

Philippians
February 1, 2009
Phil. 3:17-4:1

I. Picking Directions

In this life, we know that faith comes through grace. Yet God is also looking to us to make personal decisions. As Christians, we can choose to follow Him or to go in other direction. (Of course, if you choose to go in other directions, you might not be a Christian.) How do you go about choosing between possible directions?

II. Imitate the Pattern

Phil 3:17

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

NIV

“Following” or “imitating” is important in the growth of the Christian:

1 Cor 4:16

16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

NIV

1 Cor 11:1

1:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

NIV

Eph 5:1

5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

NIV

1 Thess 1:6

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

NIV

1 Thess 2:14

14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews,

NIV

Heb 6:12

12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

NIV

The last part is not Paul's ego speaking. Basically he is telling the Philippians that they should imitate those who imitated him, just as he imitates Christ, per the advice in 1 Cor. 11:1.

III. Enemies of the Cross

Phil 3:18-19

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.

NIV

If they do not follow or imitate Paul, they might live as enemies of the cross, following those who are already its enemy. These enemies are not identified, but they could be the Judaizers (which we will assume) as indicated before or totally non-Christians. In either case, these individuals are attempting to take the Philippians away from the true gospel.

The Judaizers do not follow the cross and do not have the salvation that it offers. Therefore “their destiny is destruction.” The Judaizers did not only believe in circumcision but also in the food laws of the Jews. As such, they think that eating right is worshipping God. The Judaizers claimed circumcision (see beginning of Chapter 3) and food laws as their glory. Instead, they are their shame because they take them away from the true God that they worship. Paul had talked about his earthly credentials having been lost because of Christ. The Judaizers have only earthly things on which to focus their attention.

IV. Our Citizenship

Phil 3:20-21

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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.

NIV

Verse 20 is a well-known because it states so concisely our relationship with heaven and with the world. What is that relationship? Note also:

Col 3:1-2

3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

NIV

In verse 21, what is the “power that enables him to bring everything under his control”?

Col 1:17-18

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

NIV

What is the transformation our body?

1 John 3:2

2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

NIV

1 Cor 15:42-44

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

NIV

V. Stand Firm

Phil 4:1

4:1 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!

NIV

In the immediate verses, Paul points out that we have the dilemma of looking to heaven or in following the enemies of God. In 4:1, Paul calls for the Philippians to stand firm. Then he proceeds to suggest ways in which they can do this:

- ❖ Live in harmony with one another.
- ❖ Rejoice on all occasions because of their faith in Christ
- ❖ Develop the quality of gentleness in their dealings
- ❖ Allow the peace of God to guard their hearts and minds.

Some relate this whole chapter as relating to peace.

The other use of stand firm in this epistle:

Phil 1:27

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

NIV

Even though this is clearly a warning, the tone is quite positive indicating that the Philippians are apparently standing firm.

What does Paul mean by calling the Philippians as his “joy and crown”?

VI. Questions

What do we know of God’s love and power?

What does that “knowledge” of God’s love and power have to do with us standing firm? What other tools do you have for “standing firm”?