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 Philippians 3:15-4:3
 Eleventh Message
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CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

We live in a very diverse area of the world. Many people in the Bay Area were born in a different country or a different state. Living in the U.S. or California is very different from what many of us were accustomed to. That is true for me, having lived the first 23 years of my life in Nebraska. California is a different culture. Sometimes we can feel the tensions of two different homes.

As Christians we feel this way at times since we belong to two countries or lands, so to speak. This is the result of our earthly birth and now our heavenly birth. We are simultaneously part of two kingdoms, one temporary, the other permanent. In the present we live with the tension of competing allegiances. Applying the truths that Paul talks about in chapter 3 of Philippians helps us have the right priorities and framework for dealing with this tension.

I. Right Mind-set and Positive Examples

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (Philippians 3:15-17 NASB)

Paul makes four appeals: “to have this attitude,” “to keep living by the same standard,” “to follow my example,” “to observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” All of these appeals refer to the same thing, which is the subject of verses 2-14, describing Paul’s story. Paul explains that when he came to Christ, he abandoned all the Jewish symbols and rituals that had identified him as a member of God’s people. He rejected Torah living as a means to becoming godly. In the light of gaining Christ and knowing him, all of these things became garbage.

Paul explained that when he came to know Jesus, he adopted a different pattern for living, based on the example of Christ, the cruciform lifestyle that he talked about in chapter 2. Paul embraced both the dying of Jesus and the life of Jesus. He was willing to be conformed to the death of Christ, to lay aside all his Jewish privileges, lay down his life, give up his rights, die to self, humble himself, and suffer obediently. All of these things were modeled in Christ, who humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

But at the same time Paul lived in and experienced the resurrection power made manifest in the power that raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus made possible for the present the life of the age to come. Resurrection power allows believers to be transformed into Christ. Paul’s appeal is for the Philippians and for us to adopt the same pattern of living.

The first appeal is to have the right “attitude.” This is the key word in Philippians. It comes from a verb “to think,” and might best be translated “mind-set.” We saw this verb in chapter 2, where Paul urged the Philippians to “have this attitude (mind-set) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). Here in chapter 3, Paul urges the Philippians to have his mind-set, which leads to right behavior.

Paul’s second appeal is to “keep living” by that same standard. The words were originally a military term meaning to be “drawn up in a line.” Paul used this word in Galatians: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk (keep in line) by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Paul would have us bring our life in line, in step, into conformity to the way of living in the Spirit as new creations in Christ. This is the line that the Philippians had already come to attain or reach as a result of their belief in Christ.

The third appeal is to follow Paul’s example. Literally, he says, to “be a fellow or joint imitator of me.” We get our word “mimic” from the Greek word for “example.” The appeal is to imitate Paul, who imitates Christ. In five other places Paul exhorts in his letters to imitate either him or God.

The fourth appeal is to observe or examine carefully those who walk “according to the pattern you have in us.” The “us” here might be referring to Epaphroditus and Timothy, who were with Paul in Rome. The word “pattern” means a copy or image. We get our word for “type” from the word, as in typology. Since Philippi was located on a major highway, the Philippians would encounter many travelers. Paul is telling them to watch people and examine those who walk through life as a type of Christ.

We should take note of this little caveat that Paul throws in. He addresses those who are “perfect,” meaning complete or brought to completion. While Paul is not yet perfect in terms of bodily resurrection, as he says in verse 12, the implication is that he is mature in terms of his mind-set. Paul includes the Philippians in this state of maturity, at least those who shared his point of view.

However, there might be some who are not there yet in terms of maturity. This doesn’t trouble Paul. He knows that God will reveal the truth and bring people to a mature or complete mind-set. He doesn’t feel the need to harangue them and control their every thought. He is not implying that it is fine for people to just be true to what they think. There are no major misunderstandings on the important issues. The Philippians are friends, and Paul can trust God for their maturity. What a great model for us to follow when we get impatient with people and their lack of progress. We too can trust God for growth and maturity in others.

What rich images Paul gives us: having the right mind-set, lining up to follow Jesus, imitating Paul’s example, paying attention

to others who walk as a type of Christ. The issue for the Philippians is suffering for their faith, for their allegiance to Christ as Lord rather than Caesar. They are living in the world and dealing with pagan pressures. Paul shares Christ's story in chapter 2 and his own story here in chapter 3. He now appeals for the Philippians to make these two stories their story, and by extension, invites us to make it our story.

Most of us grow up mimicking, imitating, copying others. We have idols and models that affect the way we talk, the way we dress and the careers we pursue. Very few of us are trendsetters; we are trend followers.

Growing up, my idol was Mickey Mantle. I held the baseball bat just like Mantle, with the pinky on the nub of the bat, and patterned my swing after his. When I started playing golf, my idol was Arnold Palmer. I didn't pattern my swing after Arnie's wild swing, but I did pattern my putting stance after his, with my right foot turned inward. In college I was very shy and introverted. I watched the "cool" people very carefully in order to dress like them and imitate their social graces. Almost every commercial or advertisement presents a type or an image that says you will gain a certain image if you purchase a certain product.

Who do we imitate or follow for our spiritual life? Pupils do not just receive instruction from their teachers, they put into practice the example of the teacher. Most truth is not taught but caught. It comes by watching others and how they live their lives. A lot of ministry takes place without words or fanfare. Therefore we are to watch those whose life is flavored with grace, beauty, and integrity. We watch couples that die to self and love sacrificially in marriage. We listen intently to those who can teach us to pray. We follow the example of people who show us "how to die, how to grieve, how to trust, how to disagree with another believer without turning belligerent and while still cherishing forbearance and humility."¹

We are to look for people who teach to have the right mindset. When we follow those examples, then we become models and examples for others to follow. All of us are called to influence the next generation of new believers to follow the example and pattern of Christ.

Maybe you are thinking you don't have any models to follow. I would disagree. We have biographies of saints like Hudson Taylor, Oswald Chambers, William Wilberforce, and others who down through the ages lived their lives with the mind-set of Christ. In the Scriptures we have men like Jeremiah and Isaiah, Paul and Timothy, and indeed our Lord himself, "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2).

These appeals by Paul indicate that it is important for us not to float through life being unthinking and uncritical. Rather, it is extremely important to be aware of the thoughts that are determining our actions and the people who are influencing the way we live. The reason for this is because there are many who think wrongly and give us negative examples. If we are not paying attention, we might end up going down the wrong path, as Paul goes on to explain.

II. Wrong Mind-sets and Negative Examples

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (3:18-19)

In contrast to those who walk according to the pattern of Christ are those who walk as enemies of the cross. Is Paul referring to the Jewish teachers he talked about in verse 2? Are they Jews or Gentiles? Are they believers or unbelievers? It is very difficult to know.

Since Paul weeps for these people, one would assume that they profess to be Christians. It is unlikely that he would be in tears over unbelievers who were trying to lead the Philippians astray. Every generation produces people who profess faith in Christ but end up deceiving people and drawing some away from authentic Christian living.

Paul calls these "enemies of the cross." The cross is shameful. It stands as God's utter contradiction to human wisdom and power. Whoever these people are, they do not live a cross-centered life and do not follow the pattern of Christ. They want resurrection power but refuse to be conformed to the death of Christ. They want to avoid suffering. Paul employs pagan language as he gives four characteristics of these people.

Their end is destruction. The word "end" is the same as the word perfect or complete in verses 12 and 15. These people take a different path. Instead of becoming mature or complete in Christ, they end in destruction. Clearly they are not believers.

Their god is their appetite or belly. This is a confusing description, but it probably means that they try to satisfy their appetites with creature comforts, with things of the earth that never fully satisfy. They give themselves over to bodily desires. This is their god, their top priority. They are idolaters.

Their glory is their shame. The things that they pursue and value to give glory are in reality downright shameful. They look for a temporal glory instead of an eternal glory. Perhaps this is a reference to Jews who glory in circumcision and not the cross.

Their mind is set on earthly things. Here is our key word that we just saw in verse 15, the word mind-set. The basic mind-set of these people is on the things of earth that they see with their eyes, desire with their bellies, and believe to have glory. Their mind-set is earthbound, not heaven-bound. They don't have the mind-set of Christ or follow the pattern of Paul.

These descriptions certainly mirror my own life as a pagan in college, living in a fraternity house. They also describe professing Christians who are really unbelievers and idolaters. They may not necessarily be doing wicked things, but they focus completely on earthly things. Paul is warning the Philippians to not be deceived by these people even as he weeps for them. What a great model for us. We can speak the truth plainly but we weep for the lost.

III. Motivation for the Right Mind-set

So why should we emulate the pattern of Christ and the example of Paul? Why shouldn't our mind-set be on earthly things

while we wait for our ride to heaven? What is our motivation? Paul explains:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (3:20-21)

We live as citizens of heaven, in contrast to those whose mind-set is on earthly things. We saw this word earlier, in chapter 1: “conduct yourselves (live as citizen) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27).

Philippi was a colony of Rome, an outpost populated with Roman soldiers. Its residents lived as Roman citizens, abiding by the practices and culture of Rome. They didn't live in Philippi waiting to get back to Rome, waiting to go home. Rather they sought to extend Roman influence and rule to northern Greece. They hailed Caesar as their Lord and Savior.

Paul is applying this idea of citizenship to the believers in Philippi. Some of them probably were Roman citizens, but they were also citizens of heaven. They had dual citizenship. They were living as an outpost of heaven and therefore abided by the practices and culture of heaven. They were not just waiting to go to heaven but actively seeking to extend the influence and rule of heaven on earth. Heaven isn't a place somewhere up in the clouds, it is God's dimension of reality. Heaven is the invisible world all around us.

We too are citizens of heaven. Churches all over the world are colonies of heaven. We don't just live our lives, waiting to go home and be with the Lord. We live as citizens of heaven, seeking to extend the rule of heaven on earth: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Understanding this identity is what motivates us in living a cruciform lifestyle in the present. We don't cling to earthly things. We don't set our minds on earthly things.

Because my 2½-year-old grandson was born in Ecuador, he has dual citizenship. He is a citizen of both the United States and Ecuador. In the years ahead, I doubt Noah will cling to his Ecuadorian citizenship. Rather, he will fully embrace living in the U.S. These two citizenships will not be equally weighted or valued. In the same way, our earthly citizenship and heavenly citizenship are not to be equally weighted or valued. We still have to work, pay bills, and get our cars fixed. However, we should not cling to our earthly citizenship but rather embrace fully our heavenly citizenship. We live now as citizens of heaven.

In contrast to those whose end is destruction, glory is the end for citizens of heaven. Here Paul amplifies on what he mentioned as his final goal in verse 11, the resurrection of the dead, and verse 14, the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. When Jesus comes, the true Savior as opposed to Caesar, the new heavens and new earth will appear and believers will receive new bodies.

Here again Paul makes use of several words and ideas that he used in the Christ hymn in chapter 2: transform, humble, conform. Christ existed in the form of God but changed into the form of a man. He humbled himself unto death. God raised him from the dead and transformed his earthly body to a supernatural

body. God exalted him and gave him a name above every name. So too we will be changed. God will transform our humble bodies to be like Christ's glorious body. The glory of God is true glory in contrast to those whose glory is their shame. This will happen through the power of Christ who subjects all things to himself. Christ's story of suffering and resurrection becomes our story as well.

Our future is so wonderful that we “eagerly wait” for the coming of our Lord. The term is always used in connection with the coming of Christ. It means to stand on tiptoe. We are like little children waiting for Christmas morning, or like a puppy that wags its tail in anticipation of a walk. Sometimes when I open my eyes in the morning, my dog Lucy is sitting right in front of me with her eyes focused on mine. She is eagerly waiting for any movement that might signal the coming of breakfast. This is how all of creation is eagerly awaiting the new heavens and new earth, and how we are to await the coming of the Lord, saying always, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

Our salvation is for today since we are already citizens of heaven, and our salvation is for tomorrow as we await the final glory that belongs to Christ. We live today in light of the end and develop a homesickness for heaven.

IV. Putting Theory into Practice

How do these truths work out in real life? I think it best to see the first three verses of chapter 4 in light of chapter 3. This is where the rubber meets the road and theory is put into practice. There are two applications, one general and one very specific. This is perhaps where Paul has been heading all along.

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. (4:1)

Here we see Paul's affection for these believers. Twice he addresses them as “beloved,” and in the first phrase we see that they are his longed-for brethren. He longs to see them and be with them. They are also his joy and his crown. Paul finds joy in what God has done in their lives, and he anticipates their being together in the presence of Christ in the future. As a pastor, I often feel the joy of seeing God at work in people's lives. The Philippians will also be Paul's victor's crown, his prize, his validation for not running the race in vain.

His exhortation is to stand firm, the same one he gives in 1:27. The Philippians are facing opposition and beginning to suffer for their allegiance to Jesus as Lord. But based on the glory and certainty of the future, they can stand firm in the present.

All of us need to hear this word as we face the difficulties and trials of life. When we are tempted to give in, give out or give way, we are reminded of our heavenly citizenship and future glory. We are encouraged to not let discouragement and despair get the better of us, to not set our minds on earthly things or cling to this life. We can endure the present suffering without compromise because this world is passing away and our home is in a distant country. So we dig a foxhole and hold our ground. We stand firm, not with a stiff upper lip, but with a quiet confidence,

knowing that heaven will heal every sorrow in the future and that God will supply what we need in the present.

The second application is very specific.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (4:2-3)

Euodia and Syntyche were co-workers with Paul, part of the leadership of the church along with Lydia. Maybe they came to the Lord when Paul first arrived in Philippi and met Lydia by the river. The fact that he mentions them by name means they were friends. Evidently, there was some tension between these two women. They had a falling out and were having trouble getting along, or perhaps they had a different viewpoint on suffering or how to respond to Jewish teachers.

Paul's encouragement for them is to live in harmony. Here again is our key word: have the same mind-set, think the same thing. Certainly Paul has in mind what he has just said—to follow the pattern of Christ by dying to self for the sake of the gospel. He knows that tension within the leadership can distract the church and hinder the heavenly colony from its influence in the world. His tone is not demanding, controlling, or judgmental. He isn't afraid for this word to be read publicly, as were all his letters to churches. He simply wants them to sit down and work it out, to agree in the Lord.

Paul also sees the value of having someone help them sort it out. We don't know the identity of the true companion or yoke-fellow. It can't be Epaphroditus or Timothy, since they were with Paul. It may have been Luke or someone in Philippi whom Paul expects to get this letter. In any case, he urges this person to get involved and to help these two women. He also mentions Clement and the rest of the co-workers in the church, wanting them to follow his example. Working together for the gospel is a top priority. Again, Paul draws motivation from the future and the fact that their names are written in the book of life.

Internal tensions often arise within the church. People get on the wrong side of each other or on opposite sides of an issue. People get hurt. Communication breaks down. Neither party will back down. Small things become big things. If you are like me, you will hold this inside and shut down. Many times this can lead to people leaving the church or to a church split. As believers we are to take the high and costly road of dying to self and seek the greater goal of the gospel. This does not mean that we seek unity at the expense of truth, nor does it mean that we will always agree on every subject.

But there are many tensions that can be dissolved and we should seek to do so as quickly as possible. We shouldn't let things linger or dig in our heels, refuse to be corrected or resort to manipulation or blackmail. We can take out our Bibles, think things through, find out why there is a disagreement, and be willing to be corrected. We can involve a mature third party who can help the two sides to hear one another. "Personal differences should never become an occasion for advancing your party, for stroking bruised egos, for resorting to cheap triumphalism, for trimming the gospel by appealing to pragmatics. Focus on what unites you: the gospel, the gospel, the gospel."²

How is God calling you to apply the right mind-set to your life today? Having the right mind-set as a citizen of heaven changes the way we live as we await our future glory.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20–21 TNIV)

¹ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 94.

² D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 103.