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Philippians Bible Study (To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain)

## Philippians 3:17-4:1, Heavenly Citizenship

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Paul has been writing to the Christians in Philippi about how they must live humble, self-sacrificing lives because they belong to the Lord. In chapter 2 Paul described the humble, self-sacrifice of Jesus. He continued to show that Christians exemplify this behavior, as seen in the humble, self-sacrifice of Timothy and Epaphroditus. In chapter 3 Paul uses himself as the example, who has many reasons for confidence in the flesh. But he counts all of those gains as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. He counts everything as loss for the sake of Christ, to know him and gain him. This has been the powerful, singular message of Paul in these last two chapters. Now listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:17.

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

What did Paul do that these Christians are to imitate? Everything that was gain in the flesh was counted as loss. Walk according to the example of Paul. Walk according the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Walk according to those examples given to them. Now, what does this look like for these

Philippians? We read in Acts 16 that Philippi does not have enough Jews in it to support a synagogue. This is a Gentile city, a Roman colony, and a military outpost. These are Roman citizens who enjoy all kinds of rights and special privileges because they live in Philippi that other cities in the Roman Empire do not enjoy. So what is Paul saying? Just as Paul counted as loss and forfeiting all his privileges and confidence in the flesh that he had in Judaism for the sake of Christ, these Christians must be willing to forfeit their privileges and confidence in the flesh that they have as Roman citizens for the sake of Christ. You must be willing to sacrifice anything to serve Christ. They cannot place value on being Roman citizens and maintaining those privileges over the value of knowing and serving Christ. Their citizenship is going to depend on an allegiance to the Roman Empire and, in particular, to the emperor. That allegiance was going to be in conflict with their allegiance to Christ. So what must they do? Count all their gains as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Paul explains this further in the rest of this paragraph.

## Unwilling to Count as Loss (3:18-19)

With tears Paul proclaims that many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ (3:18). Paul has told these Christians many times painfully that there are many who will pretend to be Christians. But their lives show that they are enemies of the cross. Notice that Paul does not say that they are enemies of Christ. Rather, they are enemies of the cross. They are enemies of what the cross means and represents. The cross represents denying self. The cross represents humble, self-sacrificing lives. This is what Jesus meant when he said that to follow him you must take up your cross (Matthew 16:24). People cannot be Christians and reject the cross in their own lives.

Paul goes on describe what those who are enemies of the cross look like. You might be surprised at what their nature is. The first description is that their end is destruction. These people who are enemies of the cross have a secured outcome for their lives. But it is not an eternity in heaven but a certainty of destruction. Dead faith has eternal destruction coming.

The second description given to them in verse 19 is that their god is their belly. Quite simply, they are idolaters. They obey their fleshly appetites. What controls their lives are their desires. What controls their lives are their impulses. They do what they want to do. This is the opposite of taking up the cross!!! Paul's concern that he pleads with them in tears over is that there are people who think they are Christians but their belly is their god. When you do what you want to do rather than what God has called you to do, you are an enemy of the cross of Christ and your end is destruction. When you do what you want to do rather than sacrifice as God has called you to do, you are an enemy of the cross of Christ and your end is

destruction. I am not sure why we have such a difficulty with this concept. Yet we do. We think we can do what we want and still be Christians. Being a Christian means you do not do what you want but what God wants. You do not do what is good for you but what Christ desires for you to do. I want to drive further the thought that we are not only talking about sinful things. Yes, you must not obey your passions and desires that are sinful. You must subject your body to Christ. When we sin, we are declaring that our god is our flesh. But there are more subtle ways we worship ourselves rather than God. When we refuse to study the scriptures, pray, share the gospel with others, refuse to gather with other Christians, and the like we are showing that our god is ourselves. We will do what we want rather than what God wants. This is why when you do not join with other Christians for worship and study we are concerned. This is a public declaration that your god is your belly. You have other things you want to do rather than sacrificing for Christ. There are not a lot of things that we can see as a public declaration of whether your god is God or your god is yourself. But this is why we are so concerned when we do not see you on Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays, or any other gathering times. When we do what we want and are unwilling to sacrifice ourselves, we are enemies of the cross of Christ.

The third description for these enemies of the cross of Christ is that they glory in shameful things. By their indulgence they glory in what is shameful. Their glory is not in the Lord. Their joy is not that God is glorified. They glory in their own shameful ways. We are not even ashamed of our decision to not sacrifice for Christ. We publicize and glory in the fact that we are not giving ourselves completely to the Lord. We show the world that God is not the treasure worthy of sacrificing all things for. Instead we glory in the nonsense of this world. This leads to the final description of those who are enemies of the cross.

Finally, the enemies of the cross of Christ have their minds set on earthly things. They show that their joy and life is here on this earth, not in God. Notice again that it is not that they set their minds only on wicked things. Rather, they set their minds on earthly things. Enemies of the cross do not have a single minded pursuit of Christ. Enemies of the cross have their minds on this world. They are concerned about this life. They are concerned about their flesh. They try to find their joy right here, right now.

## Citizenship in Heaven (3:20-21)

Those who are truly followers of Jesus have their citizenship in heaven. Do you hear the message of Paul to these Philippians who have a powerful and special privilege of being citizens of Rome because they live in Philippi? Their hope is not in Roman citizenship but in heavenly citizenship. We pledge our allegiance to heaven, not to earth. Our eyes are always heaven directed because from it we await a Savior. What are we waiting for in this life? Notice Paul says that Christ followers live awaiting the Savior

from heaven. We live in America, but we are from another place where we long to go. When I lived in Kentucky to finish my college education, I had my car tagged with a California license plate and I had a California driver's license. I did everything I could to keep my car tagged with a California license plate. Why? Because I was not from Kentucky. I had to live in Kentucky. But I wanted nothing to do with Kentucky. I was from California and I wanted to show that I was from California.

In the same way, we live on this earth and we live in America. But we want nothing to do with the ways of this world. We want to show the world that we are from heaven. We know we are citizens of heaven. We desire to do everything we can to show this citizenship and will not entangle ourselves with the worldly nonsense or entangle ourselves with the affairs of this earth. The scriptures make it clear that we are foreigners and strangers on this earth.

**Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11 ESV)**

**These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13 ESV)**

We do not belong here. This world is not our home. We are just passing through. We await a Savior who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. This is what we care about. Paul said this back in 3:10-12. Paul counted all things as loss to know Christ and gain Christ so that he may know the power of Christ's resurrection. We do the same thing. We long for the glorious bodies these bodies will be transformed into when our Savior returns. We keep our eyes heavenward. Our actions are driven by where we are going.

## Conclusion: Stand Firm (4:1)

With these things in mind, stand firm in the Lord in this way. Do not be enemies of the cross of Christ. Embrace the cross of Christ. Paul said that to know him and experience the power of his resurrection we must share in Christ's suffering (3:10). Let the cross represent your need to sacrifice yourself for the sake of Christ. We will count anything and everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Join in imitating Paul. Show that your god is the only true God and not your flesh, not yourself. We may live here but our eyes are on Jesus, longing for his return. Live in that knowledge and stand firm in that faith.

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