

Rejoice in the Lord always! Meditating on Philippians

Imitate Me as I Imitate Christ

Philippians 3:14-21

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on October 19, 2025

The following notes are a draft of my sermon. These are not my pulpit notes or a manuscript I use to preach with but something I type up before writing out my "pulpit notes". I hope they are helpful.

Scripture Reading

Philippians 3:14-21 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. (16) Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

(17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. (18) For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (20) But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Introduction

1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

- **Scriptural Foundation:** Begin by reading Philippians 3:14-21 aloud, then briefly connect it to the broader context of Philippians chapter 3 (e.g., Paul's pursuit of knowing Christ above all in vv. 7-14) and the entire letter (e.g., themes of joy in suffering, unity in humility from ch. 1-2, and practical living in ch. 4).
- Spurgeon's biography... emphasize how imitation shapes character and destiny. Imitation in child rearing – imitation in things like lifting weights, etc. Let me show you how it should look. Follow Me...
- **Thesis Statement (Main Thought Clarified):** The core command of this passage is to imitate Paul's example (and those like him) because it mirrors Christ's life. For Paul, "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), which means: (1) knowing Christ as the surpassing treasure, making all else rubbish (3:7-8); (2) imitating Christ's sacrificial humility and love (2:5-11, modeled by Paul in his "poured out" service, 2:17); and (3) advancing Christ's gospel with joy, bearing fruit in others'

faith (1:25-26; 2:16). This imitation guards against destruction and guarantees glory, calling us to live as heavenly citizens in a earthly world.

I. THE CALL: Imitate Me (Phil. 3:17)

- **Explanation:** Paul urges the Philippians to "join in imitating me" and observe those who "walk" (live) according to his pattern. This isn't arrogance but a call to follow Christ through proven examples (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). Throughout Philippians, Paul showcases this through:
 - His own life: Rejoicing in imprisonment for the gospel's advance (1:12-18), counting all as loss for Christ (3:7-11), and pressing toward the upward call (3:12-14).
 - Others as models: Timothy's genuine concern for others (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus's risk-taking service (2:25-30).
 - Future reinforcement: In 4:9, Paul reiterates to practice what they've learned from him.

1 Timothy 4:12 ESV Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

1 Peter 5:3 ESV not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Hebrews 13:7 ESV Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

- **What We Imitate:** Break it down into three interconnected aspects of "to live is Christ":
 - a. **Knowing Christ Intimately:** Prioritizing relational depth with Jesus, where earthly gains (status, achievements) become "rubbish" compared to the "surpassing worth" of knowing Him (3:8; cf. 3:10's desire to share in His sufferings and resurrection power).
 - b. **Imitating Christ's Humility and Love:** Adopting the mindset of Christ (2:5-8)—emptying oneself, serving lowly, and loving others sacrificially. Paul models this by being "poured out as a drink offering" for their faith (2:17), echoing Christ's cross.
 - c. **Glorifying Christ Through Fruitful Living:** Preaching and sharing Christ to produce joy, growth, and boasting in Him among believers (1:25-26; 2:16). This includes fostering unity (2:1-4) and rejoicing in trials (1:18-19).
- **Application:** Imitation isn't passive observation but active following—it's how we embody the gospel in daily life (1:27).

II. THE WARNING: The Path of Destruction Threatens You (3:18-19) (Reason 1)

- **Warning and Urgency:** Paul weeps as he warns "often" about "many" who walk as "enemies of the cross." This isn't a distant threat but a real danger for the church—implying that without imitation of godly examples, believers risk veering onto a hazardous path leading to eternal loss.

Acts 20:31 ESV Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

- **Identity of the Enemies:** Likely false teachers or wayward professing believers, such as Judaizers (insisting on law-keeping like circumcision, cf. 3:2-3) or libertines (abusing grace for self-indulgence). They are "enemies of the cross" not by denying it, but by undermining its sufficiency and call. **THEY REJECT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CROSS:**
 - **LEGALISM** - They add works to salvation, implying Christ's death isn't enough (contra 3:9's righteousness from faith).
 - **LICENSE/LAZY** - They reject the cross's demand for self-denial, suffering, and humble service (contra 2:3-8; Paul's example).
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- **Characteristics of This Path:**
 - a. **Self-Worship:** "Their god is their belly" (appetites)—they live for personal desires, cravings, and fleshly impulses rather than God's will.

Romans 16:17–18 (ESV) "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."

Isaiah 56:10–12 (ESV) "The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. They are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all. 'Come,' they say, 'let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.'"

- b. **Misplaced Glory:** They "glory in their shame"—boasting in sinful behaviors or worldly achievements that should evoke repentance (e.g., pride in legalism or license).

Isaiah 5:20 (ESV) "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

Jeremiah 6:15 (ESV) "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to

blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord."

- c. **Earthly Mindset:** Their minds are set "on earthly things"—fixated on temporal pleasures, power, or possessions, ignoring eternal realities.

Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 16:23 (ESV) [Jesus to Peter:] "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Romans 8:5–7 (ESV) "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

- **Consequence:** "Their end is destruction"—eternal ruin, not just temporal fallout. This motivates imitation: Follow Paul's Christ-centered path to avoid this soul-costing fall.

To follow them is to fall with them.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 ESV This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— (6) since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, (10) when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Matthew 7:13-14 ESV "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 ESV For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Revelation 14:9-11 ESV And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, (10) he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Revelation 17:8 ESV The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

Revelation 19:20 ESV And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

- **Modern Parallels:** Connect to contemporary issues like consumerism, moral relativism, or "prosperity gospel" distortions that dilute the cross's demands.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT: The Way of Glory Is Guaranteed (3:20-21) (Reason 2)

- **Identity as Motivation:** Contrast the enemies' earthly focus with believers' true "citizenship in heaven" (echoing 1:27's call to live "worthy of the gospel"). In Philippi, a Roman colony, citizenship meant privileges, protection, and pride—Paul elevates this to heavenly status: names in the book of life (4:3), secured inheritance (3:14), and divine rights.
- **Anticipation of Christ's Return:** We "await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," who will transform our "lowly bodies" to be like His glorious one. This echoes the pattern of Christ in 2:5-11: humiliation leads to exaltation (cf. Matt. 23:12; Phil. 3:10-11). We wait but not passively – but pressing towards the prize!
 - **Current Reality:** We suffer in "lowly bodies," bearing the cross (not as enemies), through humble service, self-denial, and gospel advancement.
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 - **Future Promise:** Christ, with "power that enables Him to subject all things to Himself," will glorify us—resurrecting, perfecting, and vindicating faithful imitators.
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- **Motivational Tie-In:** This guarantee fuels endurance: Live as Christ now (knowing, imitating, advancing Him) because glory awaits. It's not lazy waiting but active, sacrificial living in light of eternity (3:14's "prize").
- **Contrast with Reason 1:** Destruction for the self-focused; glory for the Christ-focused—imitation secures the latter.

Conclusion: Living the Imitation

- **Summary:** Recap the main thought—imitate Paul's Christ-like example to avoid destruction and embrace guaranteed glory. Tie back to the letter's joy: True fulfillment comes from living as heavenly citizens in a broken world.
- **Call to Action:** Challenge the congregation to examine their lives against Paul's pattern, committing to one practical step (e.g., daily Scripture for knowing Christ, serving someone sacrificially).
- **Application Questions:** Pose these probing questions to drive heart-level application, encouraging self-reflection, prayer, or small group discussion:
 1. **On Imitating:** Who am I imitating or following? Paul, Christ, and what this letter calls me to, or the enemies of the cross that lead to destruction?
 2. **On Knowing Christ:** Am I daily pursuing an intimate knowledge of Christ, valuing Him above all earthly pursuits, or have I allowed "rubbish" (career, comfort, status) to compete for my affections?
 3. **On Imitating Christ:** Do I actively humble myself to serve others sacrificially, considering their needs above my own (as in Philippians 2:3-4), or do I resist the cross's call to self-denial in my relationships and decisions?
 4. **On Advancing Christ:** Am I passionately sharing the gospel and investing in others' faith to produce joy and growth in Christ, or have earthly distractions dulled my evangelistic zeal?
 5. **On Eternal Perspective:** Do I live with heaven as my true citizenship—eagerly awaiting Christ's return and striving for the upward prize—or is my mindset fixed on temporary things that could lead to destruction?