

## A Heavenly Example – Philippians 3:17-4:1

**Main Idea:** The Christian life is shaped by the examples we follow, the influences we resist, and the heavenly citizenship that reorients our identity, priorities, and hope toward Christ.

### I. The Pattern | Philippians 3:17

Throughout Philippians 3, Paul has been reminding believers that the Christian life is a life of pressing on toward Christ. But in verse 17 he turns to another important reality: the influences that shape our pursuit of Christ. **Spiritual growth rarely happens in isolation. The people we observe, admire, and listen to inevitably shape the direction of our hearts.** Because of this, Paul writes, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

At first this may sound surprising. Encouraging others to imitate your life could seem arrogant. Yet Paul clarifies this principle elsewhere: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). **Paul is not presenting himself as the ultimate model; he is pointing believers to a Christ-shaped life.** The word translated “example” refers to a pattern or imprint. Just as a stamp leaves a mark in wax, the gospel leaves visible marks in a believer’s life. **When Christ transforms someone, patterns begin to emerge; humility, repentance, perseverance, devotion to God’s Word, and love for the church.** Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs to affirm; it is a life to learn.

This is why discipleship in Scripture is deeply relational. Proverbs 13:20 reminds us that “whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.” Paul describes the same generational pattern in 2 Timothy 2:2 as the gospel is passed from one believer to another through faithful teaching and example. **Paul’s instruction reminds us that every believer is both a disciple and a discipler. Our lives are always communicating something about Christ.** Children watch their parents. Younger believers watch older believers. Even unbelievers form impressions of Christianity based on the lives they observe.

For that reason, Paul’s words push us toward two important questions: Who am I following, and who is following me? Discipleship often happens not through formal programs but through the ordinary rhythms of life; sharing meals, opening Scripture together, praying together, and walking through hardships side by side. **A healthy church becomes a place where believers intentionally help one another follow Christ, so that the pattern of His life is continually reproduced in the lives of His people.**

#### To Ponder:

1. Why does Scripture place such importance on learning the Christian life through example as well as teaching?
2. How can believers intentionally place themselves around faithful examples that help them grow in Christ?
3. If someone closely observed your life, would they be more likely to see patterns of Christlikeness or worldliness? Why?

### II. The Destruction | Philippians 3:18-19

Immediately after calling believers to follow godly examples, Paul presents a sobering contrast. Not every example leads toward Christ. Some lead in the opposite direction. Verse 18 begins with a warning: “For many... walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Paul adds that he gives this warning with tears. **These are not the words of a detached theologian but of a shepherd whose heart breaks over people walking toward destruction.** Paul remembers that apart from the grace of God, he himself would still be on that same path. The gospel produces humility and compassion toward those who are lost.

Paul calls these individuals “enemies of the cross.” Some oppose the cross openly by rejecting the gospel altogether. Others oppose it more subtly. **They may claim to believe in Christ while refusing the kind of life the cross calls believers to live. They want forgiveness without surrender. A Savior without a Lord.** Paul

then describes the direction of this life. “Their end is destruction.” A path may feel comfortable for a time, but if it leads away from Christ it ultimately leads to ruin. He continues by saying that “their god is their belly.” Rather than worshiping God, they are ruled by their desires; comfort, pleasure, reputation, or control. **Over time these desires reshape a person’s perspective so deeply that Paul says they even “glory in their shame.”** **What should bring sorrow becomes something to celebrate.** The final summary captures the heart of the issue: “their minds are set on earthly things.” Their perspective is shaped entirely by the temporary things of this world.

This warning presses close to home because earthly-mindedness is often subtle. It can appear in our attachment to comfort, security, success, or reputation. **When our hearts cling too tightly to temporary things, our willingness to follow Christ begins to shrink.** Paul’s warning reminds believers to examine their hearts honestly and to remain watchful about the influences shaping their desires.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. How can believers guard their hearts from becoming increasingly “earthly-minded”?
2. When you see people far from Christ, do you tend to respond with compassion, frustration, or indifference? What might shape that response?

### **III. The Citizenship | Philippians 3:20-4:1**

After describing the tragic end of those whose minds are set on earthly things, Paul lifts the church’s attention to a far greater reality: “But our citizenship is in heaven.” This statement creates a clear contrast in the passage. **While some live as though this world is their ultimate home, believers belong to an entirely different kingdom.**

This language would have been especially meaningful to the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony, and many of its residents took great pride in their Roman citizenship. Even though they lived far from Rome, they still enjoyed its privileges and protection. Paul uses that familiar idea to describe the believer’s identity. Christians live in this world, but their true allegiance belongs to a greater kingdom; the kingdom of heaven. **Paul also speaks of this citizenship as a present reality, not merely a future hope. Through faith in Christ, believers already belong to this kingdom.** Our deepest identity is no longer defined by the world around us but by our relationship with Christ. Scripture often describes believers as “sojourners and exiles” in this world (1 Pet. 2:11). We live here and serve here, but our ultimate home lies elsewhere. This identity reshapes how believers view life. **If our citizenship is in heaven, our priorities should begin to reflect that reality.** Rather than living primarily for comfort, reputation, or success, Christians are called to live in a way that reflects the character and values of the kingdom they belong to.

Paul also reminds believers that we are awaiting a Savior. The Christian life is lived in expectation of Christ’s return. When He comes, Paul says He “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” The bodies we live in now are weak and subject to sickness, aging, and death, but the resurrection of Jesus assures us that this will not be the final chapter of our story. This transformation will happen by the power of Christ, the One who rules over all things. The same Lord who reigns over the universe will one day renew His people completely. Because of this hope, Paul concludes with a loving exhortation: “Therefore... stand firm in the Lord.” **When believers remember where they belong and what future awaits them, they gain strength to remain faithful in the present.** Citizens of heaven live differently; not because they have escaped this world, but because they know it is not their final home.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. What does it mean that a believer’s citizenship is in heaven, and how does that shape Christian identity?
2. In what ways should heavenly citizenship influence how Christians think about priorities like work, comfort, success, and reputation?
3. What areas of your life require renewed commitment to “stand firm in the Lord”?