

## *Conduct Consistent with Commitment*

### **Introduction (Text: Philippians 3:15-16)**

- A. **Paul calls now for conduct consistent with commitment, for a consistency between the level of spirituality we have attained and the practical way we daily live: “Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”**
- B. **The essential discipline of Christian growth is learning to say yes to Christ in every area of our lives every day.** This is the way we *become* the new creations we *are* in Christ. The Bible makes the point over and over again—that our consent is necessary for Christ to act in transforming our lives.
- **Christ does not force Himself upon us.** He comes to us and abides in us as we say yes to Him. He doesn't take command against our will. He works in us according to our obedient response to Him.
  - **And that response must be new and fresh every day.** New occasions demand new duties. New situations call for new responses.
- C. We may state this truth another way, which applies to each of us, no matter where we are on our journey. **Faithfulness to the truth we have already learned is a condition of receiving further and fuller truth.** None of us are without some measure of revelation and understanding, none of us are bereft of truth, all are at some level of maturity—let us be true to that.
- D. **This leads to Paul's closing word in this section, which is a word of judgment.**

### **#1: Judgment (Philippians 3:17-19)**

- A. **In this passage Paul does that which is always dangerous to do—designating oneself as an example.** Those who would do this become vulnerable, setting themselves up for failure.
- **One has to be either extremely arrogant, or transparently humble to project oneself as a model.** The world is full of the arrogant who send the message, “I have arrived: you would do well to follow me.”
  - Modern advertising uses that scheme. Superstars and the super-successful are presented as models, the glamorous and luring lie being that if we use the item these persons use we will be like them.
- B. **Rarely does a call to imitate come from the humble.** Thus this is a rare passage. Paul has confessed his limitation: **“I have not attained—I am not perfect.”** And here his deep feelings are captured in his words, **“I tell you even weeping” (v. 18, NEB).** He is pleading for folks to follow him not in his failures and limitations, not in his achievements, but in that which really matters—**being laid hold of by Christ Jesus.**

C. **Not to be responsive to that, not to press on to attain the prize of the high calling of God has serious consequences.** So, Paul makes an unequivocal statement about judgment, and provides a frightful description of those persons whose manner of life makes them **“enemies of the Cross of Christ.”**

D. Who are they? They are those **“whose god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame.”** **“Stomach”** is a metaphor that suggests far more than merely gluttony. It covers all that belongs to the bodily, fleshly life of humans; also for the satisfaction of the carnal nature. But it covers even more than that. **Paul uses this word as he uses the word *flesh (sarx)* to denote the old, earthbound humanity from which Christians have been rescued into the new humanity of Christ.**

- That this is Paul’s meaning is understandable when we remember that he is talking about people who are with the church of Christ. That makes the pronouncement of judgment even more searing.
- **Within the church there are those whose fate is *destruction* because they turn their freedom into a perverted liberty; their primary interest is selfish—self-serving, self-seeking, and self-justifying. Their minds are still “set on earthly things.”**

E. Do not mistake the meaning of this. Paul is not advocating an otherworldly religion. He is stressing the fact that some Christians have simply missed it. They are still controlled by an earthbound life, refusing to be open to the gracious and transforming influences of heaven. **By failing to accept the *once and for all* death of the old life, they disqualify themselves for the new. “Their destiny is destruction.”**

F. But such does not have to be the case. **Paul’s compelling passion to know Christ and the power of His Resurrection in this life, has added to it the invincible confidence of the coming of our Lord who will complete His saving work by transforming “our bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (3:21).** In that confidence we can stand fast as **“alien residents,”** and **“rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4).**

## **#2: Citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20-4:1)**

A. **We are citizens of heaven.** That is our uniqueness as Christians. Those who set their minds on earthly things are enemies of the Cross of Christ.

- We really live in the tension of a dual citizenship. In citizenship language, in the United States we refer to some people living within our bounds as **“resident aliens,”** persons who belong by birth to another country, but are currently choosing to live here. That is a descriptive designation for Christians. We are citizens of heaven, **“resident aliens”** of earth.
- **We are forever pulled by the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus,”** we have been **“laid hold of by Christ,”** and what really matter is to know Him.

**The only way we can live as citizens of two kingdoms without being torn apart and going to pieces is to claim the power of His Resurrection.**

- B. Philippi, as already stated, was a Roman colony, a miniature Rome in distant Macedonia.** Many of the inhabitants of Philippi were Roman citizens, probably the aristocracy of the city. There was an intense pride in being a citizen of Rome. We have no way of knowing how many, but certainly some of these proud Roman citizens had become Christians. Were they being accused by their compatriots of belonging to a fellowship disloyal to Rome and the Emperor?
- C. What buckling courage and heartening comfort Paul's words provided for citizens of Rome who had become Christians.** There was an emphasis on the word "our"—our citizenship is in heaven—which has meaning if Paul had some other citizenship in mind.
- D. Though a citizen of Rome, you are in Christ's kingdom now. Because we are in that kingdom now,**

### **#3: We Can Live in Great Expectation**

- A. "We eagerly await a Savior" (v. 20).** The Greek word *apekdechomai*, translated "await," denotes a waiting that is eager and intense; it means "expect anxiously." It was the favorite word to use of the expectation of the Parousia, the return of Christ. **Their expectation was a cardinal element in the life of the early church and it gave them great moral power.**
- B. In Paul, and all early Christian preaching, there was this telescopic view of history—hope centering in the return of Christ.** While centered in this, Christian expectation and hope overflows into the whole of life. **We hope because we believe that God is in control, and His intention is to make the kingdom of this world the kingdom of our Lord and Christ.**
- C. As those who live in the kingdom now we can live in great expectation. Also despite what the current situation is,**

### **#4: We Can Stand Firm in the Lord**

- A. With the hope of the coming of the Savior, and the fact that he has the power "that enables him to bring everything under his control," we can live resolutely, with courage, in the moment. All that Paul has written in chapter 3 is a commentary on what it means to stand firm. The most conspicuous characteristic and result of standing firm is joy (v. 4).**
- B. Here is a contemporary witness shared by Will Campbell in Brother to a Dragon Fly.**

I tell you about Mrs. Tilly, a little "Christian" woman from Atlanta who never weighed more than a hundred pounds in her life, who looked about eight years

younger than God, who joined forces with a group of 40,000 women in the 1930s and 40s in what they called the **Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching**. Later she was active in **advocating for the desegregation of public schools** and got a lot of obscene phone calls, calling her everything but the gentle woman she was. She did not let the calls deter her. No one could intimidate her. She knew racism was evil and she knew that as a white woman she was through with it and wanted her town, her state, her country, the world to be rid of intimidators. But she would not stoop to the tactics of the intimidators. She had an engineer hook a recording machine to the telephone and when persons called her late at night to spew out their venom, the answer they heard was a baritone soloist singing the Lord's Prayer. The calls soon stopped.

**C. O how we need to learn to stand firm with faith in the power of Jesus Christ because we are citizens of heaven!**