

In the name of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

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. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I often wonder if maps will someday become obsolete. Most people have some kind of GPS built into their phones. Punch in the address and you are good to go – unless your address is like mine where my street hasn't been entered into Google Maps yet. Then you might have a problem. You have to dig out a map or call for directions.

When trying to find your way it helps to have a good and accurate source to guide you. The Apostle Paul was emphasizing that, in this portion of scripture, as he talked about our journey through life and our ultimate destination of heaven. **“Make sure you have the right directions!”** because, **“Good guides are hard to find,”** but, **“The best guide is easy to see.”**

I. Paul's letter to the Philippians was a little different from his other letters. In many of his other letters he had to deal with doctrinal matters or specific attacks on the church but his letter to the Philippians is a little more personal. This congregation had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to help Paul during his imprisonment there. And now it was time for Epaphroditus to return home and Paul wanted to send a letter to encourage the congregation. Even though they didn't have doctrinal issues at the time, Satan was still at work attacking the congregation in various ways just as he looks for ways to attack every Christian congregation, including ours.

As Paul encouraged the Philippians he put himself before them as the example they should follow in Christian living, and not only himself but also those who live according to the pattern Paul had given them. Where did this plan come from? Paul in his letter to the Corinthians spelled it out quite simply, **“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 11:1). The pattern Paul was talking about comes from God. The word Paul used for pattern is a word that means, “Follow the pattern you have been stamped with.”

This is not something superficial like the stamps I make on your children's hands which can be easily washed off. This is more like a metal stamp which leaves a deep impression. And God's Word does just that – it leaves a deep impression on our hearts – the stamp of faith. When Paul was imprisoned in Philippi the jailor asked what he must do to be saved and Paul said, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,”** and then Paul baptized the jailor and his family bringing the Holy Spirit to create faith in their hearts and mark them as one of

God's own family. He has done the same thing for us through the waters of Baptism and the Word. He has stamped us as his own and given us the pattern to live by in his Word.

A pattern we want to follow, motivated by the love of our Savior, and nothing else. This pattern doesn't save us but it keeps us close to our Savior and lets our faith shine. This a pattern that not only Paul followed, but also the leaders of the church. This is a pattern that we continue to follow today, **"To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself."**

This is what we want to pass down to the next generation as we live our lives for Christ. We can't just tell them what to do, we have to show them. After all, most children learn by watching and then imitating what they have been shown. As Paul said, "Imitate me," he wasn't motivated by how great he was but more so by how great God was in his life. We, too, want to reflect the greatness of God in our lives for the next generation – for we are giving them an example to follow, whether we realize it or not.

But Paul notes that not everyone was a good example. **"¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."** Paul was sad that some of the congregation had fallen away from God's Word and were now "enemies of the cross." They had rejected Christ and without Christ their destiny is eternal condemnation in hell – everlasting destruction.

Their path to destruction is all too familiar to us. They chose the wrong priorities in life. When Paul says their god is their stomach he is referring to anything that might satisfy a person's sensual appetite. It could be greed, gluttony – overindulgence in food, drunkenness, recreational drugs, sexual immorality or anything else that satisfies what the sinful nature demands. There are so many pleasurable things in this world that can easily become an obsession and crowd God out of our lives. But the glory and pleasure these things bring on earth ends up being our shame at judgment. Paul warns us not to let the pleasures of the world become our downfall as they have for so many throughout the centuries.

Christians are tempted just like everyone else and easily be guided down the wrong path by our friends, the influence of society, doubt, and depression. That is why we want to keep the cross of our Savior in focus. The cross reminds us there is no compromise with sin. The punishment for sin our God demands is very visible in the cross, but so is the grace and love of our God who paid for each and every one of our sins. When we wander from the path of righteousness, the cross pulls us back to our Savior. A beacon in life bringing us forgiveness guiding us back onto the path of Christian living. As we keep the cross in focus the Holy Spirit gives us strength to follow our Savior. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our Savior is easy to see.

II. He is easy to see because we are citizens of heaven – his kingdom. Citizenship is a concept the Philippians would have understood well because many of their inhabitants were retired Roman soldiers. The people of Philippi dressed like Romans, used Roman coins, and their official language was Latin – the language of Rome. Being a Roman citizen brought certain

privileges and rights just as being a US citizen brings us certain privileges and rights. Citizenship in Rome was something to desire and it was valuable to have.

Our citizenship in heaven is more valuable than any earthly citizenship. As part of God's kingdom, we are given the forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of eternal life. We may live in this current world but as citizens of heaven we are not of the world in which we live in – we are different because Christ our king rules in our hearts and he has prepared a place for us in heaven.

Paul gives us just a glimpse of the homeland in verse 21 as he describes the return of our Savior on Judgment Day, **“who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”** On that day our body and soul will be reunited but it won't be the sinful body that was put into the ground – a body affected by sin. On Judgment Day our body will be transformed to be like Christ's glorified body. We will have to wait until that day to see the full picture of what a glorified body is but if it comes from our God we know it has to be good.

So hang in there. As Paul says, **“Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”** Stand firm in the faith. Hold onto the gospel Paul preached – the very same gospel we preach. You are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. Hang in there – not by your own power but by the power of God with the Lord Jesus Christ at your side.

It is easy to get distracted and lost as we journey through life but Christ is here to guide us – we can see him clearly in God's Word. He will keep us focused on the path of righteousness – he will keep us from getting lost and Jesus Christ is the one we trust to take us to our home in heaven. Amen.