

## **Philippians 3 pt. 3 v.17-4:1**

Previously Paul has strongly urged the Phillipans church to join with him in a unity of mind and conduct. This is one of the recurring themes of the book - unity in the church.

He has also declared his own personal intention of pressing onward in his commitment to follow Jesus no matter the cost; because in Paul's assessment nothing compared to knowing and following Jesus.

These two thoughts intersect in chapter three - unity with one another, and pressing on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That practically means following Jesus not only individually but together.

Our text this morning continues to advance this theme by way of Paul's own appeal to his personal example and the example of other stout-hearted believers as he contrasts that commendable pattern of conduct against those who are supposedly walking in faith but are actually "enemies of the cross."

That thought, a contrast in the kingdom, paints for us a sad state of affairs among the universal congregation of saints. One might be tempted to ask, how could that possible be? But this condition of unconverted “Christians” is not new to us.

V.17 - Mark the familial language that Paul continues with...brethren.

It is perhaps easy to forget the weight that terms like brethren, brother, sister, etc., are supposed to carry.

As a matter of fact sometimes we feel like those terms come off as kitsch or cheesy because we've heard them tossed around without very much conviction regarding the actual familial bond that those words are meant to communicate.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, doesn't use such language lightly. He viewed the church as family.

He then exhorts this dearly loved family of his to be “imitators together,” of the example that he has so faithfully presented to them.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 367.

Now Paul doesn't say he's the only one following the Lord! This is important! Paul was a giant of the faith but he acknowledges that there are others on this blessed walk and in this blessed family who are presenting an admirable example that others should note and imitate.

Now, while we may desire to draw this out and discuss all of the various examples of faithfulness and the ways to follow this example -- that we have encountered; while we might desire for Paul to give us more detail on what exactly made these examples so good for the believers at Philippi, he actually takes us in a completely different direction.

He calls to mind the opposite of a good example in order to highlight what right looks like. Paul shows us what wrong looks like. This is incredibly important!

There are so many important aspects of pressing onward in our walk with Jesus. We ought to KNOW by now that we are SUPPOSED to be following Jesus on the long walk of sanctification toward holiness (Heb 6:1-3) but there are also some

examples that we are supposed to shun, or turn away from -- examples that are dangerous.

V.18-19 The proliferation of bad examples -- MANY walk who are enemies of Jesus. Let that sink in!

Apparently this warning to be careful who we follow is so important to Paul that he has repeated it over and over again.

Just as the faithful are surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses,” that encourage us to run with endurance (Heb 12:1) we are also surrounded by a an army of bad actors who have adopted the language, style, and customs of the church as simply a means to an end -- to get paid, to gratify the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16)

This reality broke Pau’s heart!

One source writes that Paul’s writing here was, “commonly used of loud expression[s] of sorrow and pain. It signifies intense grief. It is essential to render this phrase in such a way as to indicate clearly that Paul is extremely sorry to have to say what he does. It may, therefore, be necessary to render with tears as “I am so

sorry about this that I could cry,” or “this makes me so sorry that I am crying.””<sup>2</sup>

This is a big deal. It isn't something to be swept under the rug. The fact that this plague of sorry believers has infected the church grieves Paul deeply!

Our dear teacher doesn't pull any punches, soften his language, or make cheap appeals to reconciliation and grace. He describes this multitude of bad actors as “enemies of the cross.”

We were all ONCE enemies of the cross - BUT, once we have been won to Christ we are His! Let us not dare to remain in our wretched state, not even for a moment, to present ourselves as enemies of the cross!

Ultimately those who follow Jesus by half measure - who play both sides - the church and the world...their end is destruction.

About these types of people, Gordon Fee writes, “Paul is referring to some who have appeared as believers, but whose “end” demonstrates that something was wrong with their “faith.” They

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<sup>2</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 115.

probably consider themselves to be within the household of faith, and most likely are, or were, but whom Paul now assigns to a place outside Christ, precisely because they have abandoned Christ by adopting a lifestyle that is totally opposed to the redemptive work of the cross.”<sup>3</sup>

We are to identify and turn away from this type of living. That may seem harsh but the Bible instructs us clearly on this matter.

[1Co 5:9-13 NKJV] 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet [I] certainly [did] not [mean] with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what [have] I [to do] with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 371.

Did you notice that to the Corinthians Paul indicates that we can't do anything about unbelievers living in continual sin - that's their nature! Of course they're going to live like that - what do you expect?!

Paul gives us some specific indicators of what to look for.

The first is that their god is their belly. That means that the ruling force in their lives is their own gratification in both a literal and figurative sense.

Just as Paul instructed the Philippians to note those good examples he instructed the Romans to note those bad examples by using some of the same terminology!

[Rom 16:17-18 NKJV] 17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

The second mark is that these unconverted Christians glory in their shame, or they claim their shame as glorious -- reveling in

sin, wearing it as a badge of honor. This is not to be named among Christians! Our past sin, and any current sin we war against is to be abhorrent and resisted, not embraced and celebrated.

This much is certain - we are each called to holiness!

Lastly, they set their minds on earthly things. That means they are constantly considering that which is worldly as opposed to the heavenly.

This last marker probably rings a bell for most of us as it is contradictory to an oft-quoted verse:

[Col 3:2 NKJV] 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Do you see what Paul is driving at?

Christians are to be markedly different! What Paul presents to us here is a series of comparisons and contrasts meant to illustrate the world of difference between believers and enemies of the cross.

The proof of sincere faith is in the pudding!

Or, if you prefer, “every good tree bears good fruit.” [SHOW IMAGE -- DELETE DURING PROOFREADING]

[Mat 7:15-20 NKJV] 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor [can] a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Did you notice that the ravenous wolves that Jesus teaches about actually APPEAR to be sheep? It is impossible to discern the heart of the wolf aside from looking at the fruit they bear because all outward indications suggest to us that they are sheep!

Now...we need to balance this idea of bearing fruit lest we believe in error that we can just strive hard enough to pop out good fruits on our own terms or own effort. That would be a works based

faith; wherein we save our own selves because of the fruit we bear. That is quite a popular lie!

The inverse of that works based faith is the truth we cling to: we bear fruit BECAUSE we've been saved. We are not the true vine - Jesus is!

[Jhn 15:1-6 NKJV] 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every [branch] that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you [are] the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw [them] into the fire, and they are burned.

In both of these portions of Scripture, Matt 7 and John 15, we see the importance of bearing fruit. We also see that the fruitless or

unprofitable will end up in the burn pile; and that only by abiding in Christ can one bear good fruit.

V.20 - Contrasted against those who are enemies of the cross and “who set their mind on earthly things,” Paul affirms that the community of saints holds a heavenly citizenship.

This is WHY and HOW we are different!

This is WHY those who are connected to the true vine - Jesus - can't help but press into the kingdom! It's who we are! The substance of our being is conformed into, grafted into who He is.

As citizens of heaven we speak Christ's heavenly language! We live His life! We carry His customs and traditions with us! We have His shared history! We have a national identity that is rooted in eternity, and in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

BUT....for the time being, as we wait, we are ambassadors and pilgrims in a foreign land. That means that we have to speak two languages - just like any good ambassador. AND, like any good ambassador, thinking to advance the interests of our homeland, we hold to a unified message!

Paul writes about this to the Corinthians:

[2Co 5:20 NKJV] 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore [you] on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

It's important that we recognize we are ambassadors and not refugees. It would be easy to look at this passage and hear Paul's language regarding those who "eagerly wait for the Savior," in a forlorn sense - like we're refugees waiting for rescue but NO -- we've been rescued!

Now as we hopefully serve in the diplomatic corp of Christ we also eagerly wait for His soon return.

Pay attention to Paul's expectation. Note that his language indicates to us that the state of the first century church was one of expectation -- a waiting for the soon return of Christ! They believed that Jesus was returning soon!

As the millennia tick by, some of us naturally become disheartened. There are even those who have dismissed the

notion of a second coming altogether. Preferring to explain this Biblical teaching as allegory or wishful thinking. BUT, we are to be people of expectation and hope.

Peter writes about this in his second epistle.

[2Pe 3:3-4, 9 NKJV] 3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of creation." ... 9 The Lord is not slack concerning [His] promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Our expectation isn't wishful thinking. Our understanding that Jesus could come back at any moment should actually impact our work on planet earth! And we believe this because Jesus declared it: [Jhn 14:3 NLT] 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

A question for reflection: If Jesus could return at any moment and transform this place, this earth, our very bodies --- how would that move us to interact with the world around us?

The day is getting long, loved one! If we grasped this truth, or were grasped by it, we would be about our Father's business, ensuring that our lives bore the marks of faithful examples -- separating from the earthly minded false believer, pressing forward to the prize and this ambassadorship, reaching out to the hopeless and unsaved, crying out, "be reconciled to God!"

Paul instructs the Roman church on just this thing!

[Rom 13:11-14 NKJV] ...now [it is] high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation [is] nearer than when we [first] believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to [fulfill its] lusts.

4:1 - It makes better sense to include this verse with the reading of chapter three given that it is the culmination of what Paul has set forth in the past several verses

Paul again expresses his deep connection with the church by referring to them in unabashedly affectionate terms. I propose that this is an example that we should also embrace with one another and with other Jesus followers.

So sweet is Paul's fellowship with this church that he refers to them as a treasure, and the object which brings him joy.

Is this how we feel about the church and one another? That question might be challenging. Some of us would rather hide our affiliation with the body of Christ rather than treasure and wear it on our heads as a laurel crown to be looked upon with awe.

The end of the matter of comparisons for the Philippians and for us is to stand fast. Having been presented with good examples to follow and a sea of bad examples to discern and shun the last remaining duty is to remain firm in our position. Where is that position...in the Lord.

One commentator suggests that , "With this word one can visualize a soldier standing firmly amidst the horrors of a battle. The idea is to remain faithful without giving way..., or to demonstrate unswerving loyalty...amidst attacks from without and

false teachings within...one can sometimes express it better [as] “you should never run away,” “you should never give in,” or “you must never collapse.”<sup>4</sup>

And so we pray, Lord, equip us with the endurance to stand until the end by your Spirit, your grace, your word, and your strong hand.

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<sup>4</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 124.