

Paul's letter to the Philippians



Unity and joy in the fellowship

Philippians 3:17-4:7



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3:17 ~ Look for godly examples of behavior

- Paul began with two present tense imperatives or commands:
 - **“join in following my example”** (*summimētēs*) ~ keep on joining with others in following my example.
 - **“observe”** (*skopeō*) ~ continue to “scope out and mark” specific people around them.
- They were to look for **“those who walk”** (*peripateō*) ~ a Hebraism for living one’s life or regulating one’s conduct.
- **“according to the pattern”** (*tupos*) ~ corresponding to the image or model in the examples Paul previously shared.
- **“you have in us”** ~ this gave the Philippians several examples of godly behavior that they already knew and could follow immediately.

3:18 ~ Unfortunately, godly examples are rare

- **“For”** (*gar*) ~ indicates that Paul is providing additional explanation **for** what he had just said. The word **“many”** (*polos*) could be translated as “a great number, most, or almost all.” As believers look around them for godly examples to follow, almost everyone they observe will be living in a way that is **not** according to the pattern seen in the example of Paul.
- Paul had **“told”** (*legō*) them about this many times, and now writing this had brought him to the point of **“weeping”** (*klaiō*). Paul was heartbroken that there were not more examples of godly behavior to imitate.
- **“enemies”** (*echthros*) ~ open hostility rather than a simple lack of concern or disinterest. This identifies the many people around us who refuse to believe in Christ.

3:19 ~ Characteristics of the ungodly

- The vast majority of people will continue to go about their normal lives, living in order to please themselves rather than God.
- The final destiny of those who refuse to believe is “**destruction**” (*apōleia*), eternal ruin, misery, and the loss of everything that gives meaning to life.
- Three things characterize the unsaved:
 1. Their “**god is their appetite**” (*koilia*) ~ literally, a hollow cavity like the stomach or the womb. This designates any physical appetite or sensual pleasure.
 2. Their “**glory is in their shame**” ~ pride or boasting about shameful things.
 3. They “**set their minds on earthly things**” (*phroneō*) ~ Their thinking or mindset is focused purely on “**earthly things**” (*epigeios*). To the vast majority of people in the world, earthly things are what give them the most satisfaction and meaning in life.

3:20 ~ Believers: *not earth-bound, but heaven-bound*

- The discouraging picture of the unsaved presented in 3:18-19 is contrasted here with the hope that believers possess.
- **“our citizenship is in heaven”** (*politeuma*) ~ their real homeland is the perfection of heaven and their true citizenship is there.
- Believers should be living in eager expectation of their returning Lord and Savior. **“eagerly wait”** (*apekdechomai*) ~ to fully expect and intensely look ahead in order to receive or take hold of something.
- Paul had referred to the future **“day of Christ”** (1:6, 10; 2:16), when Jesus will rescue church-age saints from the wrath to come upon an ungodly world (1 Thess 1:10). At that time “He who began a good work in you will perfect it” (1:6).

3:21 ~ The resurrection of church-age saints

- Paul provided additional details about the resurrection and transformation which church-age saints are eagerly awaiting.
- “transform the body of our **humble state**” (*tapeinōsis*) ~ depicts the “lowliness” and “vile” condition of bodies that are sinful by nature. The believers’ mortal flesh is not suitable for an eternal existence in heaven and must be transformed (see 1 Corinthians 15).
- “**into conformity with the body of His glory**” ~ the believer’s resurrection body will have properties similar to those of Jesus’ body at His resurrection (1 John 3:2).
- “**by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself**” ~ It is certainly not too much to think that the omnipotent King of the Universe is capable of accomplishing this.

4:1 ~ Continue to eagerly expect Christ's return

- **“Therefore”** ~ what Paul will say here is closely connected to what he just finished saying.
- **“beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown”** ~ His great affection for them is clearly evident, and they represent the crowning achievement of his ministry and mission for Christ. **“crown”** (*stephanos*) is a symbol of the completion of his service.
- **“continually stand firm** in the way I just described” (^{present tense} imperative) ~ Paul shared his admonition to believers for living in eager expectation of Christ's return. One mark of Christians worth imitating is their eager expectation of the Lord's return, at which time their longing for perfection will be fulfilled.

4:2 ~ Paul's appeal for unity in the fellowship

- Paul raised a specific issue he became aware of in the church at Philippi. A spirit of disunity existed between two prominent women, and it was becoming a threat to unity in the fellowship.
- **“to live in harmony”** (*phroneō*) ~ the same word Paul used when he told the Philippians to have an **attitude** of humility of mind (2:5).
- Paul's way of handling this situation suggests that it involved a personality conflict rather than a doctrinal dispute.

“Euodia and Syntyche, be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose; doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves. You are not merely to look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of each other” (2:2-4)

4:3 ~ Believers' names are in God's book of life

- **"Syzygus"** ("yoked together" *masculine gender*), **"help these women"** to resolve their differences. They were important and influential because they had faithfully served alongside Paul **"in the cause of the gospel."**
- Paul also mentioned **"Clement"** before including **"the rest"** (*loipos*) of his fellow workers as a collective group. The Philippian believers would have known all about the situation and exactly who Paul was referring to by name, even though we do not have any other information about them.
- **"whose names are in the book of life"** ~ God keeps a record of all the righteous who place their faith and trust in Him. This is an important point. As Jesus said, ***"rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven"*** (Luke 10:20).

4:4 ~ The command to rejoice

- The fact that one's name is recorded in God's "**book of life**" should result in great rejoicing.
- Both instances of the word "**rejoice**" (*chairō*) are commands in the present tense, which could be translated, "*constantly be in the habit of rejoicing.*" We can rejoice in God's grace and goodness which has provided for us both presently and throughout eternity.
- This kind of joy is not a feeling, but a decision. You cannot command a person to have a specific feeling. It requires mental discipline to obey a command like this, especially in the face of difficult experiences in life. But with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers can have a joy "**in the Lord**" that is not determined by outward circumstances.

4:5 ~ The Lord is near

- Paul followed the previous command to “**rejoice**” with another command relating to their attitude. They are to demonstrate a “**gentle spirit**” (*epieikēs*) ~ “to yield, give place, or submit.” This carries the idea of meekness which results from humility of mind and regards others as more important than ourselves (2:3-4).
- “**The Lord is near**” ~ puts into perspective all that precedes it as well as what follows. The word “**near**” (*eggus*) can refer to nearness in place as well as nearness in time.
 - The Lord is near in proximity since each believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
 - The “day of Christ” is near in time. He will return to gather church-age saints who will then appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom 14:10). This should provide a great deal of motivation to live in a way that pleases Him.

4:6 ~ Overcoming anxiety by focusing on God

- Since the “**Lord is near**,” both in proximity and time, He is able to help believers to overcome anxiety and to live in peace.
- “**anxious**” (*merimnaō*) ~ Positively, “to have a care, thought, or interest in something,” which can even lead to promoting one’s own interests. Negatively, “to be troubled with cares and to worry about one’s situation.”
- Believers’ most practical way to handle anxiety is to refocus their thoughts on their Savior by communing and communicating with Him. In the midst of every circumstance, believers are to direct their thoughts to God.
 - “**prayer**” (*proseuchē*) ~ bring one’s requests directly to God.
 - “**supplication**” (*deēsis*) ~ conveys a lack or need as the basis for the request.
 - “**thanksgiving**” (*eucharistia*) ~ an attitude of gratitude for all God has done.

4:7 ~ The result of fellowship with God

- The antidote to “anxiety” is the “**peace of God**” ~ a deep and abiding peace that results from being reconciled to God and having a personal relationship with Him. It is God’s own peace that He bestows upon a believer who is fully trusting Him. The act of “*prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*” gives evidence of this relationship of trust, and God honors those who honor Him.
- “will **guard** your hearts and your minds” (*phroureō*) ~ a military term that carries the idea of watching over and protecting from harm, as well as preserving for safekeeping. “*Prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*” (4:6) brings the “**peace of God**” as the antidote to anxiety, and God’s peace can in turn protect and preserve the believer’s heart and mind from anxiety-producing attacks.