

Philippians XXIII – Friends and Enemies of the Cross (*Phil 3:15-19*)

Introduction – I don't know if you've noticed, but we don't all agree on everything here. As Paul writes to the Philippians he is very aware that God is working on different individuals differently. His claim that he (and our claim that we) have not yet finished the race necessarily means that no one has arrived yet in perfect understanding or in perfect lifestyle. As we press on in this race, we are exhorted to imitate Paul as he glories in the grace of the cross; and we are to understand that in doing so, we will avoid the mindset and lifestyle of the enemies of the cross.

Same Mindedness (vv 15-16) – Continuing on with the theme begun in 2:2, Paul calls us to like-mindedness in what we believe and in how we live towards one another.

Those Who Are Mature – Playing with the word *telos*, Paul is not contradicting himself here with what he said in v12. There, perfection was used with the end in mind; here he is referring to the maturity that we are to grow into in Christ (1 Cor 14:20). His point is that we are to leave behind the childish notions of reaching perfection by means of rigid law-observance.

If You Think Otherwise – Paul obviously draws the line somewhere on what's up for grabs; consider the biting language in this chapter towards the false teachers. To those who are sincerely following Christ (those who are 'mature' on the primary things), Paul is confident that God has promised He will bring us along (Psalm 25:14, John 7:17, Luke 19:26).

Walking and Being – Our actions flow from what we believe; and so we must emphasize the primary doctrines and hold lightly the secondary things. We must do this, not squelching good and sound study and debate, but in a spirit that maintains the bond of peace (Eph 4:11-16). There is a faithful way to hold to the truth (Gal 6:13-16) and there is a faithless way to appear to be zealous for the truth (Matt 23:15, 23-24).

A Pattern to Follow (v17) – “*Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ*” (1 Cor 11:1). How are we to learn this wisdom of standing firm and letting go at just the right places? We must imitate Paul and those who so walk. We need men and women to teach us by their example. The godly examples of others are essential to our growth in godliness. Much more is caught than is taught, the saying goes, and this is why God calls us not forsake the gathering together (Heb 10:23-25). Would you rather have shelf full of great big fat books or a cloud of witnesses who have run the race faithfully?

Corollary – We can be greatly hindered by the godless examples of others (1 Cor 15:33, Prov 22:24-25, Prov 13:20). This only strengthens the argument of finding godly examples to imitate. These warnings are sometimes, and rightfully, applied to young people; but our whole congregation needs to be warned. For instance, if you hang out with a man prone to anger, and you do not call him on it, you are on the road of becoming like him. And this begs the question: what kind of example are you? Hard question, but consider in the next couple verses how important the answer is.

Enemies of the Cross (vv18-19) – The warning is not about false-teachers who dress in black and carry cards proclaiming they are heretics or destroyers of fellowships. The warning is about those whom Paul weeps over; for they were within the confessing church at one time (as in Gal 2:4, 1 John 2:18-19) and have devoured others. It is important to note as well that Paul had to warn them often of such destroyers.

Their End Is Destruction – The teaching that denies boasting only in the cross of Jesus Christ is a doctrine that leads to condemnation. It is a great evil to preach any other gospel than the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and to add anything to this gospel is to deny that very gospel.

Belly-gods – Paul probably has their sensual appetites in mind. They are not like Christ; they will not take up their cross and follow Him. Too often, those who lay down a legalistic standard for their disciples are themselves slaves of their own lusts. Perfectionism is often a cover for hidden licentiousness.

Whose Glory is in Their Shame – This may be another slam on the mutilators, the dogs. The very thing they glory in is in fact shameful. But see how this can apply to any filthy self-righteousness we proclaim to be 'the way.' Glory is how they view their works; shame is how they should perceive their behavior.

Who Set Their Mind on Earthly Things – This is the climax of the list and is misunderstood by some as meaning that pursuing any temporal goal upon this earth is sinful. “*Isn't this teaching that we shouldn't be pursuing the kingdom of God upon the earth?*” But that hasn't been Paul's point. Paul is very clear in Col 3:2, 5, 8 what he means by “earthly things” and it applies to this passage as well.

Friends of the Cross – Jesus said we would distinguish the true and false teachers, not primarily by studying what they said, but by their fruits (Matt 7:15-20). The enemies of the cross will have one type of fruit in their lives and in their homes; the friends of the cross another. The friends of the cross boast in the cross by the grace of God. Maturity is measured by growing in a kind of grace that never lets go of what is central to the faith, showing forth the fruit of gospel repentance.