

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

**The Heavenly Processional  
Philippians 3:17-21  
Part 4**

The United States government is committed to the ongoing existence of the state of Israel. This ongoing commitment has produced foreign policies that much of the Muslim world see as unfairly biased in favor of Israel at the expense of Palestinians. This perception has unleashed a number of different forces against us and those forces are not making our lives very easy. Certainly at the top of this list would be terrorists and terrorist attacks. Will these forces that are coming against us prevail or will the United States Government continue to stand firm? Only time will tell. But what we are seeing in the natural world also has a parallel in the spiritual world. This weekend will see this spiritual parallel.

The passage that we have been studying is **Philippians 3:17-21**. This weekend we will be adding one more verse to this section of scripture. This weekend we will add **Philippians 4:1**. Let me read for you this passage,..... **“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (18) For many walk of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”** And now let me add the very last verse in this section, **(4:1) “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”**

This passage is all about a heavenly procession. It is all about groups of believers lined up one after another as they all press forward toward the glory of heaven. What can we learn about the heavenly procession from Philippians 3:17-4:1?

We learn that we are commanded to follow those who by the way they are living demonstrate they are in the heavenly procession (Philippians 3:17). Let us read **Philippians 3:17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”** This pattern, which we have considered in great detail over the past several months, is spelled out for us in **Philippians 3:7-16**. It is a pattern that should characterize everyone in the heavenly procession. Those walking according to this pattern will, because of their personal relationship with Christ, set their minds on things above rather than on things of earth. What is the second thing we learn?

We learn that many professing Christians are enemies of the cross of Christ and not in the heavenly procession (Philippians 3:18-19). Let me read for you **Philippians 3:18-19 “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”** Not all professing Christians are walking according to the pattern of those in the heavenly procession.

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They are many professing Christians who are walking according to the pattern of the enemies of the cross of Christ. Rather than setting their minds on things above they have set their minds on things of earth. These individuals are a threat to us and help us understand why obeying the command found in **Philippians 3:17** is so important. What is the third thing we learn?

We learn that those in the heavenly procession eagerly wait for the return of Christ (Philippians 3:20-21). Let me read for you **Philippians 3:20-21** “**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.**” Those who know Christ do not only want to be with Him but to be like Him and they know that this will not happen until He returns and gives them their glorified bodies. Therefore those in the heavenly procession who have set their minds on things above rather than on things of earth will eagerly wait for Christ’s return and the completion God’s redemptive program when they will finally be conformed to the image of His Son. Hopefully this hope, this blessed hope is alive and well in your mind and heart.

This weekend we will come to the fourth and final thing that we learn about the heavenly procession. I would once again express to you my hope that our study will help us to focus our attention on the hereafter rather than on the here and now. I would hope that our study will help us to focus not only our attention but our affection on things above rather than on things of earth..... What is the fourth thing that we learn about the heavenly procession?

We learn that those in the heavenly procession must stand firm (Philippians 4:1). Let us read **Philippians 4:1** ..... “**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved brethren.**” This verse is tied to what has come before by the word “therefore” and is a call to arms.

The word to “stand firm” (STEKO) is a word which is used to describe a soldier standing fast in the midst of a battle. But what battle?

This is not the first time that we have seen this call in this epistle. We saw this same call to stand firm in **Philippians 1:27-30**. Let me read this passage for you. “**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.**” In the context of this passage “standing firm” communicates that the church needs to remain unified in their effort to proclaim the gospel of Christ even in the midst of opposition from outside the church. Though this was the context of “standing firm” in **Philippians 1:27-30** this is not the context of standing firm in **Philippians 3:17-21**.

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Based on the context of Philippians 3:17-21 Paul is calling believers to stand firm against the worldly influence of the enemies of the cross of Christ. Who had Paul just warned the Philippians about in **Philippians 3:17-21**? The enemies of the cross of Christ. Who were those enemies? They were professing Christians whose appetite was their God and who had set their minds on earthly things. They were a threat not because of their doctrine, but because of their walk or behavior. They were a threat because their focus was the things of this world. They were a threat because of their worldly influence.

When we choose to join the heavenly procession by exercising faith and embracing Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we choose to observe closely those individuals who profess to be a part of the heavenly procession and who demonstrate it by the way they are living their lives, don't think that this will be a cakewalk! We will be opposed. And we certainly will be opposed by the world and by worldly influences.

When I talk about worldly influences you should not simply think about alcohol, drugs, and pornography. I am talking about something much bigger than that and far more pervasive and far more dangerous.

We have succumbed to worldly influence when we succumb to false philosophies, ideologies, values, and lifestyles that exist independent of and in opposition to God.

Sometimes these threats are obvious. Certainly the “playboy” philosophy is a false philosophy. Certainly the ideology of the communist party is a false ideology. Certainly the lifestyle of Osama Bin Laden is a false lifestyle, they all exist independent of and in opposition to God. And all of these specific influences that we find in the world can obviously pose a spiritual threat to us. They could suck us in if we are not careful. But these worldly influences that I have mentioned will most likely not be very effective in capturing the mind or heart of anyone attending here this weekend, at least I would hope so. For the most part they are just too obvious and personally objectionable to us. But there are other worldly influences that pose a far greater threat. Influences that we find in the world that are in and of themselves not evil but which can become evil if we are not careful. What might some of those other more subtle influences be?

Loving money more than we love God is a subtle worldly influence which spiritually threatens us (1 Timothy 6:10). **1 Timothy 6:10** says, **“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil....”** We all like money but we need to be careful that we do not like money so much that our pursuit of money or the possessing of money becomes more important to us than the Lord and doing His will....

If we are going to stand firm against worldly influence then we have to stand firm against every influence that exists independent of and in opposition to God and loving money more than we love God is certainly one of those influences. We need to stand firm against it. How are you doing?

If you are doing well in this area you will probably see that reflected in your generous level of giving rather than seeing the vast majority of your financial resources tied up in saving or obliterated through unrestrained consuming.

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Loving family more than we love God is a subtle worldly influence which spiritually threatens us (Matthew 6:37). **Matthew 10:37** says “**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.**” We all would like to have a special someone in our lives. We all hopefully appreciate the value and importance of having a loving family, but we need to be careful that we do not love a particular special person or our family more than the Lord and doing His will..... (Amen).....

If we are going to stand firm against worldly influence then we have to stand firm against every influence that exists independent of and in opposition to God and loving a person or loving our family more than we love God is one of those influences that we must stand firmly against. How are you doing?

If you are doing well in this area you will probably see that reflected in your efforts to share the gospel outside of the church and your spiritual gifts within the church rather than having all of your time and energy being consumed by your family.

Loving the recognition of men more than we love God is a subtle worldly influence that spiritually threatens us (Matthew 23:1-7). Let me read for you **Matthew 23:1-7**, “**Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, (2) saying, “the scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; (3) therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. (4) and they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. (5) But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. (6) And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, (7) and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, “Rabbi.”** It is very easy for us to live our lives for the recognition of men but we must be careful that this does not become more important to us than the Lord and doing His will .....

If we are going to stand firm against worldly influence then we have to stand firm against every influence that exists independent of and in opposition to God and loving the recognition of men more than we love God is one of those influences that we must stand firmly against. How are you doing?

If you are doing well in this area you will probably see yourself resisting opportunities to advance or promote yourself those opportunities to advance or promote yourself interferes with your personal ministries within and outside the church.

These are just a few of the many subtle worldly influences that threaten us. When we successfully “stand firm” against these influences it will be obvious.

There was a man named C.T. Studd, a cricket player in England in the nineteenth century, who became a world-famous sports personality who stood firm against worldly influence.

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While attending Cambridge University, Studd heard D.L. Moody preach and hearing the gospel he chose to embrace Christ as His Lord and Savior and became a Christian. He found himself working hard at trying to convert his teammates to Christ. His efforts to do this only fueled his appetite for ministry and he decided to go into full time Christian service offering himself to Hudson Taylor for missionary work in China. While in China he received word that he had inherited a fortune. Immediately Studd returned to England to receive his inheritance.

What would he do? Stay in England and enjoy a life of luxury? Would he again return to the popularity and stardom of the cricket field? Would he choose to return to his family? To the astonishment of a watching world, young C.T. Studd gave away his entire inheritance to the work of God's kingdom and he did this within 24 hours! And then returned to full-time service.

Let me ask you a question. Had C.T. Studd set his mind on the things of earth or on the things above? He had set his mind on the things above!! The love of money, the love of family and the love of prestige did not prevail over his love for God and His desire to advance His kingdom.

Turning down a fortune, turning his back on his family and his profession certainly was not easy. In order to do this he had to take a stand. He had to take a stand against the influences of the world that might have taken him in a direction other than the direction he felt God would have him to go. And because he was willing to do this; because he was willing to stand firm against those influences his lifestyle became very distinct from the lifestyle of others who had their focus on the things of this earth.

What about your lifestyle? Does your lifestyle stand out? Does your lifestyle stand out from the typical lifestyle of a person you might come across in everyday life? If you have chosen to line up behind someone with their spiritual headlights on, if you have chosen to line up behind someone in the heavenly procession that is living their lives according to the pattern of Paul and his associates such as a C.T. Studd's it will not take long before your life becomes very distinct from the life of your unsaved neighbor.

We must take the command that Paul gives in **Philippians 4:1** to heart and “**stand firm.**” If we don't we will be swept away by the philosophies, values and lifestyles of the world.

How are we to stand firm? We are to stand firm in the Lord. Let us read the verse “**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord.**” We are very naive if we think that we will be able to stand firm against influences of the world if we are doing this in our own strength. We must stand firm in the strength that is ours in Christ. Professing Christians who know that their money, that their family, or their reputation has become far too important to them, or anything else in this world, will not be able to successfully fight this battle apart from the strength that God provides them. They must be prepared to give themselves up to the Lord fully and completely.

Are you there this weekend? Hopefully you are. Hopefully you are prepared to do anything that you need to do in order to bring your life into line with everything that you know God desires for your life no matter what they might be. If you are willing and you simply ask for the grace to do those things, God will supply.

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What do the Scriptures teach “Ask and it shall be given you ..... “. Do you want to stand firm ? You can in the Lord!

Is Paul confident that the Philippians will stand firm in the Lord ? The answer would have to be that he is. Paul’s various expressions of affection for the Philippians indicates that he believes that they will continue to stand firm. Let us take a look at these various expressions of affection.

The first expression of affection is “my beloved brethren.” Typically he has referred to the Philippians earlier in the epistle as “brethren” (Philippians 1:12; 3:1,13,17) but he intensifies this term of affection by adding the term “beloved.”. Not only does he use this intensified term at the beginning of the verse, but he then repeats it at the end of the verse.

The second expression of affection is the phrase, “whom I long to see.” When Paul tells the Philippians that he longs to see them he is repeating what he said in Philippians 1:8. But he is not done.

The third expression of affection that he shares with the Philippians is that they are his “joy and crown.” Certainly the Philippians were a source of joy for the Apostle Paul in **Philippians 1** but the phrase “my joy and crown” does not to be emphasize what they were to him but what they will be to him when Christ returns (1 Thessalonians 2:19). There are a number of different reasons for me saying this. First of all there is the immediate context. What is Paul and all those who are following his example eagerly waiting for? The return of Christ. We saw this in the preceding verse. The word “crown” (STEPHONOS) refers to a victor’s crown. Finally there is a parallel passage that refers to the Thessalonians in the very same way. Let me read for you **1 Thessalonians 2:19, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.”**

Paul is confident on the day of Christ’s return that he will be filled with joy knowing that they have along with himself stood firm. And because they have stood firm they will figuratively speaking become his victor’s crown bestowed on Him for faithful and effective service.

There is a lot of affection shared by Paul for the Philippians in this one single verse. We should not consider this kind of affection as somehow unique to Paul and the Philippians. All those in the heavenly process will love one another (John 13:34-35). Let me read for you these two verses, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all men will now that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.”** This is why the command of Philippians 3:17 to get more closely involved in the lives of those who have their spiritual headlights on should not be a burden to you but rather something that you would want to eagerly do even in spite of the worldly influences that are pressing against us.

Not only is it something you would want to do, but it is something you must do. This is God’s design for his church. He has designed the church to be linked arm in arm in standing firm against the influences of the world.

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CONCLUSION

If you are successfully standing firm against worldly influences you will be actively seeking to draw closer to those in this fellowship who have their spiritual headlights on.

Terrorists may be a threat to the citizens of this earth, but worldly influences are a threat to the citizens of heaven and we need to stand firm together against those forces.