

# Session #5: Philippians 3.17-4:23

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Today we bring to an end, not only to the core teachings of the Letter to the Philippians but to the letter itself.



## **Our Goal 3:17-4.1**

### **3:17 imitators of me**

St. Paul offers himself up as a model or example not out of arrogance or pride. It was a common practice in the ancient Greco-Roman world for teachers to point to themselves as examples. In light of that we know that St. Paul offers himself as an example out of humility. As we studied last week in verse twelve of this chapter: *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.* St. Paul recognizes his own humanity but also understands that there are few who are making a sincere effort to live the Christian walk as devotedly as he is for as long as he has, and the community in Philippi know him as someone who works hard to model his own life after the life of Christ. *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* 1 Corinthians 11:1. But we are not meant to set out on this journey alone. St. Paul tells us to **join others in being imitators of me.** A better literal translation would be: *co-imitators of me.* St. Paul further develops this idea in the verse by saying: **observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.** This is why we are Church. We support, nurture, fortify, pray for, encourage one another in our efforts to be our best selves as imitator of Christ. For those who might feel that the challenge to imitate Christ, or St. Paul too intimidating, try following a Saint of the Church (which is why the Catholic Church “creates” saints). An example might be Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey. A simple man of great devotion who opened his heart and the doors of the Church to the lost, forgotten, hungry and spiritual poor of the greater Detroit area. But, for all those who seek to follow the example of Christ, St. Paul warns us that there are those we should NOT seek to emulate. He goes on to say there are those who...

### **3:18 walk as enemies of the cross of Christ**

The intimacy of this statement tells authors that St. Paul is not talking necessarily in a general way, but has in mind a specific group or individuals that are known to the community in Philippi. It is very likely that St. Paul has talked about them before. Some scholars suggest that St. Paul might be referring to the Judaizers referenced in verse two of this chapter. Whatever the relationship, St. Paul is so upset by their choices to live in sinfulness that as he writes he is moved to write **with tears.** These individuals, because of their decisions to embrace sin walk counter to the message of Jesus Christ and therefore are walking away from the grace of heaven. And what are the sins they are embracing...

### **3:19 Their god is:**

- Their belly – gluttony
- Glory -- pride
- Worldly ways – lust, greed, sloth, anger, envy

These are the seven deadly sins. While we all struggle with these seven monsters throughout our lives, the question is not whether we give into temptation but who wins the battle. St. Paul is very clear, should these sins become our gods our ***end is destruction.***

**3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven***

This is a conversation we have had often in this bible study, that while we are living here on earth we are a pilgrim people. Earth is not our forever home. We, as believing Christians, have our citizenship in heaven. Heaven is our forever home. In other translations we may find *commonwealth* in place of citizenship. St. Paul uses these word(s) specifically in hopes that it would call to mind the importance that some within the community hold dear, their Roman citizenship. Remember, Philippi was in part, a retirement community for Roman soldiers and their families. Roman citizenship brought with it special privileges and honors that, if you had them, you would hold dear. If you did not have them you would envy. St. Paul is hoping that the community of Philippi would make the connection with Roman citizenship but understand that our belonging to heaven is so much greater. It is interesting to note that the words, citizenship and savior are not found again in any of St. Paul's letters, which leads scholars to believe it is used here because of the unique nature of Philippi in their relationship to Rome because of the retirees.

**3:21 *change our lowly bodies... glorious body***

From the New Revised Standard Version Bible we read verse 21 as: *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.* If we take the 1<sup>st</sup> century hymn from chapter two we find similarities. Scholars suggest that St. Paul is using this as an ongoing tool to remind his readers that this is not our home. This image of changing our bodies for glorious ones is not what you think. We do not all the sudden become thin, athletic and the envy of all. These are earthly desires. When we get to heaven we exchange all that is earthly for all that is of God. God will transform us into glorious immortal beings.

**4:1 *stand firm in the Lord***

While almost all bibles will have a division at the end of 3:1, Fr. Dennis Hamm challenges that the *stand firm* we find here in this verse links back to the *standing firm* that St. Paul writes in 1:27, thus forming a "bracket" indicating that 1:27-4:1 is one unit and the core of the letter. St. Paul brings to conclusion in this section and the focus of the letter calling us all to stand firm in our faith using Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus as living examples to imitate.

**Joy and Peace 4:2-9**

**4:2 *Euodia...Syntche***

As St. Paul draws this letter to a close he offers a challenge to two women to resolve issues. We have no clues as to the issue or to whom these women are. Not in this letter or any of the others. None the less these women were leaders in the Philippi community and strong advocates for the gospel otherwise St. Paul would not include them when writing in verse three that they *struggled at my side in promoting the gospel*, as well as including their name along with Clement in *the book of life*.

**4:3 *my true yokemate***

Another word used for "yokemate" is "co-worker". It can also be translated from the Greek as a name, "Syzygus". Some scholars believe the Greek word used is best

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translated to “*spouse*” leading them to believe that St. Paul was married and that his wife remained in Philippi. (This is not a very popular idea, by the way.) Whatever the original intent of the word, we know that St. Paul is directing his words to a particular person requesting them to take the two women in hand and help in mediating their problem. The verse goes on to mention another co-worker in Christ, **Clement**. No where else in the New Testament is Clement referred to. Some scholars suggest this Clement mentioned in Philippians is the same Clement who was the fourth Bishop of Rome. We have no way of knowing for sure. We do know that whomever Clement, Euodia, Syntche and the fourth person all, all will find their names **in the book of life**. This “book” is a metaphor for the list of names, of those individuals after having lived a good and holy life will find themselves standing with the angels in heaven. Jesus mentions it after the 72 return from their mission work in Luke 10:20. Here’s hoping your name and mine will be listed.

**4:4 Rejoice in the Lord, always** As this letter comes to an end St. Paul goes into one more moment of teaching. If not in word than in deed. That this man can, in the midst of his own hardship can find joy in the Lord shows the depth of his character. In the words of Fr. Dennis Hamm: *Is this the organized elation of the cruise-ship events director? No, Paul knows from experience that, no matter what the circumstances, being mindful of their union with the risen Lord will evoke a deep, mysterious joy. He can mandate that from of mind because he and they know that Christian joy is not simply a feeling; it is a choice.* The phrase is repeated for emphasis

**4:5 Your kindness...known to all** Most scholars believe that, while a general teaching for all is most probably pointed directly at Euodia and Syntche.

**The Lord is at hand** There are two ways one can understand this sentence. First meaning the end of all time. If this letter was written earlier in St. Paul’s missionary career there would be an urgency about this call. Because, in those early years St. Paul believed that Jesus was returning in his lifetime. Here at the end of his life it is most likely that there is no sense that the Lord’s return is eminent but the fact of the matter is Jesus will return and we must maintain our stamina as we run the race. The second way we can understand verse five is by looking at the translation from another bible: **The Lord is near**. No matter where we go, God is with us. In the words of Psalm 139:8-10:

*If I climb to the sky, you’re there!  
If I go underground, you’re there!  
If I flew on morning’s wings  
to the far western horizon,  
You’d find me in a minute—  
you’re already there waiting!*

**4:6 Have no anxiety at all** Most of us who read this line could easily respond: “Easy for you to say, St. Paul.” But as we spoke of earlier, this is a primary teaching of Jesus. And St. Paul does go on further in the verse to explain just how we can achieve this lack of anxieties and worries. If we but **in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God**. Our call in faith is to lay our burdens down at the feet of Christ confident that He will take care of all.

If we do this in everything, in every circumstance of our lives, then we then we will know the truth of verse seven.

**4:7 *peace of God*** When difficulties and trials enter our life the first inclination for most is to worry and stress about them. St. Paul is challenging all his readers to remember the teaching of Jesus and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-34). If we put our trust, our hope, our confidence in God; if we keep our eyes on Jesus then we will know serenity of heart and mind. *Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.* (1 Peter 5:7)

**4:8-7 *think about these things. Keep doing...*** St. Paul ends this section by challenging his readers to think and to act. Verse eight gives us the right attitude to have in life. We are to focus on truth, honor, justice, purity, beauty and all that is good, is of God. This is the proper attitude to cultivate in our lives and we do that by what we think about. But attitude is not enough. Action is required. Therefore *keep doing what you have learned.*

### **Final Gratitude and Farewell 4:10-23**

There are those scholars who believe that 4:10-20 was a note that was sent on first upon receiving the generosity of the Philippians when Epaphroditus first came (4:18) and was later attached to the document that came when Epaphroditus returned. Whether a separate note or the ending of this letter what we have here are St. Paul's sincere affections for the community at Philippi.

**4:10 *I rejoice greatly*** As we bring this document to a close St. Paul returns to the financial gift received through Epaphroditus. From the sounds of this verse the community at Philippi was unable at first to do anything which explains St. Paul saying ***that now at last you revived your concern for me.*** But, in fear that the comment could be understood as snide or sarcastic, St. Paul continues on by acknowledging that the community was either going through their own crisis or had no way of getting their support to him.

**4:11 *I find myself to be self-sufficient*** We could take this verse and understand St. Paul as prideful or arrogant but again, most scholars agree that St. Paul is working hard to not lay any guilt on the community at Philippi. He wants them to know that he appreciates what they are able to do but recognizes the need to depend on himself. And let us not forget God's providence. We already heard St. Paul tell us that our dependence is to be on God (4:6-7) praying for our needs. But, this sentence regarding self-sufficiency leads into what he offers next, living with whatever life brings.

**4:12 *I know indeed how to live*** To fully appreciate verse twelve we must reach back to the hymn we read in 2:6-11 and the mindset of humility and the glory of God. The phrase *to live in humble circumstances* is a translation from the Greek verb *tapeinoo*. A more literal translation of this Greek word is "to humble oneself" or "to be humbled". As St. Paul brings this document full circle he is modeling the behavior of Christ *humbled himself and became obedient (2:8)* by himself accepting whatever circumstances he finds himself with grace and humility. This could also refer not only to financial circumstances but through the suffering and hardships he has known because of preaching the Gospel. But it is not enough that he knows how to live as Christ would want. St. Paul goes on, in a subtle way, to invite his readers to live this way as well. St. Paul goes on to say ***in all things I have***

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**learned the secret of...** One scholar suggests the idea that St. Paul is inviting the community at Philippi (and you and I) to “join the club”. Membership often means sharing secrets that insiders know. As baptized believers who not only share in Christ’s victory, we share in the hardship that faith can sometimes brings. But we all know the secret to success – is putting on the mind of Christ.

**4:13 I can do all things in him who strengthens me**

This beautiful message acts as a bridge statement having just shared his gratitude in what the community at Philippi was able to do for St. Paul (4:10) and living in the secret of faith, (4:11-12) and recognizing that regardless of the circumstances, that nothing is more important in life then the blessings of God (4:14-20).

**4:14 it was kind of you**

Just in case his gratitude got lost in the teachings, St. Paul comes back in gratitude to the Philippians. St. Paul’s words reminds us *that any true independence we have is ultimately rooted in profound dependence on the Lord, and that kind of dependence calls us to look after one another’s needs, especially within the community of faith.* (Fr. Dennis Hamm, SJ)

**4:15-17 beginning of the gospel**

St. Paul is referring to here, not when Jesus was preaching but the beginnings of faith there in Philippi. St. Paul, during his second missionary trip crosses from Macedonia (present day Turkey) to Achaia (present day Greece). His first stop and the first Church established in present day Europe – Philippi. Philippi is where the gospel began to be spread throughout a new land.

**in an account except you alone**

Scholars are scratching their heads over just what was the relationship with St. Paul and the community at Philippi in regards to financial support. We read in Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:3-18; 2 Corinthians 12:13-16) that St. Paul refused the monies offered him through that community rather choosing to *worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you (1 Thessalonians 2:9)*. Some scholars suggest that maybe from the beginning the community at Philippi offered to support St. Paul in his missionary work through occasional gifts of money as we read in verse 16: **when I was at Thessalonica you sent me something for my needs, not only once but more than once**. The concern would always be that people would take this “payment” in the wrong way. It happens to this very day. Mistrust that the monies given for charity are going into private pockets or that people are paying for the “message of God” to favor them through the words or actions of the pastor. So, in his appreciation of the generosity of the members of the community at Philippi, St. Paul wants to thank them but assure them in his humility the appreciated while acknowledging that through the greatness of God they all will be blessed. This is why he says in verse 17, **It is not that I am eager for the gift; rather, I am eager for the profit (blessings) that accrues to your account.**

**4:22 especially those of Caesar’s household**

As we discussed in 1:13, If St. Paul was not held in the Praetorium (\*See Notes below) then at the least it was Praetorium guards who were stationed in and at his home to assure St. Paul did not leave. These men were captive audiences to St. Paul’s teachings. If not them then the servants and slaves of Caesar’s household who came and went with food and messages. Not surprising that many who give their lives to Christ. This mention of Caesar’s household would also be particularly meaningful for this Roman colony in that they may know of individuals of whom St. Paul speaks.

**4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit**

This is a standard blessing

from St. Paul. It is through the grace of God that we come into existence, that takes us from this world and in which we live for all eternity.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Looking at your own life how comfortable would you be in asking others to use you as a model? Recognizing that we are not perfect are there areas of your faith you are proud of the way you are living? Take a moment to identify them.
2. Every parish has their struggles and divisions. Can you identify one that has happened in your parish or neighboring parish? How was it resolved?
3. As we bring this study to a close what were some of the “lessons” that really touched your heart?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church**

**Citizenship is heaven: 2796**

**Rising of the Dead: 997-1001**

**Prayer of Petition: 2629-2633**

**NOTES:**

\*Praetorium was the name given to the General’s tent within a Roman encampment. The General’s war counsel would meet there to discuss strategy. Later, built within Rome itself was a compound to house those soldiers whose job it was to guard the Emperor and key prisoners of Rome. There were nine thousand of these individuals house together. This compound was called the Praetorium. We know from the Acts of the Apostles (23:35) that St. Paul had been placed under arrest in Herod’s praetorium in Caesarea, and most likely was under the praetorium guard in Rome. St. Paul could be referring to those men who were Praetorium guards or to the community that housed within the Praetorium itself.

**Bibliography:**

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- The New Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon by William Barclay
- The Navarre Bible: Captivity Letters
- New Collegeville Bible Commentary: First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon by Terence J. Keegan
- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch
- Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, by Dennis Hamm, SJ