

## TRUE AND FALSE LIFESTYLES

Phil 3.15-16

### Introduction

Life is all about the choices we make – for better or for worse.

- Some choices we are called to make are relatively trivial – like, will we have Cornflakes or Sugar Puffs for breakfast? Not a lot will hinge on the choice we make in that particular case.
- But other choices we're called to make may have far-reaching consequences – like what subjects we choose to study at school – the sciences or humanities? Our whole future career path may be determined by the kind of choices we make at the age of 15 or 16.
- Sometime the range of options that present themselves to us can seem quite bewildering. But what's fascinating about the Scriptures is how often the choice it calls us to make boils down to just one of two possible options.
- We can think of all the parables Jesus told about two pathways to choose from:
  - his story of the two builders: one wise, the other foolish;
  - his story about two types of plant: the field of wheat and weeds;
  - his story about two sorts of bridesmaid: well-prepared or negligent;
  - and his parable about two sorts of animals: sheep and goats.

In each one of those parables there is a stark choice as to what sort of a person we are going to be. And similarly, in the verses we are studying this morning, Paul sets before us two possible lifestyles to choose from.

First, he speaks about

### 1. THE GOOD PATTERN HE HIMSELF HAD SET (v17) the Philippians.

- He talks in **verse 17** about *joining with others in following my example*. Literally, he calls us to be 'fellow mimics' of his way of life. The word he uses here is the one from which we get of our English words 'imitate' and 'mimic'.
- And towards the end of the verse he speaks about us *living* [or more literally 'walking'] *according to the pattern we gave you*.
- Paul had given the Philippians not only verbal instructions, orally, in his formal times of teaching. He had also lived out that teaching, visibly, in their midst, to provide them with a practical example of what it all meant. Someone has said that Christian ethics are not about us receiving a prescriptive manual, consisting of detailed instructions to cover every eventuality in life, as in some religions. It's about us being shown a life – supremely the life of Jesus, God's unique Son, living out a loving relationship with his Father God. That's the life that Paul sought to live out amongst the Philippians, which is why he could point to his own example alongside the pattern of formal instruction he had given the church.
- And this is something that he did with all the churches he founded. He didn't simply tell the new believers how they should be living; he showed them, through his own personal example, by modelling the life of Christ amongst them.
- And so he was able to say to the Corinthians (**1 Cor 11.1**), *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*. Christian leadership is always to be by example, not just by exhortation.
- It's something he emphasised particularly when writing to the Thessalonians. Keep a finger in Phil 3 and turn over to 1 Thess. In **1 Thess 1.5-6a**, Paul writes, *our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and [thereby] of the Lord.*
- And in **1 Thess 2.8-12**, he continues, *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives*

worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. Paul modelled the kind of life he wanted his fellow believers to practise, and then called them to mimic him.

So, what was the pattern and example that Paul had left the believers at Philippi? Well, it's what we have been looking at over the past few weeks as we've studied the preceding verses in Phil 3, particularly from verse 10 onwards. You see, these verses really encapsulate the whole thrust of what Paul is wanting to get across to his readers. So if we touch on them *again* this morning, I hope you won't become wearied by them. I hope instead, we will really start to take them to heart, so that they become defining shape of our discipleship.

In verse 10, Paul reminds the Philippians that

**1.1 His heart was set on getting to know Christ better (v10)**

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,* he writes. This is what someone has called Paul's 'magnificent obsession' – to get to know his Lord and saviour as well as he possibly could. And Paul knew that God could use every experience he allowed Paul to pass through, to bring this about.

- So let me ask you if this is where your heart is set this morning. Is your greatest desire in life to get to know Jesus better? Is it what gets you out of bed in the morning – the prospect that another new day is another day for getting to know Jesus better, through whatever experiences God chooses to take us? This is what it means to live according to the pattern Paul has left us, here in God's Word.

Then in verse 12, Paul reminds the Philippians that

**1.2 His thoughts were set on becoming more like Jesus (v12)**

He recognises that he hadn't yet arrived at all that he could be as a flower of Jesus. *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect.* Great man though Paul was in so many different ways, his life was characterised by a remarkable humility when he assessed his likeness to Jesus. He still had a long way to go before he *attained to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*, as he defines Christian maturity for us in **Eph 4.13**.

- Becoming like Jesus in every part of his being was Paul's burning ambition. Paul wanted his inner nature, his hidden life, to be like Christ's – his assumptions and values, his goals and ambitions, his attitudes and motives. For Paul knew that God is more concerned about our character development than about our service for him. God's long-term project for our lives is to transform us into the likeness of his Son.
- Paul also wanted his outward, public life to be like Christ's. He wanted the way he spoke to other people to be like the way Jesus spoke to other people.
- In **Luke 4.22**, we read that those who heard Jesus *were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips*. That's why in **Col 4.6**, Paul writes, *Let your conversation be always full of grace* – so it's like Jesus'. John tells us that the true glory of Jesus consisted in the fact that he was manifestly *full of grace and truth* (**John 1.14**).
- Peter tells us (**1 Peter 2.22-23**) that *no deceit was found in Jesus' mouth*. His lips always spoke the truth. He never tried to 'pull the wool over people's eyes'. He never said one thing whilst meaning something else. *And when people hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats*. Paul wanted his speech to be like that of Jesus – full of grace and truth.
- It was said of Jesus that he was someone who *went about doing good* (**Acts 10.38**). So Paul wanted his actions to be like those of Christ. He wanted to be a do-gooder, in the best possible sense of that phrase. He didn't simply want to be a preacher. He wanted his actions – his acts of kindness and compassion – to benefit people too.
- Jesus was able to say, *I always do what please my Father* (**John 8.29**). It wasn't just what Jesus thought and said that pleased his Father God. He pleased him through his actions too.
- And so measured against this incredibly high standard set by Jesus – a life of perfect conformity to his father's will – Paul had to confess, 'I've still got an incredibly long way to go, before I'm like my

Saviour.” But that was his burning ambition – to become more and more like the one he wanted to get to know better and better.

Thirdly, Paul reminded the Philippians in vs 12b-14 that

**1.3 His sights were set on future goals**, not on past achievements or mistakes.

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me, he writes. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Paul lived in the present, but for the future.*

- He didn't live in the past. He didn't wallow in his past achievements, like some nostalgic people do.
- Nor did he dwell on the past – neither on his own regrets, which could have driven him to despair; nor on bygone hurts, which would left him very bitter. If we dwell on what has been, the past can act like a ball-and-chain around our ankle, hindering us from embracing what God wants us to get on and do – and be – in the present and on into the future.
- To follow Paul's pattern of life means to be forward-thinking, future orientated – not backward looking.

And fourthly, in verse 16, Paul reminds us that to follow his pattern means living up to what we know to be right and true.

**1.4 His energies were set on living out the truth (v16)**

*Let us live up to what we have already attained (or received, by way of God's truth.).*

- **James 4.17** teaches us that *anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*. In other words, we can sin as much by doing nothing (when there's truth to be lived out) as we can by transgressing God's laws!
- After Jesus had washed his disciples feet, he said to them (**John 13.14-15,17**), *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them*. It's not the knowing that counts, but the doing of what we know to be right and true.

So this was the pattern Paul had set before the Christians in Philippi, both in his verbal instructions to them and through his own personal example of dedicated living. And now he encouraged them to join with others in following his example. He encouraged them to take a good look at those who were living according to this pattern. That reminds us of the words we find in **Heb 13.7**: *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

- We live in an age that is obsessed with the cult of personality; and this mindset can sometimes slip into Christian circles. My elder sister, who's a bit of a writer, has been trying to get the Christian press to run an article on Prasada Rao, the founder of IREF who died earlier this year. He was a remarkable man in so many different ways. But I will remember him most for his enormous love for Christ, which gave him a most wonderfully radiant joy. I will remember him for his warm personality, which always had a welcome for strangers. I will remember him for his deep humility – he dressed very simply, in a Ghandi type sheet, that's all. I will remember him for his extraordinary spiritual vision, his tiger-like tenacity, and his unwavering faith. My sister was bewailing the fact that the Christian press didn't want to know about such a remarkable man. They were too preoccupied with the latest celebrity making a name for him or herself – instead of living a life that brings glory only to Jesus.
- The pattern Paul sets before us in one that does just that. It's about
  - a heart set on knowing Jesus better;
  - an attitude of mind fixed on becoming more like Jesus;
  - a future focus set on achieving the goals Jesus sets before us;
  - and all of our energies set on living out all of the truth Jesus has brought us.

That's the first way we can choose to live – according to the pattern Paul set out for us.

The second way to live is according to a pattern he laments (vs 18-19).

## **2. A PATTERN PAUL LAMENTS (vs 18-19)**

*As I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Here was a pattern of life that caused Paul to shed tears – especially when he saw that pattern of life being lived out by those who professed to be Christians. Titus 1.16 speaks about those who claim to know God, but by their actions, deny him.*

- Paul refers to such people here as *enemies of the cross*, because everything they practise and advocate is contrary to what Christ died to save us from. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness*, Peter explains in **1 Peter 2.24**.
- *We died to sin*, Paul writes in **Romans 6.2-4**; *so how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Baptism symbolises, amongst other things, Christ dying for the things that had alienated us from God – our self-centredness; our tendency towards self-indulgence, given half a chance; our hankering after self-determination, so that we are our own Masters. These are the things that necessitated Christ going to the cross for us. In our baptism, as we are buried under the water, we symbolically identify ourselves with Christ dying for these things, in our place and on our behalf.
- Symbolically, we are demonstrating that we have died to that old way of life; and as we are brought up out of the water again, we are symbolising the fact that we are embarking on a new kind of life – a life lived for Jesus, in his power and strength.
- And it's tragic, and causes many a Pastor to shed many tears, when those who have been baptised into a new way of life revert to their old ways. They live as *enemies of the cross* because everything about their life makes a mockery of the fact that Christ died for them - to redeem them from their old way of life, and impart a new life to them.
- This is how Alex Motyer puts it (p190): *On the cross, Christ identified himself with all our self-pleasing. He reckoned as his own, all our shady moral compromises and open moral lapses. He became in himself the sin that anchored us to earth and destined us for hell. So to continue to sin as if he had never died ... is to oppose all that the cross means.*
- *We must remind ourselves that Jesus described as his 'enemies' those 'who didn't want me to reign over them as their king' [Luke 19.27].* In other words, not only those who are openly hostile to Jesus being their Lord, but those who are simply indifferent to his claim on their life. Whenever we can't really be bothered about Jesus, or are reluctant to face the demands of Jesus, or resist giving our all to Jesus, we place ourselves in the category of his enemies, making a mockery of the cross.

So how does such a terrible state of affairs arise? Notice the downward spiral of self-seeking that is so evident in verse 19. Paul is speaking here about those who once professed to be Christians, but whose lifestyle is now a living denial of that profession. Here are people who are

### **2.1 Earthbound in their thinking**

*Their mind is [set] on earthly things.* By 'earthly things', Paul doesn't just mean material things. He is speaking about everything to do with this present age, as opposed to the age to come.

- Here are people whose thought processes are dominated by the here and now, instead of the glorious eternity that God has in store for those who truly belong to Christ.
- Here are people who get bogged down by 'the worries of life', as we were learning last week. They preoccupied with food and fashion – designer clothes and celebrity diets.
- It makes us all ask ourselves the searching question, "What is your mind set on? What thoughts dominate your thinking?"
- *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*, Paul urges us in **Col 3.2**. *Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God* (Col 3.1). We need to lift our eyes off the things of this world to focus them firmly on Christ, seated at God's

right hand in glory. For only when we do that we will be able to view the things of this world with a right perspective. We will start to look at the things of this world as God sees them, from his position of sovereignty on high; and we will start to look at this life in the light of the glorious eternity God has got in store for us. It is people with no hope of eternity who feel they must grab as much as they can for themselves in this life. That's why they set their minds on earthly things, instead of eternal things. But we're different, Paul would say to us (v12). *We press on to take hold of all those good things for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of us.* We know that this present age is going to *pass away (Mat 24.35)*. So why be wedded to it when God has destined us for the age to come?

- Everything else in our life will be determined by what our mind is set on. *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen,* Paul reminds us in **2 Cor 4.18**. *For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

But if our mind is set on earthly things, our life will be

**2.2 Dominated by our appetites.** Paul tells us, in a very graphic phrase: *their god is their stomach,* he writes, of those who have become enemies of the cross.

Our god is whatever we chose to live our life for; it's whatever controls us, or dominates us. If our mind is set on earthly things, it will be our natural instincts or physical appetites. It might be food or drink, drugs or sex, fame or fortune – whatever it is that we can never get quite enough of, so we become addicted to it; and it becomes our master.

- *The warning isn't against particular vices,* writes Alex Motyer (p187), *but against the underlying sin of pandering to oneself. In one Christian, the temptation may be towards sexual sin; in another, towards gossiping; in another, lying in bed instead of being alone with God in the morning. Paul is raising a warning to us all here – for here is the downward pathway to becoming an enemy of the cross.*
- Whatever our mind is set on, that will determine our lifestyle – what we live for.
- If our mind is set on earthly things – transient things, things belonging to the here and now – our life will be dominated by our physical appetites and urges, and we will live a life of self-indulgence.
- But if our mind is set on heavenly things – things belonging to the age to come, things that will last forever – we will make it our burning ambition to live for Jesus, not simply gratify our basic instinct.
- Over in **4.12-13**, Paul explains that neither material plenty nor relative poverty meant very much to him any more. What counted was doing everything that Christ asked of him, through the power of his all-sufficient Holy Spirit. *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* Satisfying Jesus, not satisfying himself, is what dominated Paul's thinking.

What we see next is that when our minds are set on earthly things, and our lives are dominated by our physical appetites,

### **2.3 Our values are false**

*Their glory is in their shame,* Paul writes. In other words, what they have come to value most highly, God is utterly ashamed of. And it's *his* judgement, not their own approval ratings that will count in the end. The best commentary on this phrase comes in **Romans 1.18,21,28-32**. *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ...Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.* Sound values are turned on their head once people abandon God as their moral compass.

People not only continue to do things that they know to be wrong; but they approve of other people doing them as well, because there's a sense of solidarity that comes from that kind of mutual admiration.

- People will boast about the number of pints they can drink at their local pub; or about the number of times that they have got drunk, as if it's a big laugh. What's wrong? – everyone does it, goes up the cry.
- People will boast about the number of sexual partners they've had. It's almost taken for granted now in our society, that there's nothing wrong in young people sleeping around, providing they take appropriate precautions. Safe sex rather than abstinence is what is approved by our society. Abstinence is considered too restrictive of young people's personal liberty. They'll do it any way, so let's try to ensure they do it safely, is the prevailing attitude. There are many dating and mating TV programmes in which sex without commitment is seen to be the desired outcome for the participants.
- *This is the verdict, John 3.19* tells us. *Light has come into the world – in the person of Christ, who has taught us how to live in a way that is pleasing to God; but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* People's deeds are evil because their minds are set on earthly things, and as a result they see the be-all-and-end-all of life as satisfying their physical appetites.

But God isn't fooled. *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,* says **Isaiah 5.20**.

Such people are

**2.4 Doomed to destruction** Paul warns us in verse 19.

*Their destiny is destruction,* he writes. And there destruction is a destruction of their own making; for as Paul warns us in **Gal 6.7-8**, *Don't be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* It's sometimes very tough to follow the way Paul advocates here in these verses. It's to swim against the tide of the society around about us. But the tough way is the right way, long-term. So, *let us not become weary in doing good,* Paul continues (**Gal 6.9**) *for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* We will reap a harvest of eternal values to Jesus, our matchless Lord and Saviour. In the final analysis, it's all about him – living to please the one who gave his all for us. And so we *press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.*