

The sermon

Intro

There're hazards in life which come in many forms. On the road it could be potholes or ice or screws or deer or pedestrians like small children.

On the golf course the primary hazards are the water and the sand bunker. You also don't want to land in the rough or in the trees.

What's a hazard? Something to avoid. Something to be on the lookout for.

Like there's hazards on the road and the golf course, there's spiritual hazards in the Christian walk. We'll highlight five this morning.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Five hazards to spiritual progress.

Hazard # 1: Failure to follow helpful examples (3:18-19)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. – 3:17

People like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Paul's in prison and he doesn't know whether he's going to live or die. Whatever the case, there's opportunity to honor Jesus. Either I'll help believers make spiritual progress or I'll be able to testify to the truth.

In 2:20, Paul describes Timothy as someone *“who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.”*

In 2:30, Paul says Epaphroditus *“nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”* That's risking his own welfare to travel approximately 700 miles to bring gifts from the Philippian church to the imprisoned Paul.

There are some examples we ought to have. Other examples should be avoided. **Be discerning!** Is their spirituality consistent with Scripture?

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. – 3:18

“For” indicates an explanation. Some Paul currently weeps over (“many”) once professed faith have followed bad examples and are now enemies of the cross = non-Christians.

My theological explanation would be they never actually belonged to Christ. See soils two and three in *The Parable of the Sower* in Matthew 13 and 1 John 2:19. Because God never fails to complete the work he begins in his people (1:6). Not to say that Christians can't be deceived or have a season of sin.

Elders and Deacons

Paul say keep your eyes on faithful examples so you don't turn away from Jesus.

This means we need to have good examples in the local church. God helped us by establishing pastor/elders and deacons. The qualifications for elders are ability to teach, proven leadership in the home, and exemplary character. Deacons likewise have character requirements.

Charge to Deacons and Elders

Elders and deacons. We need to ask ourselves, what example am I setting? Is my manner of life a model to the church? In what areas do I need God's help to be a better example? The call to leadership is a call to ongoing self-examination.

The Basic Point

I'd caution you that this isn't a black and white matter. Our examples usually aren't either a 0 or a 10. The example we're following could be a 2 or a 5 or a 7. Examples might be mostly bad with some good, a mixture of good and bad, mostly good with some bad. Our examples might be good in some areas but not so helpful in other areas. **We need discernment!**

Bad Examples

I had an example who emphasized Bible reading, prayer, purity, church attendance, and evangelism. But with that came the baggage of you have to throw out every non-Christian CD you own, you can't play video games, and you can't do anything in life other than read your Bible, pray, go to church, and evangelize. I logically concluded no TV shows, no movies, no sporting events, no anything else. The biblical justification would have been "redeeming the time" and everything outside spiritual disciplines is rubbish.

My evaluation?

Spiritual disciplines good. The rest is troubling. What did it do to me? Prevented my conscience from being shaped by the Bible. Bypassed the need to acquire wisdom like which TV shows should I watch (discernment)? and how much entertainment is appropriate (moderation)? It made me judgmental of Christians. Oh no! All my Christian friends are worldly. It made me too weird to have friendships with non-Christians.

It stunted my growth, harmed relationships in the church, and discouraged relational evangelism. Not a good recipe.

We have a duty to set examples for one another. Did you ever think of fellowship that way?

Hazard # 2: Our belly becomes our god (3:19)

Their end is destruction,

Destruction

- 1) Old Testament pictures of earthly destruction (Deut 28:45, 48, 51, 63) include military defeat and the death and exile that follows (Deut 28:36-52, 63-65). The destruction of high places (Hos 10:8), trees (Amos 2:9), fields (Joel 1:10), and military strongholds (Isa 23:14).

Destruction pictures calamity.

- 2) In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the future destruction of the wicked.

Past judgments like the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7) foreshadow destruction to come.

- 3) The Bible speaks of "*eternal punishment*" (Matt 25:46), "*the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*" (2 Thess 1:9), and the 2nd death (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

- 4) “*Eternal destruction*” happens on the day of the Lord (2 Thess 1:7, 9-10) as unbelievers are relocated to a place called the lake of fire (Matt 25:41, 46; Rev 20:15) where they experience “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matt 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30).
- 5) Following the day of the Lord, they live on forever experiencing torment from God (Rev 14:10-11) in that location (Jude 13).
- 6) I would note that the torment one experiences in hell varies from person to person given their level of exposure to the gospel (Matt 11:22, 24; Luke 12:47-48).
- 7) Pictures of hell include incineration to ashes (2 Pet 2:6), dead bodies that are never burned up (Isa 66:24), lake of fire (Rev 20:15), gloomy darkness (Matt 25:30; Jude 13), and chained confinement (Jude 6).

Hell is a miserable existence to be avoided at all costs. It matters who we follow. If we believe these things we’ll be affected. We’ll speak the gospel.

their god is their belly,

Belly = our inner being, heart, feelings, desires. Literally used of the stomach and the womb. In John 7:38, we learn that “*Whoever believes in me... Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” Heart is the same word as belly.

To say the belly is one’s god is to say one’s own desires and longings are one’s god. Our god becomes whatever we want. Lowercase god means Paul is equating this way of life with idolatry. The picture is a person who’s enslaved by their appetites. Driven by passion without restraint.

Like sexual lusts lead to pornography. There’re good resources out there. I can be of help.

Modern Culture

Ryan Fullerton helpfully points out that everyday comments like “you do you,” “be true to yourself,” “follow your heart,” “find yourself,” “be yourself” “is the water we swim in every day.” (<https://www.9marks.org/article/if-you-want-to-address-lgbtq-address-expressive-individualism/>)

This self-centered way of life gives preference to the individual’s personal goals, loves, and desires. It’s going after what I want without restraint.

The Bible warns us that this isn’t a wise way to do life because human nature is fundamentally flawed.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? – Jeremiah 17:9

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. – Proverbs 4:23

Application

Paul says following our own desires leads to destruction. Jesus says self-denial leads to life (Matt 16:24-26).

Who’s directing the ship? My own self-centered passions? Or passions shaped by the word and Spirit?

It’s our duty to help one another fight enslaving passions. Thus the need for good examples.

Hazard # 3: Glorifying in shameful things (3:19)

and they glory in their shame,

Glory

God's glory is his shining radiance, the beauty of his attributes, character, and actions. To glorify God is to honor, esteem, worship, celebrate his perfections. To glory in God is to esteem and celebrate his greatness.

Shame = experiencing disgrace or embarrassment because of one's situation or behavior. The shame of sitting in lowest place at the table (Luke 14:9). Like the 28 year old who still has to sit at the children's table at Thanksgiving. Jesus' shame on the cross (Heb 12:2). Being publicly stripped, mocked, and condemned as an impostor.

These whom Paul weeps over celebrate the things that ought to make them ashamed.

Application

The idea is shameless people. The person who takes half the pizza for themselves at the potluck. The person who boasts about the torment they inflict on others. The school bully.

It's hard for me to come up with something shameful that Christians celebrate. I think our default tendency is to conceal our faults from each other. Generally Christians don't celebrate sin in front of other Christians. I think the temptation for us is to succumb to cultural pressure to affirm the things that God says are shameful.

On the flip side, shame is good when it causes us to confess, repent, and seek help. We don't need to remain ashamed. There's forgiveness in Christ. There's help in the local church.

It's our duty to help one another renounce shameful things. Good examples show us what to glory in.

Hazard # 4: Setting our focus on earthly things (3:19)

with minds set on earthly things.

This is why *"their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame."* Because God's word isn't in their thoughts.

The word translated "**minds**" is the same word we've seen in 2:2, 5 where the church members need to be of the same mind. And it's the same word we've seen in 3:15 where the mature think in a certain way.

The idea is their minds are constantly considering, pondering, thinking about, focused on things that are human. God isn't in their thoughts.

What Paul's saying is God's word has no place in their lives.

Application

I'm going to assume God's word has a place in your lives. I'm going to assume you aren't the person who never thinks about how God's word should inform your decisions and the way you relate to others. But there's still a danger for us.

Earlier I cautioned against the unwise legalist who says no music, no TV, no movies, no video games, no recreational activities. But there's a flip side. We can binge watch TV series. We can become obsessed with sports radio or conservative talk radio such that God's voice is reduced to a whisper.

We become practical atheists when we aren't thinking, how does God's word inform my financial decisions? My use of time? How I treat my siblings? My attitude towards my schoolwork or employer? God's word has to be in our thoughts.

It's our duty to help one another meditate on God's word and its practical implications for our lives. We need examples who set their minds on the things of God.

Hazard # 5: Forgetting the future (3:19-4:1)

But our citizenship is in heaven,

We're citizens of a place where we are not: heaven. We're foreigners living in exile. We belong to a different realm that's characterized by different values than the towns we live in. What happens in heaven right now? God is celebrated. Sin is absent. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, the holy angels, and the souls of dead believers dwell together in righteous harmony. That's not the world we live in.

and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

We're looking forward to a day when things will change. We're not content with live as is. We long to be rescued.

who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,

When Jesus returns, the believer's soul will be reunited with the body. We'll go from lowly bodies to glorious bodies.

Lowly speaks to our present state of humiliation. The bodies we bear today are often an occasion for humiliation aren't they? This body wears out. Beauty fades. Strength fades. What was once routine is no longer possible. Walking becomes a struggle. Wrinkles set in. The hair goes gray. Baldness sets in. Memory fades. We struggle to control our bowels. The present body is rather humiliating.

When Jesus returns, our humiliation ends. The new body can't die or sin or suffer. The new body is immortal and imperishable (1 Cor 15:53-54) and fit for the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50).

by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

On that day Jesus will subject the earth and the heavens to transformation (Rom 8:19-23; 2 Pet 3:10) by burning (2 Pet 3:7). He'll subject Satan, demons, and unbelievers to destruction. He'll establish a "*new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells*" (2 Pet 3:13).

One good thing about Jesus' return. No more delegated authority. In the present arrangement, God delegates authority by raising up and removing governing authorities. When Jesus returns, authority is no longer delegated to unrighteous, oppressive, unwise, self-serving rulers.

Application

Too much earthly focus dulls heavenly hope. Too much conservative talk radio means too much focus on earthly concerns. Conservative talk radio isn't concerned with things like spiritual progress, the health of the local church, and getting the gospel to the unreached. The hope of conservative talk radio isn't Jesus' return.

Non-Christian

Maybe you're visiting with us this morning and you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. Maybe it's dawning on you that I'm one of the ones who will be destroyed. If you're getting me that's dreadful news.

Destruction doesn't have to be the last word. We've also heard about a cross and a Savior.

The good news is God is merciful.

Jesus went to the cross to rescue sinners. Sinners like you. Sinners like me.

You can be rescued right now, this moment through faith and repentance. Turn from your sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Conclusion

Paul calls these Philippian believers *“my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.”*

I’m your pastor, but we’re brothers and sisters. We have the same Lord and Savior. We share in our fallen condition.

What’s pastoral love? What brings this pastor joy? I want you to thrive. I want you to make progress. I want you to kill destructive sin like pornography. I want you to experience God’s sustaining grace in cancer. I want you to experience edifying fellowship with each other. I want you growing in wisdom and knowledge and discernment. I want your confidence in God and joy in God to abound. I want you stable and standing firm. I’m confident these are possible because God is working *“in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (2:13).

If you’re struggling, help’s available.

Paul says the Philippians are his crown. His victory. His winner’s purse. Your progress and steadfast faithfulness is my prize.