

## Reading II

[Phil 3:17—4:1 or 3:20—4:1](#)

Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters,  
and observe those who thus conduct themselves  
according to the model you have in us.

For many, as I have often told you  
and now tell you even in tears,  
conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction.

Their God is their stomach;  
their glory is in their "shame."

Their minds are occupied with earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven,  
and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will change our lowly body  
to conform with his glorified body  
by the power that enables him also  
to bring all things into subjection to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters,  
whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,  
in this way stand firm in the Lord.

**or**

Brothers and sisters:

Our citizenship is in heaven,  
and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will change our lowly body  
to conform with his glorified body  
by the power that enables him also  
to bring all things into subjection to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters,  
whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,  
in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

## Jerome Biblical Commentary

**17.** *join in imitating me:* Paul does not hesitate to propose himself for imitation (4:9; 1 Thes 1:6; 2 Thes 3:7, 9; 1 Cor 4:16), since he himself is an imitator of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 11:1). **18.** *enemies of Christ's cross:* Paul is most probably thinking of the Judaizers; his strong words could apply to tenets of their propaganda. However, some commentators think that he is referring rather to libertine Christians of another sort. *destruction:* Cf. 1 Cor 1:18. *their god is the belly: their shame:* Probably a reference to the

circumcision, which they advocate. *earthly things*: Cf. Gal 4:9.**20**. *our commonwealth is in heave*: Union with Christ has transferred the Christian in a sense to the "heavenly realm" (Eph 2:6, 19). He is there where Christ is (Col 3:1-4). *we await a savior*: See Acts 1:11; 3:21.**21**. *will change our lowly body*: Cf. 1 Cor 15:47-55; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:1-5; Rom 8:23 (cf. N. Flanagan, [CBQ](#) 18 [1956] 8-9).

Probably a derisive reference to the dietary observances of the Judaizers (cf. Rom 16:18).

[CBQ](#) *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

## Haydock's Catholic Commentary

**Ver.17.** *Be followers of me*, always in distrust of your own merits, and always eager to advance in perfection, as I am. It is a happy thing when a pastor can thus in all sincerity and simplicity address his flock. --- He exhorts them to follow him in what he had taught them, and in the model of a good life, which he had set before them. He repeats to them, with tears, what he had formerly told them, that many *walk* and conduct themselves as *enemies to the cross of Christ*, to Christ crucified, by abandoning themselves to the pleasures of a sensual life, who glory in things they ought to be ashamed of. He hints at the disciples of Simon Magus, or of the Jewish doctors. (Witham)

## Daily Study Bible Series (non-Catholic)

### DWELLER ON EARTH BUT CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

Philippians 3:17-21

Brothers, unite in imitating me, and keep your gaze on those who live, as you have seen us as an example. For there are many who behave in such a way—I have often spoken to you about them, and I do so now with tears—that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their end is destruction: their god is their belly; that in which they glory is their shame. Men whose whole minds are earthbound! But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, for he will refashion the body which we have in this state of our humiliation and make it like his own glorious body, by the working of that power of his whereby he is able to subject all things to himself.

Few preachers would dare to make the appeal with which Paul begins this section. J. B. Lightfoot translates it: "Vie with each other in imitating me." Most preachers begin with the serious handicap that they have to say, not, "Do as I do," but, "Do as I say." Paul could say not only, "Listen to my words," but also, "Follow my example." It is worth noting in the passing that

Bengel, one of the greatest interpreters of scripture who ever lived, translates this in a different way: "Become fellow-imitators with me in imitating Jesus Christ," but it is far more likely—as nearly all other interpreters are agreed—that Paul was able to invite his friends, not simply to listen to him, but also to imitate him.

There were in the Church at Philippi men whose conduct was an open scandal and who, by their lives, showed themselves to be the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Who they were is not certain. But it is quite certain that they lived gluttonous and immoral lives and used their so-called Christianity to justify themselves. We can only guess who they may have been.

They may have been Gnostic. The Gnostic were heretics who tried to intellectualize Christianity and make a kind of philosophy out of it. They began with the principle that from the beginning of time there had always been two realities—spirit and matter. Spirit, they said, is altogether good; and matter is altogether evil. It is because the world was created out of this flawed matter that sin and evil are in it. If then, matter is essentially evil, the body is essentially evil and will remain evil whatever you do with it.

Therefore, do what you like with it; since it is evil anyhow it makes no difference what you do with it. So these Gnostic taught that gluttony and adultery and homosexuality and drunkenness were of no importance because they affect only the body which is of no importance.

There was another party of Gnostic who held a different kind of doctrine.

They argued that a man could not be called complete until he had experienced everything that life had to offer, both good and bad. Therefore, they said, it was a man's duty to plumb the depths of sin just as much as to scale the heights of virtue.

Within the Church there were two sets of people to whom these accusations might apply. There were those who distorted the principle of Christian liberty. They said that in Christianity all law was gone and that the Christian had liberty to do what he liked. They turned Christian liberty into unchristian licence and gloried in giving their passions full play. There were those who distorted the Christian doctrine of grace. They said that, since grace was wide enough to cover every sin, a man could sin as he liked and not worry; it would make no difference to the all-forgiving love of God.

So the people whom Paul attacks may have been the clever Gnostic who produced specious arguments to justify their sinning or they may have been misguided Christians who twisted the loveliest things into justification for the ugliest sins.

Whoever they were, Paul reminds them of one great truth: "Our citizenship," he says, "is in heaven." Here was a picture the Philippians could understand. Philippi was a Roman colony. Here and there at strategic military centres the Romans set down their colonies. In such places the citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their time—twenty-one years—and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman dress

was worn; Roman magistrates governed; the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth they remained unshakeably Roman. Paul says to the Philippians, "Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belonged to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship."

Paul finishes with the Christian hope. The Christian awaits the coming of Christ, at which everything will be changed. Here the Authorized Version is dangerously misleading. In verse 21 it speaks about our *vile body*. In modern speech that would mean that the body is an utterly evil and horrible thing; but *vile* in sixteenth-century English still retained the meaning of its derivation from the Latin word *villis* which in fact means nothing worse than *cheap, valueless*. As we are just now, our bodies are subject to change and decay, illness and death, the bodies of a state of humiliation compared with the glorious state of the Risen Christ; but the day will come when we will lay aside this mortal body which we now possess and become like Jesus Christ himself. The hope of the Christian is that the day will come when his humanity will be changed into nothing less than the divinity of Christ, and when the necessary lowliness of mortality will be changed into the essential splendour of deathless life.

## GREAT THINGS IN THE LORD

Philippians 4:1

So, then, my brothers, whom I love and yearn for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Through this passage breathes the warmth of Paul's affection for his Philippian friends. He loves them and yearns for them. They are his joy and his crown. Those whom he had brought to Christ are his greatest joy when the shadows are closing about him. Any teacher knows what a thrill it is to point at some person who has done well and to be able to say: "That was one of my boys."

There are vivid pictures behind the word when Paul says that the Philippians are his crown. There are two words for *crown* in Greek, and they have different backgrounds. There is *diadema*, which means *the royal crown*, the crown of kingship. And there is *stephanos*, the word used here, which itself has two backgrounds. (i) It was the crown of the victorious athlete at the Greek games. It was made of wild olive leaves, interwoven with green parsley, and bay leaves. To win that crown was the peak of the athlete's ambition. (ii) It was the crown with which guests were crowned when they sat at a banquet, at some time of great joy. It is as if Paul said that the Philippians were the crown of all his toil; it is as if he said that at the final banquet of God they were his festal crown. There is no joy in the world like bringing another soul to Jesus Christ.

Three times in the first four verses of this fourth chapter the words *in the Lord* occur. There are three great commands which Paul gives *in the Lord*. (i) The Philippians are *to stand fast* in the Lord. Only with Jesus Christ can a man resist the seductions of temptation and the weakness of cowardice. The word Paul uses for *stand fast* (*stēkete*) is the word which would be used for a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle, with the enemy surging down upon him. We know very well that there are some people in whose company it is easy to do the wrong thing and there are some in whose company it is easy to resist the wrong thing. Sometimes when we look back and remember some time when we took the wrong turning or fell to temptation or shamed ourselves, we say wistfully, thinking of someone whom we love: "If only he had been there, it would never have happened." Our only safety against temptation is to be *in the Lord*, always feeling his presence around us and about us.

In vain the surge's angry shock,  
In vain the drifting sands:  
Unharm'd upon the eternal Rock  
The eternal City stands.

The Church and the individual Christian can stand fast only when they stand in Christ.

(ii) Paul bids Euodia and Syntyche to *agree* in the Lord. There can be no unity unless it is in Christ. In ordinary human affairs it repeatedly happens that the most diverse people are held together because they all give allegiance to a great leader. Their loyalty to each other depends entirely on their loyalty to him. Take the leader away, and the whole group would disintegrate into isolated and often warring units. Men can never really love each other until they love Christ. The brotherhood of man is impossible without the lordship of Christ.

(iii) Paul bids the Philippians *to rejoice* in the Lord. The one thing all men need to learn about joy is that it has nothing to do with material things or with a man's outward circumstances. It is the simple fact of human experience that a man living in the lap of luxury can be wretched and a man in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy. A man upon whom life has apparently inflicted no blows at all can be gloomily or peevishly discontented and a man upon whom life has inflicted every possible blow can be serenely joyful.

In his rectorial address to the students of St. Andrews University, J. M. Barrie quoted the immortal letter which Captain Scott of the Antarctic wrote to him, when the chill breath of death was already on his expedition: "We are pegging out in a very comfortless spot. ... We are in a desperate state—feet frozen, etc., no fuel, and a long way from food, but it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and our cheery conversation." The secret is this—that happiness depends not on things or on places, but always on persons. If we are with the right person, nothing

else matters; and if we are not with the right person, nothing can make up for that absence. The Christian is in the Lord, the greatest of all friends; nothing can separate the Christian from his presence and so nothing can take away his joy.

*The letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians.* 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia