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

Are you living for the here and now or are you living for the hereafter? Are you more concerned about earthly things or heavenly things? Are your hopes and dreams invested in this world or are they invested in the world to come?

These are the type of questions that I believe we are forced to ask as we continue our study in the Book of Philippians.

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 procession. It is all about groups of believers lined up one after another as they press forward toward the glory of heaven. So what can we learn about the heavenly processional from Philippians 3:17-21?

The first thing that we learned was 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.”**

In this verse the Philippians are first of all commanded to follow the example of Paul. How does the verse begin? **“Brethren, join in following my example....”** Earlier we learned that a better way of understanding this command is to understand it as a command to follow the example of Paul and his missionary associates which also included Epaphroditus and Timothy.

But since Paul and his missionary associates were in Rome and not in Philippi he 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.”**

Though Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus were not living in Philippi there were people in the Philippian church who were walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates and he is commanding the church in general to observe those particular individuals closely.

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But what were the characteristics that made up the pattern of Paul and his associates that they were to be looking for in the lives of the people they were to watch closely? Those characteristics were spelled out for us earlier in **Philippians 3**.

First of all, those walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates had made professions of faith in Christ. In other words they all had made an adjustment to their spiritual ledger by transferring everything that they had ever valued or thought important from their gain column to their loss column and as they expressed faith, in this way, they embraced Jesus as their Savior and their Lord. We saw this in **Philippians 3:7-9**.

Secondly those walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates had confirmed the genuineness of their professions of faith by a desire to get to know Christ better. We saw this in **Philippians 3:10**.

And finally those walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates will persevere in their pursuit of knowing Christ better until they eventually become a participant in the resurrection from the dead or in other words until they found themselves perfectly conformed to Christ. We saw this in **Philippians 3:11-16**.

These are the type of people who are in the heavenly procession and who I have described as having their spiritual headlights on. These are the kind of people that Paul is commanding the church at Philippi to follow.

Paul has now identified three groups in this heavenly procession. The first group was Paul and his associates, followed 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 procession by the way they were living.

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 command seriously and are trying to get as close as we can to those, who by the way they are living, demonstrate that they are in fact a part of the heavenly procession. Hopefully you are not getting yourself so buried with the cares of this world that you are totally unable to get close to the people in this church who have their spiritual headlights on.

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**?

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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.**” If we are not successful at finding and following professing Christians who have their spiritual headlights on. Or in other words if we are not successful in 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.

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. They are not enemies of the cross of Christ because of their doctrine but because of their behavior. This is clear from Paul’s use of the word “walk” and the description of these enemies in **Philippians 3:19**. The enemies of the cross of Christ in Philippians 3:18 focus on fleshly and earthly things rather than on spiritual and heavenly things.

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. And secondly we learn that many professing Christians are enemies of the cross of Christ and are not in the heavenly profession.

This weekend we will come to a third thing that we learn from this passage. I would once again express to you my hope that our study will help encourage us to focus our attention not on the here and now but rather on the hereafter. I would once again hope that our study will help encourage us to focus our attention not on earthly things but on heavenly things..... What is the third thing that we learn from this passage?

We learn that those in the heavenly procession eagerly wait for the return of Christ. People always like to have something to look forward to.

When I was a young boy my father would work tractor jobs on the weekends so that we could as a family look forward to going on a two week vacation every summer. Having something that we are looking forward to helps us to get through whatever we might be presently going through. The wonderful thing about being a Christian, for those who are a part of the heavenly procession is that we always have something to look forward to. In fact there should always be one specific thing that every professing believer should be eagerly looking forward to no matter what the circumstances they might find themselves in.

Let us read **Philippians 3:20**, “**For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**” What does Paul say that those in the heavenly procession are eagerly waiting for? They are eagerly waiting for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. What specifically does Paul have in mind?

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After Christ's 40 day post-resurrection ministry, **Acts 1:11** tells us that as His disciples watched Jesus ascend into the heavens, two angels appeared to them and said, "**Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.**" Let me ask you a question, After the angels told these disciples that Christ would one day return from heaven in the same way they had seen Him go into heaven, how do you think they started each day, especially as those days became more and more difficult for them?

I am quite confident that they started each day thinking, "Perhaps this will be the day." Their excitement about the return of Christ far outweighed the little enjoyment and small pleasures that they might experience in this world. They were looking forward to something far better.

Is this eager anticipation of the return of Christ commonplace? The answer would have to be a resounding no! The vast majority of the world and even many professing Christians have little or no interest in the return of Christ. They are too busy with the things of this world. But this certainly is not true of those in the heavenly procession whose citizenship is in heaven.

Look at **Philippians 3:20** and see how the verse begins "**For our (referring to those in the heavenly procession) citizenship is in heaven.**" The reason why the Philippians will in fact willingly choose to line up behind people in the heavenly procession is not only to protect themselves from the the enemies of the cross of Christ but also because their citizenship is in heaven. The reason why the Philippians will willingly choose to get close to other brothers and sisters in Christ who demonstrate by the way that they are living that they have their spiritual headlights on is not only to protect themselves from the enemies of the cross of Christ but because their citizenship is in heaven. In other words, this is something they will want to do because of who they are.

The word "citizenship" (POLITEUMA) refers to a commonwealth, state, or homeland to which someone belongs. Legally speaking for the vast majority of us here this weekend our citizenship is in the United States of America. But spiritually speaking I would hope that our citizenship is in heaven. We are in the world but not of it. The Philippians would have understood this very well. They were all citizens of Rome because they were a roman colony but they were not in Rome. Where were they? They were in Macedonia in what we now call Greece. They were citizens of Rome, but they were foreigners in a strange land.

A few years ago I visited Japan for several weeks. I certainly enjoyed my visit to Japan. But I could not say to you that I was at all comfortable there. I do not speak the language, I do not particularly like fish, their customs were very different. In addition to this and perhaps far more important was the fact that everything that I was most comfortable with was here in the United States of America. My family, my church, my home so after two weeks I was very ready to come home. I wanted to go home. They have a readiness to go home even if that would be through death.

Certainly we see this readiness to go home even through death expressed by Paul when he said in **Philippians 1:21**, "**For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.**" Paul did not have a problem with death. He saw death as a one-way ticket to glory. He saw death as a one-way ticket home.

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I am very disappointed in so many professing Christians who seem to struggle so much with the thought of dying. For the Christian, death is simply a stepping stone to glory. Scriptures teach us in **2 Corinthians 5:9? “Absent from the body present with the Lord.”**

But even though the citizens of heaven have a readiness to go home such as the apostle Paul this was not the emphasis that he is making in this verse.

Paul had a readiness to go home through death, but more than a readiness to go home through death he had an eagerness to be taken home. We see this eagerness in the very next phrase, **“For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The word translated “eagerly wait” (APEKDECKOMAI) describes the Christians persistent yearning for the coming of Christ. Yes Christians when they die will immediately enter into the presence of Christ and this will be a truly wonderful thing, but this is not the event that Paul tells us that he is eagerly looking forward to in **Philippians 3:20.**

It is interesting to note that Paul never uses the term “eagerly wait” to describe a Christian’s anticipation of entering heaven through death. Certainly entering heaven through death is a wonderful thing but Paul never uses the term “eagerly wait” in order to describe his anticipation of that event. Paul always used the term “eagerly wait” to describe his anticipation of the coming of Christ (**Romans 8:19-23,25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5**). For Paul the coming of Christ was especially important. For Paul the coming of Christ was especially glorious. Even more glorious than entering into the presence of God through death. And it should be for us as well. Why?

When Christ comes for His church their earthly bodies will be transformed and they will finally be conformed to Christ perfectly. This transformation of our bodies will complete God’s redemptive program on our behalf. Our souls have already been saved but our bodies have not. We still possess unredeemed flesh.

This transformation of our bodies at the coming of Christ is described for us in **Philippians 3:20-21.** Let me read this passage again **“For our citizenship (our home) is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a savior (the savior of our body) the Lord Jesus Christ. (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory”** The return of Christ will be glorious and we will share in that glory. Let us look at **V. 21** more closely.

The word translated “humble state” (TAPEINOSIS) points to the physical and moral weakness of our earthly bodies. Some Christians might have you believe that God has somehow provided through the cross physical well being and in a sense they are right. However this physical well being is not in the here and now. Our present bodies are in the process of decaying. What did Paul say in **2 Corinthians 4:16**? He said, **“Though our outer man (our physical body) is decaying our inner man is being renewed day by day.”** This body that we have will break down, it will get sick, it will get old, and it will die. This is certainly a part of our humble state but this is not all. Not only is our body physically weak it is also morally weak. In **Romans 7** Paul describes a battle that is taking place between his regenerated inner man and sin which is at work in members of his mortal, fleshly, fallen physical human body.

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The battle is so intense that he cries out in **Romans 7:25**, “**Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** (Referring to his physical body)”. And of course he immediately answers this question in **Romans 7:25** when he says, “**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ.**”

When Christ returns he will get rid of the body of our humble state. But that is not all that He will do. He will transform the body of his humble state into something else. What will that be? Let us keep reading the verse, “**who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory?**”

The body of His glory is referring to the very same kind of body that Christ now enjoys (1 Corinthians 15:47-49).

Why are we eagerly waiting for the return of Christ? We are eagerly waiting for the return of Christ because when Christ returns we will receive a heavenly body and will finally be conformed to Him perfectly. This is what our salvation is all about. It is being set free from our sins and ultimately from all the consequences of those sins. When Christ returns this will finally happen.

Those who focused on heavenly things will get excited about this. Those focused on the hereafter will get excited about this. Those focused on becoming more like Christ will get excited about this. This is why Paul tells us that those whose citizenship is in heaven eagerly wait for Christ’s return.

But how can we be assured that when he comes that He will be able to do this? Let us again read **Philippians 3:20**, “**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 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.**”

Paul’s confident expectation of this ultimate transformation of the citizens of heaven is based on the power that enables Christ to bring everything under His control (Matthew 28:18).

Since the fall of man this world has been a mess. But it will not stay that way. God the Father has given God the Son the mission of making everything right. And in order to carry out that mission Christ has given Him all power and authority. How does Christ introduce the great commission while speaking to His disciples in **Matthew 28:18**? “**All power and authority has been given me in heaven and on earth.**” There is absolutely nothing that can prevent us as the citizens of heaven being ultimately conformed to the body of His glory. It is all a part of God’s redemptive plan.

When will Christ’s mission of making everything right come to an end? It will end after the great white throne judgment recorded for us in **Revelation 20** which culminates in the coming of the new heavens and new earth. But before He makes everything right in the heavens and earth He first of all makes everything right in respect to all those who have placed their faith in Christ as their Lord as Savior. This could take place when Christ returns for His church.

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CONCLUSION

Christ has been building and perfecting His church since the day of Pentecost. Every person that is added to the church is a cause for celebration. Every step forward in their personal sanctification is a cause for celebration, but the glorious ceremony that will mark the completion of Christ's redemptive purposes on behalf of the church will not take place until the return of Christ.

Every church age saint that has ever lived will be brought together by Christ on that day, both the living and the dead. And each one of them at the very same time will finally achieve perfect conformity to Christ.

Why will those in the heavenly procession eagerly wait for the return of Christ? They eagerly wait for His return because that is when they finally receive their prize and are perfectly conformed to Christ. Those in the heavenly procession eagerly wait for Christ because that is when God's redemptive purpose in conforming them to the image of His Son will be complete.