

“Resources for Christian Living”
Philippians 3:17-4:1
February 27, 2022

INTRODUCTION:

Paul has compared the Christian life to a race, the kind of race that demands all we have. Today’s passage continues this theme by reporting some of the resources available to us in this race. God has supplied us with all we need in order to complete successfully the race before us. It reminds me again of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, where the hobbits are given some special resources by the elves, special armor and potions to help them in their quest. Our text this morning speaks of three resources all God’s people have available to them. The only question concerns our willingness to use them.

I. The Power of Examples – v. 17-19

Paul offers himself as an example to follow. He has been running this race and says that others should follow his lead. **“Brothers, join in imitating me”** (v. 17). To our ears, that sounds like a statement lacking humility. But what is it exactly about Paul’s life that he is calling them to imitate? It’s not perfection, because Paul has said that he is not perfect (v. 12). Rather, it’s the fact that Paul is struggling to run the same race they are running. He is telling them to follow his example in striving to keep running this race, in not giving up when things are difficult and you just want to quit. He wants them to follow his example in **“forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”** (v. 13). He wants them to focus on what God is calling them to do in the present and not be paralyzed by either past guilt or past accomplishments.

There is an old adage about teaching that says that “more is caught than taught.” Paul’s command here is reflecting the truth of that adage. Discipleship in the Christian life requires both teaching about the Bible and life-on-life modeling. Each is necessary. Teaching is the best way to instruct the mind on how to think about God. It is ideally suited to address the cognitive, thinking part of man. We are called to love God with all our minds. But teaching by itself is insufficient for the simple reason that we are more than thinking beings. We are also desiring, feeling and willing beings. Role models are better suited to address these aspects of the human heart. When we baptize children here, we ask the parents about both of these areas in their parenting. We ask them to promise both to set before their child a godly example and to teach their child the doctrines of our holy religion. Teaching and modeling are both necessary.

When we consider this area of modeling the Christian life, it is easy to feel guilty. Something that is said of pastors that scares most pastors to death,

including me, is that a church will look like its pastor after four or five years, for good or for bad. We are hard-wired to learn by imitation. What Paul says next softens the hard edges of this reality. **“Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”** He doesn’t offer himself as the only example to be followed. And he wants them to keep their eyes on “those who walk,” which is plural. Don’t miss the fact that I headed this point “the power of examples,” using the plural. Jesus is the only perfect example in every area. None of us are perfect models, but all of us together form a more complete model of what God asks of us. Someone might be a good model of hard work while another is a good model of empathy or of honesty.

If we are hard-wired to learn by imitation, then we need to be mindful not only of keeping before us good examples, but also of distancing ourselves from bad examples. So Paul reminds them again of those they should mark as such negative examples. Apparently, he has warned them repeatedly of this because he says that he has often told them of this group. And as he writes these words, he reports that he has tears in his eyes. **“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ”** (v. 18). Who is this group? Are they professing Christians or unbelievers. Commentators are almost universal in their agreement that Paul is talking about professing Christians. Some think that he is referring to the Judaizers that he mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Those are the ones who were insisting that Gentiles become Jews and get circumcised in order to become Christians. Others think he is referring to the opposite error of antinomianism, the idea that salvation by grace means that personal holiness is optional.

I don’t have a strong opinion about this, but it does seem to me that the latter option is more likely, because the description of verse 19 seems to better fit the antinomian error. **“Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”** This is a description of the hardening that happens when we begin to think of obedience to Jesus as something that is optional. The ultimate thing in life, our god, becomes our appetites. The conscience becomes hardened to the point that a person glories in shame. I was talking recently to a college student who told me that his classmates talk openly of their experiences with pornography, as if it’s nothing more than talking about the prospects of the college’s football team. Something that should be shameful is instead boasted in. And the last description is that the mind becomes dominated by earthly things. The hardening of the heart from antinomianism shortens one’s perspective to the point that the most important event of the future, Judgment Day, is never considered. I saw a poster recently that said, “Percent of student athletes who will become professional athletes: .03%. Percent of student athletes who will face Jesus on Judgment Day: 100%.”

Examples, for good or for bad, are powerful forces in our lives. Let me mention two applications of this. First, when you consider the inevitability of your own example, for good or for bad, what one change is most needed in your own life? If you accept the reality that your family, your church, your co-workers, and your friends will all become like what you do and not what you say, what one thing is most needful of change in your life? What would this church be like if everyone were just like you in speech, in service to the Lord here, in prayer and in giving? Let the inevitability of your example, for good or for bad, motivate you to the grace of repentance.

The second application is to take full advantage of the examples within the church. I want to target this application to those parents who still have children at home. Your children need examples from adults other than yourselves, adults who love Jesus and who love your children. This is one of the big reasons to require your children to be involved in church activities. All three of our children grew up mostly in this church, and I can point to numerous adults, as well as other children and youth, who served as something of role models to them. As parents, ask yourselves the question, "Other than their parents, who are the most significant role models in the lives of my children?" If it's those who don't love and obey Jesus, you are putting your children in danger. Good examples are a great resource for you and your children in the Christian life.

II. The Power of Belonging – v. 20

Unlike those who are enemies of the cross, we don't set our minds on earthly things because our citizenship is in heaven. That is our true home. Home is that place where you belong. Whenever I have had the opportunity to travel outside the States, there are always trials to be endured. The food is often strange and not to my liking. Very few places where I've traveled have plumbing as good as what we enjoy here. In addition to all this, it just feels foreign because it's not my home. As a result, it always feels good when I return and that plane touches down on American soil again. This is my home, the place where I was born and where I belong. Paul says that we are now waiting for our Savior, Jesus, meaning that we are not yet home.

There is a natural pride of citizenship that Paul uses to talk about the mindset of the Christian. We are to remember that our true home, that place where we truly belong, is heaven. In 42 B.C. Octavian, who would later become Caesar Augustus, defeated his rivals in a battle just outside the city of Philippi. He responded by settling many of his loyal troops in Philippi and granting the city the status of a Roman colony. That meant that its citizens would be considered Roman citizens, giving them the benefit of exemption from imperial taxation and certain legal protections as Roman citizens. The citizens of Philippi were naturally proud of this status. But Paul is telling them of an even

greater citizenship which should be uppermost in their minds. They are citizens of heaven.

The fact of our heavenly citizenship highlights both a privilege and a responsibility. We have vast privileges, including forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, a bright hope for the future, and fellowship with God. Like my American citizenship, it is ours not because we did anything to earn it, but merely by birth. In the case of our heavenly citizenship, it's by virtue of rebirth, being born again by the power of the Spirit.

Our heavenly citizenship also places upon us responsibilities. We are to live in a manner appropriate to our identity as citizens. That manner of life reflects what is happening in heaven. I like the way Spurgeon speaks of this.

In heaven they are holy, so must we be—so are we if our citizenship is not a mere pretence. They are happy, so must we be rejoicing in the Lord always. In heaven they are obedient, so must we be, following the faintest monitions of the divine will... In heaven they are peaceful, so should we find a rest in Christ and be at peace even now. In heaven they rejoice to behold the face of Christ, so should we be always meditating upon Him, studying His beauties, and desiring to look into the truths which He has taught. In heaven they are full of love, so should we love one another as brethren. In heaven they have sweet communion one with another, so should we, who though many, are one body, be every one members one of the other. Before the throne they are free from envy and strife, ill-will, jealousy, emulation, falsehood, anger, so should we be.

III. The Power of Transformation – v. 21

When Jesus does come, we will be transformed. He **“will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”** (v. 21). That phrase that is translated, “our lowly body,” is literally “the body of our humiliation.” That is an apt description of our current physical state. Perhaps we have been reminded of this even more in this pandemic era we are currently enduring. Paul highlights the positive side of our body of humiliation in that it provides a contrast to what we will be following Christ’s transformation of our bodies.

Let’s think first about this “body of our humiliation.” Spurgeon speaks of the upside of this. “Even unto this day the body is under death because of sin, and is left so on purpose to remind us of the effects of sin, that we may feel within ourselves what sin has done, and may the better guess at what sin would have done if we had remained under it, for the pains of hell would have been ours forever.” He also points out how every recovery from sickness is a pledge of the resurrection. Think about how you feel after recovering from a sickness. Perhaps it was a sickness that included a fever, and you just felt

lousy. And then when you recover, your heart is filled with gratitude. You realize that you had taken good health for granted, and now you are so thankful to be feeling good again. That feeling is just a small taste of what the resurrection of our bodies will be.

Our resurrected body will be like the glorious body of Jesus. The resurrected Jesus ate food. He invited the disciples to touch his body. It was a real, material body. And that resurrected body of Jesus is now 2000 years old and just as strong and vigorous as ever. It will be that way for the next 2000 years, as well as the next two million after that, and for all time after that. He is the King eternal and immortal. So it is a breathtaking and amazing statement to say that our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like the glorious body of Jesus. But that's exactly what is promised us here.

Not only will Jesus transform our bodies, but the text goes on to say that all things will be subjected to Jesus. The "all things" being referred to are all created things. This speaks of the goodness of God's physical creation before the sin of Adam and Eve. It also speaks of God's plan to restore it all one day. Everything in all creation will be transformed.

How does this promise of future transformation help us today? It means that there is continuity between current created things and those things once transformed. We sometimes fall victim to a type of false spirituality in which we think only our spirits will be preserved, with all the rest of the created order being obliterated and God creating something completely new. The language of this verse as well as the rest of the Bible speaks against that. It was Jesus' body that was raised to new life, and this passage says that the same will happen to us. It will also happen to the rest of creation.

There are a couple of applications of this. First, it encourages us to holiness because our body right now is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). It is your current body that will be transformed, and your life now is to grow in holiness because it is that same body. Second, this helps close the Sunday to Monday gap. That is the gap that views Sunday and Monday as two very different things that don't relate to one another. But your work on Monday is part of the all things that Jesus will transform. It might help you to ask what your Monday through Saturday calling will look like after Jesus transforms it, and then seeking to move toward that in what you do tomorrow.

CONCLUSION:

These are but some of our resources. I will let Paul's conclusion serve as my conclusion to this sermon. **"Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved"** (4:1).

Small Group Discussion Questions
Philippians 3:17-4:1

1. Paul begins the passage by inviting the Philippians to imitate him. Who have been some of the significant models in your life?
2. How would you respond to the objection that Paul is demonstrating a lack of humility by inviting people to imitate him?
3. Paul believed that Christian discipleship involves both teaching and modeling. What is the unique contribution of each of these? Or to state it negatively, what would be missing if either were left out?
4. Are there any ways you might be able to improve as either a teacher or a model?
5. The text also warns about bad examples in verses 18-19. Can you think of any applications of this warning?
6. What difference should it make in our lives that “our citizenship is in heaven?”
7. Note that the text says that it is our lowly bodies that are transformed, which speaks both of continuity and discontinuity between our current bodies and our future, glorified bodies. What will be the same and what will be different? What practical difference does that make in our lives?
8. The text says that Jesus will not only transform our bodies, but also that he will make all things subject to himself. There will also be continuity and discontinuity in your Monday-Saturday calling, whether it is a calling you get paid to do or not. What will your calling look like after Jesus transforms it? How might you move toward that in what you do tomorrow?