

Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Session 11: The Call to Imitate Paul and His Coworkers - Philippians 3:15-4:3

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Abstract

Dr. Matthew S. Harmon discusses Philippians 3:15–4:3, focusing on the spiritual imperative to imitate mature believers rather than those who live as enemies of the cross. He contrasts earthly-mindedness with the believers' true citizenship in heaven, which promises future bodily transformation and the subjection of all things to Christ. This heavenly identity is shown to require immediate, tangible action in the form of church reconciliation, as illustrated by Paul's public appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Ultimately, believers are called to stand firm in their shared identity as fellow laborers whose names are recorded in the Book of Life.

Outline

I. Introduction and Context (Phil 3:1-14)

- A. Review of Philippians 3:1-14 as the basis for the current text.
- B. Contrast between negative examples (false teachers/former self) and positive examples (single-minded pursuit of Christ).
- C. Key parallels with the Christ Hymn (Phil 2:5-11):
 - 1. Having/thinking the same mind (phreneo).
 - 2. Obedience to the cross vs. enemies of the cross.
 - 3. Submission of all things to Christ's lordship.
 - 4. Lower/humiliated bodies transformed into Christ's glorious body.

II. The Command: Join Together in Imitating the Right People (Phil 3:15-17)

- A. Focus on Spiritual Maturity rather than perfection.
- B. Community Project: A corporate pursuit involving Paul himself.
- C. Intentionality of Imitation: Carefully observing the lives and actions of mature mentors.
- D. Characteristics of a Spiritually Mature Person:
 - 1. Maintains a single-minded focus on Christ despite life's commitments.
 - 2. Acknowledges they have not yet fully arrived spiritually.
 - 3. Refuses to be paralyzed by the past, looking forward to Christ's future work.
 - 4. Values interests of others and pursues a shared mindset.

III. Reasons for Imitation: Two Contrasting Paths (Phil 3:18-4:1)

- A. The Enemies of the Cross (Phil 3:18-19):
 - 1. Mentioned with grief and tears by Paul.
 - 2. Walk on a path leading to destruction (indicative of unbelievers).
 - 3. Driven by base, gut-level desires ('their God is their belly').
 - 4. Glory in things that are shameful from a biblical perspective.
 - 5. Possess minds set on earthly things.
- B. Citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20-21):
 - 1. Outlook focused on heavenly realities and God's kingdom.
 - 2. True heavenly-mindedness yields active, tangible earthly good.
 - 3. Promise of physical resurrection and bodily transformation.
 - 4. Re-ordering of creation under Christ's absolute subjecting power (Peace/Shalom).
 - 5. Fulfillment of the dominion mandate originally failed by Adam.
- C. The Concluding Mandate: Loving and longing for the community, standing firm in the Lord (Phil 4:1).

IV. Application: Pursuing Reconciliation in the Church (Phil 4:2-3)

- A. Public appeal to Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord.
- B. Address to the 'True Companion' (Syzygous) to intervene and help.
- C. Re-affirming these women as fellow laborers in the gospel.
- D. Ultimate security: Names written in the Book of Life.

V. Summary and Practical Implications

- A. What to Think: God provides models of Christ-like lives to observe.
- B. What to Believe: The past does not determine our identity.
- C. What to Desire: Actively longing for and daydreaming about Christ's return.
- D. What to Do: Proactively help others to reconcile and restore peace.