

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Fourteen

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ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Philippians 3:17-21 - "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. [18] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. [20] But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.:"

This is a fascinating text. **Verses 17, 20, and 21** are the easy verses. **Verses 18 and 19** are the difficult ones. The battle that bubbles around those two verses is **who are these "enemies of the cross of Christ?"** Are they the same group Paul has just called "**dogs**" and "**evil doers**" in **verse 2**? Are they the **Judaisers** who are pushing these Christians into circumcision and the keeping of the law as a **tool** for Christian salvation and righteousness? And if these **are** the ones to whom Paul is referring how do we interpret the description Paul gives here - "**Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things**"(19)?

Or are these "**enemies of the cross of Christ**" those who Paul calls the "**opponents**" of the Philippian believers in **1:28** - "**....and not frightened in anything by your opponents....**"? Or are these people - these "**enemies of the cross of Christ**" - a different group entirely - a more general, undefined group of people in the churches who only pay lip service to Christ, but are given over to sensual, materialistic pursuits? My own opinion is that these "**enemies of the cross of Christ**" are not the same group as the **Judaisers** Paul mentions in **3:1-2**. Nor are they the "**opponents**" Paul mentions in **1:28**. But we'll come to that in a few minutes.

Here's how the passage unfolds:

1) **WE ARE TO MARK PEOPLE WHO ARE GOOD EXAMPLES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO COUNT ALL THINGS LOSS FOR THE SURPASSING KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS**

Philippians 3:17 - "Brothers, join in imitating me, and **keep your eyes on those** who walk according to the example you have in us."

Truth always looks better in a **life** than on **paper**. There are theological truths that, even though wonderfully true, don't sparkle in mere print. But they look incomparably wonderful when they shine in a life ablaze with the radiance of Christ. This is why, when Paul talks about how the life of the cross gets fleshed out, he paints a picture, contrasting his own life before and after Christ. He makes these verses live:

Philippians 3:12-14 - "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

As Paul will make very clear in a few minutes, not everyone who names Christ lives like that. In fact, Paul will say quite pointedly that "**many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ**"(3:18). So it becomes a matter of life and death that these Christians **seek out** genuine pursuers of Christ in the church.

Why? Why is this so important? Because if they just **hear** about this kind of **cross-centered** spiritual life but never **see** it, they will only see it as a **duty** without seeing it as something **joyful** and **beautiful**. But once they've **rubbed shoulders** with this kind of full-blooded Christianity they will come to see it as **desirable** and **possible**.

Please mark this truth carefully. If you don't have a tight, living, warm-blooded link - like a **one-flesh** link - with the church of Christ, your Christian walk will never have the incredible **boost** of having the Holy Spirit stamp your soul with the encouragement and example of someone renouncing all for Christ Jesus - and **loving** it. Your Christian life will be so much more difficult if all you have is the instructions on paper. Never forget that.

2) A GREAT INDICATOR OF THE NATURE OF YOUR HEART'S TREASURE IS WHAT MAKES YOU WEEP

Philippians 3:18 - "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ."

This blessed weeping is described too many times in the Scriptures to miss: **Psalm 119:136** - "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law."

When you study the life of Paul you won't, I don't think, assess him as a touchy-feely guy. He makes tough, solid decisions. He frequently goes against the grain and doesn't seem to worry about it. He grits his teeth and suffers a great deal. But there are times you find him **weeping**. And they're instructive.

He wept as he **warned** the church at Ephesus - **Acts 20:29-32** - "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. [31] Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. [32] And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

He wept as he **rebuked** the church at Corinth - **2 Corinthians 2:2-4** - "For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? [3] And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. [4] For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you."

Now, in our Philippians text, Paul looks at those who are enemies of the Cross of Christ and it **moves him again to tears** - **Philippians 3:18** - "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ."

What a compact, yet fascinating verse! We wish we could creep into Paul's head. Whatever is churning in his heart has churned there many times before because he says he had "**often told**" the Philippian church this same truth. So we know this wasn't some strange, new issue. It was a problem Paul frequently brought to their attention. But it **still** moved him to tears. Whenever someone repeatedly goes over and over the same ground, and yet is **still** unable to control the tearful aching in his heart, you have found his **passion**. I have wondered recently if these words from Paul might not have been on Fanny Crosby's mind when she penned her famous hymn and wrote - "**Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.**"

Detachment is **sometimes** a virtue, but **never** when the hearts and souls of people are concerned. It's a sin to be unmoved. The church won't **pray** for the lost and rebellious for an hour until it **weeps** for the lost and rebellious for an hour.

3) ENEMIES OF CHRIST'S CROSS

Philippians 3:18-19 - "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

Before we get into the analysis we need to return to the question - **who** are these people? There are things we **do** know and things we **don't**. For starters, take note they are enemies of the **cross** of Christ. Not enemies of **Christ**. This seems to be Paul's real concern. He wants the Philippian Christians to follow **his** example and those who understand his heart(3:17). So his **main** worry seems to be that these Philippian believers **not** be inclined to follow the example of these "**enemies of the cross of Christ**."

To see what makes these people **enemies** of the cross we must first establish what **is** the path of the cross of Christ? And Paul has already told us this - repeatedly. First it is marked out in the **example of Jesus Himself**:

Philippians 2:3-8 - "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among

yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

This is the path of the cross. It's not just about receiving ***forgiveness***. Notice, there's not a single word about the forgiveness of sins in that whole passage on the cross. Paul's stress is on the ***shape*** life takes ***after*** encountering the cross of Christ - ***“...have this mind....”*** (5). Have a continuous way of seeing yourselves. Move yourself ***down*** on your priority list. Use more of your time and energy and money for Christ than for you.

To make it clear this wasn't just ***Jesus'*** experience of the cross, but was to be the ***shared*** experience of ***all***, Paul tells of how the cross of Christ changed ***his*** whole approach to life as well - ***Philippians 1:21-23*** - ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”***

See it again in ***Philippians 3:7-9*** - ***“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith....”***

Underscore that word ***“count.”*** Paul says this is the way he ***counted*** the moments and resources of his life. You know what a ***conscious process counting*** is. You first learned it as a child playing games outside - ***“One steamboat - two steamboats - three steamboats....”*** You ***make*** yourself count in a certain way.

This is Paul's way of saying this Christ-shaped life can't just be ***estimated***. You can't casually ***ball-park*** following Christ in this manner. This wasn't natural for Paul. This is how he daily ***measured*** the meaning and direction of his life.

Then Paul tells them of the example of ***Timothy*** - ***Philippians 2:19-22*** - ***“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. [20] For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. [21] They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”***

It's very important to remember that Paul marshals all these accounts, not just as biographical tidbits, but to show ***how people live life post-conversion***. They are ***changed***. This is how the cross of Christ ***remakes*** those who encounter it.

So far, so good. Now we're in a better position to postulate just who these ***“enemies of the cross of Christ”*** were. At least we have some clues. Paul rarely, if ever, wept over false teachers. He wept over the ***damage*** false teachers did to the church. But he usually got ***angry*** with the false teachers themselves. Further, it is significant that Paul says nothing at all about the ***teaching*** of these people. He usually exposed the false doctrines of errant, damaging leaders. But here it's not their ***teaching*** he analyses, but their ***life***.

In contrast, Paul ***did*** weep when he saw people drifting from Christ, growing spiritually cold and dead. Probably that's the case with these ***“enemies of the cross of Christ.”*** They weren't enemies of ***Christ*** - at least not in their minds. They probably loved Christ's teaching. They surely loved His miracles and His forgiveness. What they resisted was Christ's call to a ***cross-shaped life***. They were people who probably ***once*** followed Christ - perhaps ***still*** professed Him - but resisted being ***shaped*** by the cross of Christ. They ***misrepresented*** everything central to discipleship.

You can see it in the terms Paul uses to describe them - ***Philippians 3:19*** - ***“Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”*** Simply put, they are all ***self***. There is no ***daily dying***. All of these phrases are carefully chosen to mark the appearance of a life ***opposite*** to call of the cross of Christ. Let's start with the last phrase and work back to the first:

- a) ***They have “minds set on earthly things.”*** Put the hit on the word ***“set.”*** Everyone ***thinks*** about earthly things. These people are ***set*** on earthly things. They are ***bound*** there. There is nothing else. They are ***consumers***. Period. Life is about what they can see and touch and sense. And it's about ***right now***.

Perhaps the simplest way to understand these people is to contrast them with where Paul's own mind was ***“set”***-

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain [1:21].....But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ [3:7]....I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”[3:14].

Paul says these **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** have abandoned all this. They've forgotten the **target**. They are wrongly oriented. They are like hogs who see nothing but the feed trough in front of them.

- b) **“They glory in their shame.”** This is a difficult phrase. **“Glory”** is what they delight in. **“Shame”** is how they should perceive delighting in what they delight in. In other words, their **tastes** are all backward. They're trying to secure their lives in empty things.
- c) **“Their god is their belly.”** They professed loyalty - at least a certain **kind** of allegiance - to Christ. They were involved in the things of their religion. They attached **some** importance to the things of faith. But they were **ruled** by the fulfilling of their senses. The **majority** of their lives was shaped by **inclination** rather than by **Christ**. Their **god** was their belly. Most of their **thoughts** and **ambitions** and **time** and **resources** ran in that direction.
- d) **“Their end is destruction.”** This is a carefully chosen phrase. These people have taken their eyes off the heavenly prize. They have set their lives on a different **end**. They have deleted something central to the call of Christ - **Philippians 1:29-30** - **“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”**

Because Paul is concerned the Christians at Philippi might be tempted along the same lines - because they might grow weary with the cost of choosing Christ when it brings opposition, self-denial, and even persecution - he reminds them that those who deny the cost for an easier, apparently more rewarding road, have no future at all.

So these Philippian Christians are to **walk in the example of Paul (17)**. The **reason** this is so important is there are **“many”** who, regardless of their Christian talk, **walk** (live) as practical **“enemies of the cross of Christ” (18)**. And when **“many”** just talk the talk but don't walk the walk, Christians can come to think of this phoney Christianity as **normal**. That's the great danger.

I try to read as many biographies as I can of passionate Christians of long gone eras. They seem so wonderfully weird and passionate and vivid against the bland, self-absorbed culture in which we live. And then I wonder - just **start** to wonder - if maybe these are the **normal** Christians, just living out the real cost of real faith in a wicked world. Maybe we have all gotten used to something pale, anaemic, and grossly unreal. Maybe we have been too influenced by the wrong examples. **Watch passionate Christians. Watch out for indulgent ones.**

This leads into Paul's closing comments:

4) **ONLY THOSE WHO PAY THE PRICE OF THE CROSS HAVE CITIZENSHIP IN HEAVEN**

Philippians 3:20-21 - **“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”**

As Paul ponders the future of these **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** - that their **“end is destruction” (19)** - he is moved to elaborate on the **end** of those who count all things loss for knowing Christ. Their **“citizenship”** is in heaven. Whatever they face in opposition, ridicule, or sacrifice, their **end** is certain and wonderful.

His last sentence in this chapter is more than mere repetition. It underscores the **certainty** of the end of the righteous. Paul knows these Philippian Christians are facing trouble - **Philippians 1:27-30** - **“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”**

These words underscore the obvious. There are times when it doesn't **look** like the way of the cross is that wonderful. And

there are certainly times when it doesn't *feel* wonderful either. That's where Paul's closing words in this chapter stand firm - "**... who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.**"

Whatever current threats arise (and they will arise), and whatever price must be paid for faith (and the cost will mount as this age darkens and draws to a close) there is *nothing* that will finally stand against Christ. So we need to finally ask, is this call hard or is it easy? Or perhaps more accurately, is this call hard or is it *joyful*?

Matthew 13:44 - "[44] "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.