – thermals & Ugg boots*
- *England, you’d better make sure you’ve got your raincoat*

And if we’re going to spend eternity with Christ, then we need to be **equipped** to spend eternity with Christ... And I don’t know about you, but my body ain’t going to make it...

I’ve got an ankle that had to be fused – my ankle will never bend again. But that’s OK – I’ve got a new one and a better

one coming... Last year, I over-used my shoulders, and for about 6-8 months, I could hardly do anything with them...

I'm getting old and worn out... But that's OK, because there's a replacement plan in place.

Our commonwealth/nation-state/land/home, is in Heaven. And Paul says, "From heaven, we await our saviour."...

Our dog Grube, loves to go for a drive in the ute... When I press the button and the roller door opens, she starts to get a bit interested. And when I go outside and put my boots on, she starts acting like she's at a tennis match (looks at me/at the ute)... And then she runs over, about half-way to the ute, and she's quivering – full of anticipation. She looks at me, and looks at the ute... And I say "Get up", and she runs over....

That's the sort of eager anticipation – eager waiting, we have for the return of Jesus... How about you? **Is** that the sort of eager waiting you have for Jesus??? Or is life here too good for that??? - a few more things you want to achieve before Jesus comes???

But when Jesus comes, he's not coming empty-handed. He ²¹ ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body

Some people are really happy with their bodies... Others of us, not so much... But the thing is, even the most marvellous athletic, shapely, finely-tuned body, is going to get old, sick and die... And the thing is, even people who should know

better, act as if this physical body, and living a long life, is the most important thing...

But no matter how wonderful your body might be, it is a **lowly body**. But that's OK, because the Lord Jesus Christ, will transform our lowly bodies, to be like His glorious body...

Your body will no longer:

- get old;
- sick;
- aches & pains;
- headaches;
- allergies;
- depression;
- anxiety;

The Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly bodies, to be like His glorious body...

How??? Well, it's not the "How" that matters – it's the "Who" that matters. And when you know the "Who", the "How" takes care of itself. The Lord Jesus Christ, has **the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.**

All things will be under Him. And the one who has been raised from the dead – to Him belongs all power; All authority; all might... And by this power, we will be transformed...

Now, when we think on these matters, why on Earth, do we so desire earthly things???

Which is why Paul said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”...

We live the life we have, for the Lord Jesus Christ, but whether we die, or whether we’re still alive when Jesus returns, this is what we look forward to/eagerly anticipate – to be with our Lord, in the glorious new body that He will give us...

And so Paul says:

4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Paul really loves this church, and he doesn’t want them to become like those destined for destruction. He wants them to stand firm. Not being distracted by things of the world, and all of its desires, but to eagerly await the return of Christ.

Let’s pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
when You taught Your disciples to pray,
you taught them to say, “Your Kingdom come”...
And Lord, we pray this today.

Lord, we pray for Your kingdom to break into this world.
We pray for Your kingdom to grow in our hearts
/in our town/
in our nation

and in the world

But Lord, while we know You as Saviour,
We know that our salvation isn't yet complete,
And that You will come as saviour....

And so we pray, Your Kingdom come.
Come Lord Jesus Christ, our saviour.

Lord, we look forward to the day when You return.
We have an eager anticipation...

And Lord, help us to fix our eyes/ambitions/hopes/dreams, on
this day,
When You will come in glory, and bringing glory...

But Lord, until that day,
help us to embrace the way of the Christ,
and to renounce our pre-occupation with worldliness and
earthly desires...

Lord, we delight in You,
and we ask that You would help us to live,
with an eternal perspective today,
bringing glory to You, in all things.

Amen.

i Mark 4:(ESV) 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.