

Philippians 3:17-4:1

¹⁷Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body.

^{4:1}So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends.

Our Citizenship Is in Heaven

I.

Follow me. Do what I do. All you really need is the right mindset. Imitate me.

Motivational speakers all like to point to themselves and the superior results they have achieved by dedicating themselves to making the right choices in life.

“Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you” (Philippians 3:17, EHV).

Did Paul think he was really such a great example? Was he trying to conceal who he was from the Philippians and merely have them look at his recent past as an example?

No.

Far from hiding his past, Paul talked openly about his checkered past. Paul had been a model citizen, at least, as far as the Jewish establishment had been concerned. In the beginning of Philippians 3 Paul gave some of the detailed ways he had followed the righteousness of the law, as the Pharisees would have seen things. Not only had Paul been a Pharisee, he had been a *model* Pharisee. In earlier times he had persecuted Christians. He had watched in glee as Christians were executed.

No believer in Jesus would have called him a model Christian back then. They wouldn't have called him a Christian at all. He wasn't even looking only at that time of his life when he said he was: “The worst sinner” (1 Timothy 1:16, EHV).

All that unbelieving Pharisaical life was before. They knew the rest of the story.

No doubt they knew it from Paul himself. He had been blinded by the light on his way to Damascus, where he had intended to persecute more Christians. Jesus *himself* had appeared in a vision. Jesus himself had spoken to Paul. Jesus himself announced forgiveness to Paul. And Jesus himself commissioned Paul for a special task, to be an apostle of Jesus—one who would preach the message of the gospel to others. Paul said: “I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10, EHV).

Knowing Paul's whole story, the Philippians could *indeed* imitate Paul. They knew his past, and they knew that despite his past, Paul was a forgiven child of God. What Paul was asking them to imitate really had very little to do with Paul himself, it had everything to do with Jesus.

Others might talk about their accomplishments. Paul says: “Whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. ⁸But even more

than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8, EHV). Everything he had worked so hard for a loss; everything garbage. Because Christ is so much better.

II.

“To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping” (Philippians 3:18, EHV). Sadly, Paul was not talking about unbelievers. You can see it in modern times, too. Many who *claim* to be Christian do so only for their own purposes. Maybe it looks good to a spouse. Perhaps you make some business contacts because of your professed faith. A certain level of trust is placed in you simply because you claim to be Christian. Goodwill of that sort can be worth a great deal in the business world. So you act a certain way and say what needs to be said to gain the trust of others.

“Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things” (Philippians 3:19, EHV). In the final analysis, there is a different agenda. Their appetite for earthly things and earthly glory is all such fraudulent Christians are about. They live down to the levels of their human nature.

As Paul wrote these words, he was in jail. His imprisonment was because he remained faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He could very easily have renounced his faith in Jesus and gained his earthly freedom. There is something far more dangerous than imprisonment—something that’s even more dangerous than death itself—that is a rejection of Jesus and his righteousness won for all on the cross. To do that ends in destruction.

It’s so easy to fall back on the law. It’s so easy to look at your own accomplishments. Even in Lent that’s a temptation. Did you give something up for Lent? That *can* be a good spiritual exercise. It can help you focus on the fact that Jesus gave up the glories of heaven to go through life as a human being and offer himself as the sacrifice for sins. But it can be a source of pride, too. You want a little credit. You want God to be impressed, and your fellow Christians, too. It might seem harmless on the surface, but ultimately looking for credit rejects the cross and all that Jesus accomplished for you there.

Today’s theme of the day mentioned that every temptation is a shortcut to glory. Taking pride in anything *you* have done, and thinking that somehow you have assisted God in salvation is a shortcut to glory. Even the thought that you made a choice to be a believer is a shortcut to glory, since Jesus himself said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16, EHV).

Every shortcut to glory is the mindset of the Old Self. In today’s First Reading, Jeremiah was threatened by those who wanted a different path to glory than what God was giving them through his prophet. In the Gospel, Jesus was saddened because the rejection of God’s prophets and God’s message was endlessly repeated.

III.

“But our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20, EHV). Have you ever lived somewhere temporarily? When you were away at college in another state, you still considered Michigan home, didn’t you? If you lived in a foreign country for a time, you still looked at the United States as your country. It takes a while for those who immigrate from another country, or even those who move from another state, to consider this place “home.”

Every Christian looks for even more. Whether you were born in the Grand Rapids area or moved here from somewhere else, your *real* home—your real citizenship—is in heaven.

Today's Gospel reported: "Some Pharisees came to [Jesus] and said, 'Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you'" (Luke 13:31, EHV). The Pharisees were trying to give Jesus a shortcut to safety. Or were they? Maybe they just used Herod's threat to serve their own purposes; they wanted Jesus to leave the region. Jesus did not take the shortcut, but gave up everything to make your citizenship in heaven possible.

"But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21, EHV).

Paul gets to the point of what he wanted us to imitate. We imitate his faith. We imitate his trust in Jesus, who is the Savior from heaven.

Rather than a shortcut to glory, in our Savior, Jesus Christ, we find *real* glory. The glory our Lord Jesus gives us. When Jesus returns for you and me at the Last Day, he will transform my lowly body and your lowly body to be like his glorious body. Transformed, you will be taken bodily to your real home, heaven.

IV.

"So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends" (Philippians 4:1, EHV).

Keep standing firm in the Lord. The mindset of the New Self looks beyond the success of the world. It is greater than any confidence you might have in yourself and your own accomplishments. It's much more than some nice-sounding power of positive thinking or steps you might take to a better you.

The mindset of the New Self looks to Jesus every day in repentance and faith. It looks to Jesus with wonder during the Lenten season. He was willing to do so much. He was willing to give up so much. All because he loves you. All because he wants you in heaven with him forever. Your citizenship is in heaven, even now as you walk the way of the cross here on earth. Amen.