

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Heavenly Processional Philippians 3:17-21 Part 2**

The passage that we have begun to examine is **Philippians 3:17-21**. Let me read this passage for you, **“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 in 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.**

This passage is all about a heavenly processional. We are hoping that what we learn about the heavenly processional from this passage will encourage us to focus our attention and our affection on things above rather than on the things of earth.

What can we learn about the heavenly processional from Philippians 3:17-21?

The first thing that we learned was ..... 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.**

The Philippians are first of all commanded to follow the example of Paul. How does the verse begin? **“Brethren, join in following my example....”** A better way of understanding this command as we saw last week was to understand it as a command to follow the example of Paul and his missionary team, which also included Epaphroditus and Timothy.

However, this might be difficult to actually build into their lives since Paul and his missionary team were in Rome, so Paul goes on to give a second related command. Let us continue to read the verse, **“and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”** Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus were not living in Philippi but there were people in the Philippian church who were walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates and he is commanding them to observe them, or in other words to watch them closely or to watch them intently.

Paul has now identified three groups in this heavenly processional. The first group was Paul and his associates, following closely by those who walked according to the pattern of Paul and his associates, followed by professing Christians at Philippi who chose to closely watch those who were walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates. Each of these groups had their spiritual headlights on and were identifying themselves as a part of the heavenly processional by the way they were living. Each of these three groups were characterized by the same things.

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What characterized this heavenly processional and every group within this processional? It was all spelled out earlier for us in **Philippians 3**.

They all have made professions of faith in Christ. They all are confirming the genuineness of their professions of faith by their desire to get to know Christ better and they all are doggedly determined to press forward in this pursuit until they finally reach the prize or in other words the resurrection from the dead at which time they will experience perfect conformity to Christ. These are the people who are in the heavenly procession and who have their spiritual headlights on.

Why did Paul command the Philippian church to follow his example and the example of his missionary team? Why did Paul command the Philippian church to observe or to watch closely those who were walking or living according to his pattern?

Paul wanted the Philippians to line up behind someone in the heavenly procession in order to assure themselves that they would ultimately reach the goal of the resurrection from the dead. This is the point of the verse. Hopefully we all are taking this instruction, this command, seriously. This will require us to get close enough to our brothers and sisters in Christ here at our church so that we can actually observe their lives and identify those who are in the heavenly procession.

What is the first thing we learn from **Philippians 3:17-21**? First of all we learn that we are commanded to follow those who, by the way they are living, demonstrate they are in the heavenly procession. What is the second thing we learn from **Philippians 3:17-21**?

We are warned 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.”** If we are not successful at finding and following professing Christians who have their spiritual headlights on. If we are not successful at finding professing Christians who are in the heavenly procession we might find ourselves lining up behind professing Christians that Paul identifies as the enemies of the cross of Christ. We might find ourselves behind professing Christians who do not even have spiritual headlights.

Who are these “enemies of the cross of Christ?” An important word to consider is the word “walk.” The enemies are not identified in that way because of their doctrine but because of their behavior. How does the verse begin? **“For many walk .....”** Yes there our enemies of the cross of Christ who are enemies because of their doctrine such as the Judaizers which we have already seen at the very beginning of **Philippians 3**. But there are others who are the enemies of the cross of Christ who are enemies because of their behavior. Who are enemies because they have denounced, by the way that they are living, the power of the cross to transform their earthly focus to a heavenly focus. And it is this group that Paul is introducing to us in **Philippians 3:18-19**.

They have not intellectually rejected or corrupted the message of the cross they simply have not embraced the message of the cross by faith and received a new focus.

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Though they may have made professions of faith in Christ they give little, or no evidence that they want to get to know Christ better. They give little, or no evidence that they will be dissatisfied until they are perfectly conformed to Christ at the resurrection from the dead. In other words, The “enemies of the cross of Christ” in Philippians 3:18 are professing Christians who are not walking according to the pattern of the apostle and his associates.

Though these so-called Christians, would profess faith in Christ, their lives are quite ordinary and look very much like other unsaved people in respect to what is truly important to them. And their presence and the example they set in the church is a threat. Therefore Paul warns the Philippian church about these enemies who are not just a few but many. What does the verse say, **“For many walk ...”**

And how great a threat does he consider them? Let us continue to read the verse .... **“For many walk, of whom I (what?) ..... often told you (not just a few times)”** but many times. Paul would not have found it necessary to repeatedly warn the Philippian church if these enemies of the cross of Christ were not a significant threat.

How passionate was Paul about this threat? Let us continue to read the verse, **“For many walk of what I often told you and now tell you even weeping....”**

Paul saw the enemies of the cross of Christ as a cancer that threatened people that he loved and it moved him to tears. This fellowship will not be what it needs to be until every individual clearly, by the way they are living gives clear evidence that they have their spiritual headlights on. Not only walking according to the pattern of Paul but committed to observing those in our church who also have their spiritual headlights on and are walking according to the pattern of Paul.

Now let us put the command of **Philippians 3:17** together with the warning of **Philippians 3:18**. Paul’s command is to help us line up behind someone in the heavenly procession. Paul’s warning is to help us not to line up behind someone in the procession of the damned.

To help us understand the enemies of the cross of Christ they are described for us in four very short expressions in **Philippians 3:19**, Let us look at these descriptive phrases.

The enemies of the cross of Christ are described as those whose end is destruction. What is this destruction referring to? Paul consistently uses the word “destruction” (APOLLUMI) to refer to “eternal destruction” (Philippians 1:27-28). In fact he has used this same word earlier in Philippians 1:27-18 in this very same way. 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.”** The enemies of the cross of Christ are first of all described as those whose end is destruction, or in other words whose end is “eternal damnation.” What else do we learn about the enemies of the cross of Christ?

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The enemies of the cross of Christ are described as those whose God is their appetite. This is a very interesting word and somewhat ambiguous but I will give it my very best shot. The word “appetite”(KOILA) literally means cavity or hollow and is used to describe the “belly” or “stomach.” Some people interpreting this verse understand this word in a narrow sense as referring to those interested in the pleasures of eating rather than in living a life pleasing to the Lord. Some people interpreting this verse understand the word “appetite” in a narrow sense of referring to gluttony.

How would the pleasures of the table or gluttony be a threat to the rule of Christ in our lives? Let me ask you this question. Does the Lord encourage gluttony? The answer would have to be no. God discourages gluttony (Proverbs 23:20). What does **Proverbs 23:20** say, **“Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat.”** Gluttony is defined as simply an excess in eating.

Is it common for Americans to eat excessively? I would think that the answer would have to be yes. The 1999 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey indicates that an estimated 61 percent of American adults are either overweight or obese.

For many of you this weekend you might be wondering if you might be included in this 61%. Let me help you answer that question. Being overweight is defined by having a body mass index of 25 or more. This might not have any meaning to you but let me put it this way. My body mass index is 26. I am, according to the body mass index, overweight. Do I eat excessively? At times I believe I do. Is this something that pleases the Lord? No, I don't believe that it does.

Very shortly we will be going to fating thanksgiving meals with our families. There will be, for many of us, a very large feast spread before us. Platters of freshly sliced turkey and ham, a large assortment of various vegetable and fruit dishes, an array of various desserts including our favorite pies will all be set out before us beckoning us to partake excessively. What a great opportunity that we have to demonstrate that our God is not our appetite, that our God is not our stomach, that our God is not our belly.

In fact, because of the large amount of food that is available to a typical American family, every day is a great opportunity for us to demonstrate that our God is not our appetite and our God is not our stomach, and our God is not our belly. You will have the opportunity this afternoon and again this evening not to eat excessively. Who or what is going to control our lives? Will it be the Lord or food? Wouldn't it be wonderful if this congregation could visibly demonstrate the power of the gospel to deliver us from the bondage of food.

Having said all of this I don't believe that it is best for us to interpret the word “appetite” or “belly” in its most narrow sense. Certainly it is a part of it but it is not the whole of it. In the context the word “appetite” needs to be understood in its broader sense and refers to people ruled by fleshly impulses in general (Galatians 5:19-21). Paul has not been focusing on individual behaviors but rather on an attitude, a disposition, a mind set. In order to be consistent with the whole of **Philippians 3** we need, I believe, to understand the word “appetite” in its more general sense.

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What are some fleshly impulses that emanate out from our unredeemed flesh that we might choose to act on? Let me read for you **Galatians 5:19-21** “**Now the deeds of the flesh (which simply are the out workings of the impulses of the flesh, impulses of our unredeemed flesh, impulses that have everything to do with the things of this world) are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension's, factions, (21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**” Why? Because those who practice such things demonstrate that their fleshly appetite or fleshly impulses are their God. Their body sends a message to their brain and their brain says, “Yes, master.”

You might be saying to yourself I am in trouble. My body is constantly sending messages to my brain that I know are not pleasing to the Lord. This might be so! But don't be alarmed. As long as we are in these bodies these messages will be sent. But simply because these messages are sent does not mean that we have to yield to these messages. Our minds which are being renewed by the Spirit of God through His word can reject sinful fleshly impulses (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**, “**Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. (25) And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (26) Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; (27) but I buffet my body (the fleshly impulses) and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.**” Please understand that not all fleshly impulses are evil. But when those impulses or desires interfere with our pursuit of holiness and submission to Christ and His, word, they need to be brought under the control of Christ. The enemies of Christ will make little or no effort to do so in start contrast with those in the heavenly processional who will fight this battle intensely as long as it needs to be fought.

How are the enemies of the cross of Christ described? They are described as those whose end is destruction. They are described as those whose God is their appetite. And thirdly .....

The enemies of the cross of Christ are described as those whose glory is in their shame. What does this mean?

When we come to the word “glory” many thoughts may go through our minds. We may think of the glory of God, or the glory of Christ, or the glory of the future revealing of the Sons of God. In each of these instances the manifestation of the intrinsic value of the person is wondrous and majestic, in other words glorious. But this is not always the case. The word “glory” (DOXA) refers to the outward manifestation of the essence of a person or thing and is not always associated with God, Christ, or heaven (1 Corinthians 15:39-41). Let me read for you this passage of scripture, “**All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish (40) There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.**”

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The outward manifestation of the essence of the enemies of Christ is not very wondrous or magnificent, in fact it is described as their shame. They profess a faith in Christ but dishonor Him by the way they live. They profess a faith in Christ but their appetite is their God. They profess a faith in Christ but as soon as their bodies sends a fleshly impulse to their brain they say, “Yes, master.”

How are the enemies of the cross of Christ described? They are described as those whose end is destruction. They are described as those whose God is their appetite. They are described as those whose glory is their shame. How else are they described?

The enemies of the cross of Christ are described as those who set their minds on earthly things. When Paul says that the enemies of the cross of Christ set their minds on earthly things we should not conclude that they are setting their minds on wicked things. They are not sitting around necessarily plotting how to kill somebody, or to rob somebody, or to violate somebody. This is not what Paul is communicating. Rather, Paul is saying that all their values and cherished goals are tied to this world rather than the world to come.

### CONCLUSION

Paul is commanding us to line up behind professing Christians who have their spiritual headlights on. Why is this so important? It is important because we might find ourselves lining up behind a person who has no spiritual headlights at all. Rather than being in the heavenly procession we might be in the procession of the damned. Rather than walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates. We might find ourselves walking according to the pattern of the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Are you in the heavenly procession or the procession of the damned?