

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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MOVING TOWARD WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT

Philippians 3:14-21

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My three points today are:

- Follow Godly examples.
- Avoid ungodly examples.
- Focus on your citizenship.

Paul's letter to the church at Philippi was a letter of encouragement, and like all of his other letters, full of instruction. He wrote from a Roman jail, where he was incarcerated for preaching the Gospel.

Last week, I shared with you how Paul considered his life before Christ as nothing but garbage, how he wanted to know the power of the resurrection, and how he pressed on toward the goal of being in God's will.

Today we are going to look at following godly examples, avoiding ungodly examples, and focusing on your true citizenship.

FOLLOW GODLY EXAMPLES

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:14-16

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

EXPLANATION: Maturity is the key word here. Maturity makes things clearer to us; maturity helps us understand more about the depths of God's love for us. Maturity helps us live up to being called a child of God and a follower of Christ.

There are a lot of immature believers out there. Spiritual development does not happen like physical development. A new Christian can mature quickly and an old Christian can be very immature. The closer a person comes to Christ, the more mature the person will become.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:17

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

When Paul said in another letter "Follow me as I follow Christ," he was talking about growing in his faith. He wanted others to grow in their faith as well. In the early days of the church, most did not know how to grow in their newfound faith. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, confession, study, stewardship, fellowship and so on... they were new to new believers and these disciplines were probably not even called disciplines. I can easily envision how many knew their lives had been changed but didn't know what to do next.

"Joining together" is the key phrase here. We have to be unified in the things we do. A family has to be unified to be effective. A married couple has to be unified to have a fulfilling marriage, and that doesn't mean unified based on what one person in the marriage wants. It must be mutual.

If Christians are focused on Christ, then there will be a high degree of unity in all we do. But we do not live in a perfect world, and sometimes we let the smaller things on which we disagree dominate our thinking and divide us. It is a good thing if a church divides over heresy, but it is a terrible thing if a church divides over non-important things.

This joining together is yet more proof that the Christian life is to be lived out in community, not as spiritual hermits. A lot of teaching in the Bible is about unity!

APPLICATION: Paul promoted himself and his followers as models for others to follow. I wonder what model are we creating for others to follow? One of the things I've heard is that the way you are taught is the way you teach others. I remember when I was saved. I remember the scriptures that were used when someone led me to the Lord. And I use the same scriptures. Parents model behavior and beliefs to their kids who will in turn model those things to their own children.

AVOID UNGODLY EXAMPLES

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:18-19

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

Folks, we are living in a day when there are many enemies of the cross. I mean real enemies. We must be on guard for these people.

“Their destiny is their destruction” can also be accurately translated as “whose end is destruction”. The world is working at a breakneck pace accumulating things as if they are going to live forever, with absolutely no thought that it is all going to end someday.

ILLUSTRATION: I visited a man whose family didn't think he had made any profession of faith in Jesus. He was facing a serious surgery. He said, “Some people think I may not make it through surgery and that I should be concerned about that, but hey, I am not worrying about it today.” I wasn't able to get anywhere witnessing to him.

The Greek word for destruction is literally this: *the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life, eternal misery, perdition, the lot of those excluded from the kingdom of God.*

In this same verse, verse 18, Paul says, *“Their god is their stomach”* – the Greek work that's been translated “stomach” (or “appetite” in your translation) literally

means to be given up to the pleasures of the palate. I believe Paul used this as a metaphor meaning people do whatever tastes good, in the same way that people today say, “do whatever *feels* good”. Folks, we are right there, aren’t we? People are believing a lie that whatever *feels* good is OK for you and if people disagree it’s their problem!

In verse 18, Paul continues describing ungodly examples: “*whose glory is their shame*”. If this is not a description of 2020, I don’t know what is. Ungodly people gloat in what they should be ashamed of. They are proud of their sin! Wow! My guess is that verse 18 is skipped over in a lot of churches. And if anyone points out what they are doing is not right, they are called haters full of hate speech.

Paul says all these people have their mind on earthly things.

ILLUSTRATION: I’m always kind of humored about how people blame satan for just about anything.

- If they burn the toast, satan must have done it.
- If they have a flat tire, satan must have done it.
- If they bounce a check, satan must have spent their money.
- If the toilet won’t flush, satan must have caused it.
- If they did poorly on a test, it’s an attack of the enemy.

Listen to me...satan is not burning your toast. He is not throwing nails on the highway. He is not using your debit card. He is not in the plumbing. And he’s not making you fail tests! NO! He is doing more important things, on a much broader scale... like carefully crafting a society that praises people for doing whatever feels good and being proud of what they should be ashamed of. In the end he wins because their end is eternal separation from God.

APPLICATION: Did you know before you were saved, you were an enemy of the cross? You might not like hearing that but you were. Super-sensitive people might have to go to the cry room when they hear this, but a person in his or her lost state is an enemy of the cross. I can’t think of a worse description of anyone than to be called an enemy of the cross.

I am afraid at times we may be caught in that fine line between what is earthly and what is heavenly. As citizens of heaven living on this earth, we must pay attention to earthly things, right? In this life on this earth, we must be good stewards of our earthly bodies and our possessions. We must plan for the future. Knowing how to focus in this earthly state while containing a soul that yearns for heaven is called having wisdom and discernment.

FOCUS ON YOUR TRUE CITIZENSHIP

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

APPLICATION: There is a lot of talk about immigration these days, and there are lots of different opinions about it. Within a few miles of us are people in a legal status as refugees. Refugees are people who fled their homes to avoid dying of starvation or genocide. Most of you know some of them. We're doing our best to help them.

I think it's First Peter 2 where we are called pilgrims – the same Greek word for pilgrim can be sojourner or even foreigner. In a spiritual sense, we are that foreigner. Followers of Jesus are refugees. We've left a life dominated by sin and earthly pursuits and we no longer belong to this world. We are spiritual refugees, waiting to go where our citizenship will take us some day. *“But our citizenship is in heaven.”* The body that I inhabit is the refugee body that will never see my heavenly home. It'll be left behind on this earth while I will have a heavenly body and will enjoy being a citizen of heaven.

And that heavenly home must have a body that is fit for it. Do you realize our earthly bodies could not live in heaven? They are not designed for heaven. They are designed for earth. But the resurrection body of Jesus actually was on earth. So it is

a much greater body. The human soul is saved by the power of the Holy Spirit. And saved souls will someday depart the earthly body and occupy a transformed body.

In Colossians 3, Paul said to set your mind on things above, not earthly things. The reason our minds should not be on earthly things is because we are citizens of heaven.

The title of this message is Moving On Toward What is Really Important. We must follow godly examples and we must *be* godly examples. We must avoid ungodly examples and avoid being ungodly examples. And we must focus on our true citizenship.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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