

Philippians 3:17-4:1  
2nd Sunday in Lent  
February 28, 2010

### **Philippians 3:17-4:1 (New International Version)**

**17**Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. **18**For, as I have often told you before and now say 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 on earthly things. **20**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. **1**Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Did you know that this is one of the most dangerous times of the year for walking and for driving? As the winter begins to loosen its grip on us and as the February sun melts more ice and snow one can get a little careless walking or driving. It's easy to forget that there still can be some icy spots on the sidewalks and on the roads in the morning and one little slip can lead to a broken bone or damaged car.

Sidewalks and roadways are not the only places we can slip and fall. One way in which Christians seem to slip is in living their lives as God's redeemed people. Let me ask you, "Do you have more or less control over your tongue or anger than you did a year ago?" "Have you been more loving and patient with your spouse or children or coworkers than you were a month ago?" "And what about your church attendance or honoring the Lord with your wealth? Have you gotten better, more Christ like with such things or have you slipped back or even fallen?"

Since we all still have a sinful nature that wants to do what it wants, growing in our Christianity is never an easy thing. It's a battle, it's a race, it's a contest, and one thing that makes it more difficult are those slippery spots along the way which can cause us to fall into sin and fall further behind rather than getting ahead. So how do we stand firm in Christ and in our Christian faith and hope? That's what Paul addresses in our sermon text for today. Using his words, I appeal to you this morning: **DEAR FRIENDS, THIS IS HOW WE STAND FIRM IN CHRIST!**

- I. **By following Godly examples**
- II. **By hold onto to heavenly hope**

Paul's letter to the Philippians is unlike most other letters he had written. The Philippians had not only received Paul and the gospel message with joy and generously took care of Paul's physical needs while he was imprisoned in Rome, they didn't have any real doctrinal issue that needed correcting. But that doesn't mean that there wasn't need for some pastoral encouragement. Christian humility and harmony were some of the things the Philippians needed to work on. The other was standing their ground when it came to their faith and their living as Christians. And how were they to do that? The first way they were to stand firm in Christ was by following Godly examples. **17**Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. **18**For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **9**Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

We can all come up with bad examples that we shouldn't follow as Christians, especially among the unbelieving people of this world; Hollywood entertainers, professional athletes, or punk rockers who thumb their nose up at any and every kind of authority with lyrics and lives of defiance. Such bad examples were there in Paul's day too. But the bad

examples Paul had in mind, in this context, were not necessarily unbelieving people outside the pale of the visible church. They were people who claimed to be Christian but whose teachings and lifestyles also opposed the cross of Christ and catered to sinful desires just as much as unbelievers. On the one hand there were those who used forgiveness as a license to sin. They taught and believed that since God forgives they could sin all they wanted because that would mean more forgiveness, and the more forgiveness they had the better Christian they would be! What a warped religion that is. On the other hand, there were teachers and members who believed that they could attain perfection in this life by living according to a certain regimen and obeying the Old Testament laws. Both extremes catered to the sinful flesh either by indulging the flesh or by stroking its sinful pride that thinks it's good enough to earn heaven. That's why Paul says, "Join others in following my example brothers and take note of those who live according the pattern we gave you."

What's the pattern or example that Paul set? Paul knew that as long as he lived in this world, he had a sinful nature with which to contend. He knew would never be able to be perfect. He often slipped and fell too. He bemoaned that fact when he said, "There is nothing good that lives in me that is in my sinful nature. For the good I want to do I do not do, no the evil that I don't want to do I keep on doing." But Paul also knew and believed that he was always perfect! How can that be? That's one of the great paradoxes of our Christian faith. As Luther once said, every believer is both sinner and saint at one and the same time. In other words, even though we sin with every breath with every breath by faith in Jesus God counts as holy, forgiven, saints. That's what Paul believed, taught, and lived!

Therein lies the example of Paul. How do we stand firm in Christ? Not by the things we do but by what God does for us through the Christ. He forgave us and continues to forgive us for our imperfection and gives us Christ's holiness. Standing firm in Christ means following Paul's example by standing on the Word that leads us to the cross. Standing firm in Christ means standing at the baptismal font and on the promises Christ made to us there that washed us and made us holy. Standing firm in Christ means standing regularly at the Lord's Table to receive again and again the assurance that through his body and blood given under the forms of bread and wine we are forgiven. Having stood in the light of God's saving grace, we then stand against sin and Satan. Following Paul's example let us always confess that we are never holy on this side of the grave. Following Paul's example let us always cling to God's promise in Christ that we are always holy. Only in that can we stand firm in Christ.

## II.

Not only do we stand firm in Christ by following Godly examples like Paul, but also stand firm by holding on to our heavenly hope. "As I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ...**20**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."

To appreciate the point that Paul is making here we need to remember that the city of Philippi was a Roman colony. When Roman soldiers would retire from active duty, the emperor would give them property t in these outlying cities of the empire. Those veterans would turn those colonies into miniature "Rome's" by holding on to Roman laws, customs, dress and speech. You could tell who Roman citizens were by how they dressed, lived and talked, and Paul plays on that in these words. People ought to know that Christians are citizens of heaven by the way they act and by the way they talk.

But there's the problem isn't it? Can people tell that we are citizens of heaven by the way we act and talk? Sadly, we all slip and fall down in our Christian speech and actions. To our shame, sometimes people can hardly tell the difference between us and the rest of the unbelieving world. The reason for that we've already discussed. By nature we are rotten to the core and the rottenness comes out every day in the rotten things we think, say, and do. We deserved to rot in hell, not taken to heaven. And yet, the good news, dear friends, is that Christ took all of our rottenness to himself and paid the debt for our sin by suffering hell. He bought us our citizenship in heaven by his blood. By his life and death we now have a passport on which God has stamped "This is my holy one, a citizen of heaven." That citizenship not only changes our eternal destiny, it changes our present living. We live here as veterans of the cross.

But our hope for heaven includes even more. Jesus did more than redeem our souls. He also redeemed our bodies! When Jesus comes back he will transform our lowly bodies so

that they will be like his glorious body. What that means is that just as Christ was done with sin and its consequences when he came out his grave, our bodies will also be done with sin and its consequences when we come out of our graves. What we strive for imperfectly now in this sinful world and in this sinful body by faith will be ours one day perfectly and completely. We will no longer struggle with temptation or slip and fall into sin. We will no longer die. That is our heavenly hope because that is Christ's promise. Standing on that promise you will stand firmly in heaven through Christ.

Dear friends, living in Wisconsin we know how to avoid slipping on ice and snow when walking and driving. We know how to stand firm in Christ too! Follow Godly examples like Paul. Hold on to your heavenly hope!