

## Study 7

# OUR CITIZENSHIP



Ruins of a Christian church dating from 550 AD, known as Basilica B, Philippi, Greece

## Background

How do you learn? As a young pastor I actively sought out older, wiser, pastors to glean from their experience and knowledge. Whenever I attended a pastors' conference I would try to take advantage of any opportunity to talk with a guest speaker by sitting down with them and asking questions. This was one way I would learn. But I also found that I didn't necessarily have to do this to learn from an experienced preacher and pastor. I also found that I could learn from a less experienced or polished speakers. I realised that I could learn *indirectly* and *positively* from those pastors who did things well; and, I could learn indirectly *negatively* from those who did *not* do things well. In this section of Philippians, Paul also encourages the Philippians to do the same - to learn from positive and negative examples.

# Learn From Examples

Paul seemed confident that he was living an honourable Christ-like life.

1. Read Philippians 3:17 and First Corinthians 4:16. Was Paul being arrogant in urging his readers to do this? Explain.

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Could *you* make this same kind of request? Why or why not?

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2. Consider Philippians 3:17 again. Was Paul telling the Philippians to *only* follow *his* example? If Paul was or wasn't, how might this change our assessment of his possible arrogance?
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It is important to note two things about Paul's appeal. Firstly, *imitation* of a teacher's character and way of life was a very Jewish idea. When a rabbi (a Jewish teacher/pastor) took on disciples (*students*), his students were not just expected to listen to teaching - they were expected to observe and imitate his life. Thus, when Paul appeals to the Philippians (3:17, the Corinthians (1Cor. 4:16) and the Thessalonians (1Thess. 1:6) to imitate him, he is simply following in the tradition of a Jewish concept of discipleship. Secondly, his appeal is always on the basis that he was following Christ. In other words, his appeal to believers was to ultimately follow Christ. Therefore, whenever a Christian leader is not living in a Christ-honouring way, those that he or she are leading need to consider very carefully if they can continue to follow them.

3. Every Christian leader is going to make mistakes. Is this a reason for refusing to submit to them as your spiritual leader? Discuss.
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Not every Christian leader lives a 'cruciformed' life (Matt. 16:24). It is very difficult to see what is really in the heart of a Christian leader unless you can see how they handle: (i) ease and leisure; and, (ii) hardship and adversity. I think that

God uses both of these circumstances to test and expose a leader's true character (and I think that the first of these is the most telling!). The apostle Paul continually appealed to his endurance of hardship and sufferings for Christ as one of the proofs of his apostolic call (Phil. 1:29-30). He also pointed out that some leaders should no longer be regarded as leaders - or even as true Christians.

4. In Philippians 3:18 how does Paul describe these *former* Christian leaders? How did Paul feel about them now?

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5. Based on Philippians 3:19, what was to be the ultimate outcome of their opposition to the gospel they had once preached?

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6. Match the reason for their apostasy ("walking away from Christ") with the phrase that Paul uses in Philippians 3:19 -

**a.** "their god is their belly" **b.** "they glory in their shame" **c.** "with minds set on earthly things"

\_\_\_ These apostates not only openly committed immorality, they may have actually claimed it was God's will to do so.

\_\_\_ They did not show any self-restraint, in fact, they probably claimed that God's blessing and favour was evidenced by their luxurious lifestyles. Such lifestyles may led to their obesity.

\_\_\_ These apostates only ever thought about their immediate and temporal comfort and ease.

## The Reason to Endure

Paul reminds his readers that their trials and adversities were only temporary. He was certainly qualified to tell the Philippians this since he himself had endured much and even as he wrote this epistle he was in chains (Phil. 1:7). This should remind us that Christianity is not about having a trouble-free life.

7. What was Paul's reminder to the Philippians in Philippians 1:20 about, and how would this help them to change their perspective on their current hardships?
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The Philippians needed to know that despite the present difficulties, Christ was enthroned in Heaven and was reigning as Lord.

8. How much of this world is now subjected to Christ? (Phil. 1:21) What does this mean about the uncertainties of our future?
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9. How does Philippians 4:1 create a challenge for church leaders to *feel* about those they lead and shepherd? And, how can we apply what Paul appeals for in this verse?
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## Application Discussion

- What qualities are necessary for a Christian to be an example worth following?
- If you were friends with a church leader who confessed to you that they had sinned, what would you counsel them to do?
- If a fellow member of your church was struggling to pray, read God's Word and attend church, how would you use Paul's words to the Philippians at the end of chapter 3 to encourage them?
- How does Paul's closing appeal challenge most Christians to reassess their life priorities?