



Philippians: Week 5

Week 5, Day 1 - Philippians 3:17

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

Understanding the Passage:

Because Paul is an apostle (a 'sent one') there is an unbroken link between Paul and Jesus himself. Likewise, there is an unbroken chain from Paul's readers to Jesus. This is early on in the life of the Christian church, so the chain is shorter, but we have that chain now, too. We call this *apostolic succession*. With few gaps, we can trace our following of Jesus all the way back to Jesus himself, through Paul and the other Apostles. It's an inherited way of life.

That's what Paul is pointing to when he says, "join in imitating me." It's not out of hubris or arrogance, but Paul sees his connection to the way of Jesus; and, inasmuch as he imitates Christ, he invites us to imitate him. He extends the imitation to "those who live according to the example you have in us." That is, extend your imitation to those who are in the line of the apostles.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Think about your family tree. What sorts of things have you inherited in your family (good or bad) that have seemed to stick around for generations?
2. What things have stuck in Jesus' family (the church)? What have we lost?
3. What can we imitate in Paul that we've learned in these past weeks in Philippians?
4. Who are some Jesus-followers in recent history that we should imitate as we imitate Paul?

Week 5, Day 2 - Philippians 3:18-19

¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

Understanding the Passage:

In contrast to "those who live according to the example you have in us" Paul warns his readers of "enemies of the Cross of Christ." The contrast is between those who have inherited a certain way of transformational life and those who live against that way. Paul reminds his readers that he's brought them up before (perhaps the "dogs" he talks about in 3:2). Paul's attitude toward these "enemies" and "dogs" isn't venomous or abusive, but "with tears." There's grief for Paul in talking about those who oppose the way of Jesus. Why? Potentially because Paul sees the transformation that comes with following Jesus, and he's grieved that people would resist and fight against the peace that comes with Christ.

Paul doesn't heap warnings from his own power on these people but insists that their downfall is self-imposed. Recall Romans 6:23: "the wages of sin is death." The destruction they find is something they've invited on themselves. That's grief-worthy for Paul. The motivation for their resistance is their appetites. They hunger for themselves, or other "gods," or things less than God. In God's upside-down kingdom, what brings you glory on earth is shameful and vice versa. What really

makes one an “enemy of the cross” is hungering for things that are impermanent. Paul’s implicit encouragement is to hunger for things that last in eternity.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Who does Paul have in mind when he talks about enemies of the cross? Is there something dangerous about making that distinction/judgment today?
2. What makes Paul sad to even talk about these “enemies?” Do you grieve with Paul?
3. What appetites distract us from following Jesus?
4. What earthly things distract us from our spiritual transformation?

Week 5, Day 3 - Philippians 3:20-21

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul’s writings are full of cultural and national designations. In Acts 22, Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship to defend himself against accusers and potential execution. Here, however, Paul doubles down on his citizenship in heaven. Paul isn’t saying he’s an angel or that he was born in heaven. Rather, he is describing where and to whom he belongs. When we think about citizenship, we think about birth. Certainly, that’s some of the case here, too. Paul has been “born again” and that second birth is a heavenly one. Additionally, we think of citizenship with cultural practices and norms. Paul has that facet in mind too. *Act* as if your ID has heaven’s address on it. That’s where our leader and guide is from and where he will come from.

This heaven-sent person comes to our earthly home and transforms us to look like him. Recall Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. People didn’t recognize him (Luke 24:16). Jesus walks through walls (John 20:19). And he continued to teach with a sort of physical and recognizable presence (Acts 1:3). Our ultimate destination is to have a body like that. Jesus embodies the power that transformed his body in the resurrection, the power that will also transform our bodies, and the power that he possesses to rule and reign over all. That same power works in us now in our discipleship to Jesus.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven? What do we do differently? What’s recognizable about it?
2. What parts of our earthly citizenship fit with our heavenly citizenship? Which parts conflict?
3. What can physically change in us when we follow Jesus?
4. What of Jesus’ heavenly life can we experience now?

Week 5, Day 4 - Philippians 4:1-3

¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul wants resurrection life for the Philippians. He wants them to stay the course. He wants them to imitate Jesus in all things. “Therefore,” he says, “stand firm.” Paul expects there will be external

circumstances that push and trouble the Philippians. Under the current of encouragement is a current of warning. Paul says “stand firm” because he knows there will be things to stand firm *against*. You can hear Paul’s concern, but also his affection and love.

As is custom in Paul’s letters, he ends with some shoutouts. He wants to send instructions and specific encouragement to his readers. It also gives him a chance to endorse the work and ministry of people the Philippians know as local leaders in their church. Paul lists two women, Euodia and Syntyche, and urges their like-mindedness. Paul isn’t expressing a lack of confidence in them; rather, Paul wants them to be at their best because he believes in their ministry. These women have worked alongside him in the work he’s called to. Just like Romans 16, Philippians 4 specifically lifts up women in gospel ministry. There is no getting around it. Paul counts them as co-workers.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What helps you “stand firm” as Paul encourages?
2. What pushes against your desire/ability to stand firm?
3. If you were writing a letter of encouragement (spiritual or otherwise) who would you write it to? What would you say to encourage them?
4. Who do you consider a “co-worker” in your discipleship to Jesus? How do they encourage you and help you on your spiritual journey?

Week 5, Day 5 - Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul doubles down on his imperative to rejoice. Again, grammatically Paul is saying, “joy yourself.” Fill yourself with joy. Not only that, but do this continually. Rejoicing isn’t dependent on occasion, but something for all seasons to safeguard us against despair and to secure our foundation in “standing firm.”

Paul can’t say “rejoice” enough. It’s central to the Christian life, and it’s more than simple happiness or naïve positivity. It’s filling yourself with the love and life that comes from Jesus. It can withstand all circumstances, so find it in all circumstances, Paul says.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What has brought you joy this past week?
2. How do you rejoice continually? Even when it’s hard?
3. How do you distinguish between the joy that comes from God and the fleeting joy that comes from something else?
4. How will you share the joy of Christ with someone this week?

Video Questions:

1. Do you see your life as a story of God’s redemption? Why or why not?
2. How do we live a life that says our “citizenship is in heaven?” What are the marks of kingdom citizenship?
3. How is spiritual formation in Christ also physical or bodily? What changes physically when we follow Christ?
4. What does a lack of joy alert you to in your own life? How do you re-find and reclaim joy?

Prayer requests and other notes.