

## Rethinking Your Home

### A Study of Philippians 3:17-21

Characteristic of Completeness: Hope

Big Idea: Don't make yourself at home; we're not there yet.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 16:24-27; John 18:33-36; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:17-24; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 2:28

Introduction:

- A. You'd think Paul would be a lousy salesman. That's what I like about the Apostle.

Paul was a missionary who traveled around starting new churches. That was his line of work. I guess you could say he was in Church sales. But if Paul was selling Church, he had a funny way of doing it.

In his writings in the New Testament, Paul doesn't gloss over some embarrassing problems in the Church. No, he calls attention to them. In fact, he seems to put warning labels on just about every pack of Christians assembled.

We've been studying our way through Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. You may recall the warning in Chapter 1: There are some selfishly ambitious preachers in the church with impure motives.<sup>1</sup>

You may also recall another warning in the first part of Chapter 3: There are some religious Christians in the church who are self-righteous bigots.

How would that look on a sign out front of churches in America? "Welcome. But watch out for our selfishly ambitious preachers and self-righteous bigots."

- B. Strange marketing. But the truth is, some people in the Church are worth following and some are not. That's a message Paul conveys in our text for the week. It's Philippians 3:17-21. In this text, Paul contrasts people to follow with those to avoid. Let me read it, and then we'll go back and study the two groups. He ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ► 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ► 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:15-17.

state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- I. The people whose example is *not* worth following are described in ► Verses 18 and 19, where Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Who are these people? Let's try to identify them.

- A. First, I suspect they are probably professing Christians.<sup>2</sup> This is not a fringe viewpoint; prominent scholars think Paul is talking about some Christians for a number of good reasons.
1. Paul says that ► he has often told the Philippians about them. And whoever they are and whatever they're doing, ► they make Paul weep. It's hard to see how these people could be unbelievers. It doesn't seem likely that Paul would repeatedly and tearfully warn the Philippians not to model themselves after some who were obviously not Christians.<sup>3</sup> The greater danger and temptation would be to follow some Christians in the Church who are headed the wrong way.
  2. Also, some scholars consider the term, ► "walk"—used in Verses 17 and 18—to be a term Paul generally reserves to describe how *believers* live, not unbelievers.<sup>4</sup>
  3. In addition, they are described as ► "enemies of the cross of Christ," not enemies of Christ. The suggestion is that these people do identify themselves with Christ, but somehow diminish or distort what the cross represents.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps they have believed in Jesus for eternal life but neglect to do what Jesus commanded: to take up their cross and follow Him.

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 91; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 452-453.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> O'Brien, 452.

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, 452-453.

4. It's ► reasonable to wonder whether Paul is referring again to the religious people—including the Judaizers—he mentions earlier in the Chapter 3.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the absence of strong linking language and the rather nonreligious description of the people in our current text suggest to me that these Christians are different and constitute yet another group to be wary of.

In any case, we seem to be dealing with some believers who ought not to be followed.

- B. In ► Verse 18, we are told they are “many.” This is an unfortunate reality. There was a bunch of these Christians around back then, and there is a bunch around today.
- C. In ► Verse 18, we've already seen they are “enemies of the cross.”
1. Theologically, the cross represents the atonement—the price paid for our sin. Perhaps these Christians denied in some way the need or sufficiency of the atonement.
  2. But Paul doesn't seem to be talking about their theology; He speaks of their ► “walk,” suggesting they are distinguished by lifestyle, not doctrine. How can a Christian's lifestyle make him or her an enemy of the cross?

Practically, the cross represents dying to oneself and living unselfishly for Jesus and others.<sup>7</sup> That would make selfish Christians enemies of the cross. They're not interested in dying to themselves; not interested in participating in the suffering of Christ; not interested in being conformed to His death; not interested in taking up their cross and following Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

Know any Christians like that? Yes, I'm afraid there are “many.” Perhaps we could call them carnal Christians. I hesitate to use the term, “carnal” because the word is not commonly used in our culture and some religious Christians misuse the word to describe anybody who doesn't look or act like they think they should. But the word is used enough in some Christian literature that I thought, rather than abandon the word, I would define it.

The word “carnal” describes a focus on that which is horizontal, worldly, fleshly, secular, sensual, and self-serving as opposed to that which is vertical, spiritual, godly, righteous, selfless, and Christ-centered.

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<sup>6</sup> Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2ed. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992, 2005), 180-182; Philippians 3:1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>8</sup> This fits the context nicely. See Philippians 3:10.

Paul does not actually call these Christians carnal or backslidden or nominal. He's not that polite. He calls them enemies—enemies of the cross.

- D. In ► Verse 19, Paul says their “end is destruction.” This does not sound good. But it may not be what you think.

To some, this may sound like carnal Christians are going to hell. But I don't think that's what Paul has in mind. He's saying that the lifestyle of carnal Christians will be destructive to them.

Let me give you an example. Greed is certainly an aspect of carnality. And greed is destructive to those who live by it. Paul says so in ► 1 Timothy 6:9-10, where he says of believers:

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The word, ► “destruction,” in 1 Timothy 6:9 is the same word, “destruction,” in Verse 19 of our text. Such personal destruction is associated with being ► “pierced with many griefs.”

The carnal Christian won't go to hell. Having believed in Jesus for eternal life, heaven is secure, even for the carnal Christian. The carnal Christian won't go to hell, but he might go through bankruptcy. Or lose his family. Or destroy his reputation. Or harm his children. Or be pierced with some other grief. It doesn't pay to be a carnal Christian. The “end is destruction.”

- E. Also in ► Verse 19, Paul says carnal Christians are those “whose god is their appetite.” They are focused on satisfying their own appetites—their own hunger—for food or power or pleasure or comfort or money, to the exclusion of living for Christ and others.
- F. Also in Verse 19, Paul says carnal Christians ► “set their minds on earthly things.” They have a worldly, horizontal attitude. They adopt the values and goals of culture, not Christ.
- G. And finally in Verse 19, Paul says carnal Christians are those ► “whose glory is in their shame.” What exactly does this mean? Well, to glory means to boast or to brag about or to talk up something.

1. This could mean that carnal Christians boast about the things they ought to be ashamed of, including shameful excesses.<sup>9</sup> Maybe too much money, too much house, too many cars, too much comfort, too much worthless entertainment, too much gawking, too much ego, too much power, too much preening in front of a mirror.
2. It could also mean that the things they brag about now will be a source of shame upon Christ's return. In ► 1 John 2:28, we are told,

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 2:28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

When Jesus returns for His bride, the Church, He won't be coming to chide or to scold or to punish. We're already forgiven. So how is it possible that we might be ashamed at His coming?

In that day, the magnificence of His grace toward us will shine so brightly that something else will concurrently come to light: How we have abused His grace. Even then, His grace will prevail. He will love us and embrace us as we are. But we will know what could have been. How we could have fed the poor. How we could have clothed the naked. How we could have loved others. How we could have gloried in Christ instead of in all the things that, in retrospect, mean so little.

His grace will still prevail. He will rejoice over the prodigals come home and we will stand in awe of His grace magnified all the more.<sup>10</sup> We will know His love. We will know His grace. But we will also know what could have been.

- H. Back in our text, Paul ► is saying, "Don't follow the carnal Christians. Don't be fooled by their great numbers into thinking that their lifestyle is okay."
- II. Fortunately, there are people in the Church whose example *is* worth following.
- A. And it's not just Paul; there are others. In ► Verse 17, Paul says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.
  - B. It's worth noting that Paul is not looking down his nose at carnal Christians. He's looking through his tears. Remember in Verse 18 that he is weeping over them as he writes. He's not big-headed; he's broken-hearted.

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<sup>9</sup> O'Brien, 456-457.

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 15:11-32.

C. In ► Verse 20, Paul makes a pivotal statement. He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven

Christians who are worth following and those who aren't are largely defined by their view of citizenship. Specifically, it's their answer to one question: Where is your home?

Carnal Christians think, "on earth." Paul thinks, "in heaven." The difference is huge. It's huge because your hope is where your home is. Let me explain.

Carnal Christians think and act like they're at home on earth. And so, that's where their hope is: on earth. If I think my home is on earth then that's where my hope is. When I make myself at home on earth, my hopes and dreams and goals are all earthly: health, wealth, comfort, pleasure, security, prestige, power, appearance, popularity, advancement. Nothing inherently wrong with these things. But when they become my focus, I'm following in the footsteps of carnal Christians. When I pin my hopes to these earthly things—and sometimes I do—I pierce myself with many griefs because these things are fleeting and there never seems to be enough.

Moreover, when my employer sends me on a business trip, he doesn't want me to spend all my time sprucing up my hotel room. And that's exactly what carnal Christians do. They're so busy trying to upgrade, decorate, expand, accessorize, and equip their earthly hotel room they forget they're on a heavenly business trip. A trip away from their heavenly home. A trip with some heavenly business to conduct. A trip that's going to be over soon when we check out and see the big Boss up in the home office.

This puts the recent election in perspective. In the whole scheme of things, government and politics are little more than hotel management and room service. They don't address the bigger questions: Why are we here and what happens when we check out?

Paul and other Christians worth following recognize that their home is in heaven, and that's where their hope is, too. With that recognition, hopes and dreams change. They become less and less earthly and more heavenly. Yes, it would be nice to be comfortable on earth, but that's not why I'm here. As a Christian, I'm here to represent Christ well by becoming more and more like Him. I'm a rep for Jesus Christ. Not Jenny Craig. Not Neiman Marcus. Not L.L Bean. Not Elizabeth Arden. Not Ethan Allen. Not Carnegie Mellon. Not Charles Schwab. Not Samuel Adams. Not Hugh Hefner. Not Mercedes Benz. Not even Oprah Winfrey.

The big idea of my message is ► this: Don't make yourself at home; we're not there yet. And our Characteristic of Completeness for the week ► is hope. Hope is where your home is.

Paul finishes out our text by mentioning three things that remind believers where our true home is and where our true hope is.

1. In ► Verse 20, he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:20 . . . we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

It easy to become discouraged and even embittered by the evil in this world, especially if all your hopes are earthbound. But this is not our home. It was never supposed to be. Earth is a temporary spiritual battleground. True peace will come, but not until the Prince of Peace returns to put an end to evil and to take us home to the place He is preparing. Jesus said to Pilate,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 18:36 . . . “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Which raises a very important question: If this world is not Jesus’ kingdom, whose is it? First John 5:19 tells us plainly:

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 5:19 . . . the whole world lies in *the power* of the evil one.

And so, we do not eagerly wait for Republicans and Democrats to get along. We do not eagerly wait for Saddam to say, “God bless America.” We do not eagerly wait for porn peddlers and drug pushers to suddenly get a conscience. We do not eagerly wait for a repentant Kim Jong-il to show up on Dr. Phil. We do not wait for this life to get better or easier. It won’t. Look who’s temporarily in charge.

We eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And while we wait, we set about His business, to represent Him well, to demonstrate His out-of-this-world kind of love to a dying planet, to proclaim the good news that He’s the Savior of all who simply believe in Him.

Don’t make yourself at home; we’re not there yet.

2. In ► Verse 21, Paul says the returning Jesus is the one . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory . . .

Paul is pointing to a truth confirmed elsewhere in Scripture: When believers go home, we get new bodies.<sup>11</sup> Perfect ones. No more pain. No more

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 48-54; Revelation 21:1-4.

suffering. Our hope is in new bodies, not these old ones. Those over forty say, “amen.”

It's painful to watch people put their hope in these earthly bodies, especially those who desperately try to hold back aging. It's amazing to me how much money and energy we spend trying to look like something we're not. Seems like much of it is misplaced hope to me. Our perspective needs to be stretched, not our face. We need a new pair of eyes, not a new pair of breasts.

For the past several weeks, cancer has been a theme in my life. I buried one cancer victim ten days ago. I may be burying a second this week. I talked to a third just yesterday—my brother in law—to see how he's doing. And a fourth is a friend who has just been diagnosed. When the doctor drops the “C” word on you, it's hard no matter who you are, but it's harder for carnal Christians. If all your hope is set on health, you're in for destruction. If your hope is set on Christ and heaven, your hope is untouchable.

I've been visiting the sweet little lady who I may have to bury this week. I wish I could've taken you with me. Times like that are so clarifying. She's terminal. And so are we. Where is your home?

I stood beside her bed and reaching out my hand to caress her head, bald from therapy. I asked her if she wanted me to read her some Scripture. She turned her puffy eyes to mine, cracked a little smile, and could barely say, “yes” between shallow breaths. I read, beginning in ► 2 Corinthians 4:16:

<sup>NLT</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16 . . . Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. 17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ► 18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. ► 5:1 For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. ► 2 We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. 3 For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. ► 4 While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh . . . we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. ► 5 God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. 6 So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. ► 7 For we live by believing and not by seeing. 8 Yes, we are fully

confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

As believers, our home is in heaven and our hope on earth is in Christ. We are to represent Him well so that He may be honored—so that, when He comes to take us home, we may have confidence and not shrink away. In biblical perspective, cancer is not an end to your hope; it's a new and tougher assignment to live out your hope: to represent Christ well with cancer. Or with congestive heart failure. Or with chronic fatigue. Or with troubled children. Or with depression. Or with whatever hardship you face.

Don't make yourself at home; we're not there yet.

3. In ► Verse 21, Paul says we will see and experience . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 3:21 . . . the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

When Christ returns, He will subject all things to Himself.<sup>12</sup> Every knee will bow. He will reign. He will reign in perfect justice. He will reign in perfect love. He will reign will perfect righteousness and tenderness and compassion. No more war. No more hate. No more poverty. No more bigotry. No more racism. No more hunger. No more injustice. No more abuse. No more sorrow. No more oppression. No more dysfunction.

Until then, maybe we're not supposed feel all that great on earth. Maybe it's perfectly normal and even healthy to feel homesick. We're not home yet.

A noted Christian psychologist, Larry Crabb, recounts one of his counseling sessions.

*A man opened a counseling session with an urgent request: "I want to feel better quick."*

*I paused for a moment, then replied, "I suggest you get a case of your favorite alcoholic beverage, find some cooperative women, and go to the Bahamas for a month."*

*Now it was his turn to pause. He stared at me, looking puzzled, then asked, "Are you a Christian?"*

*"Why do you ask?"*

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 2:9-11.

*“Well, your advice doesn’t sound very biblical.”*

*“It’s the best I can do given your request. If you really want to feel good right away and get rid of any unpleasant emotion, then I don’t recommend following Christ. Drunkenness, immoral pleasures, and vacations will work far better. Not for long, of course, but in the short run they’ll give you what you want.”<sup>13</sup>*

And that’s the problem. Too many Christians are living in the short run, clinging to false hope in this life, ignoring the only true hope in the next.

When Christ comes to reign, we will appear before Him. What will that be like? The passage that I read to the dying lady in 2 Corinthians is a beautiful explanation of where the believer’s home really is. But I didn’t read the end of it. In ► 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, it says to believers,

<sup>NAU</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

I don’t think the “good” will include good hotel room decoration. The “good” will include representing Christ well on this earthly business trip because that will be pleasing to the Boss back home.

Don’t follow the herd of carnal Christians. Follow Paul and others who are *not* focused on making themselves at home on earth; they’re focused on heading home to heaven.

Don’t make yourself at home; we’re not there yet.

- III. Let ► me offer a suggestion on how to apply this. I invite you to take an inventory of your life using a ledger ► with two columns. At the top of the ► left column, put the heading, “Things I do to make myself at home on earth.” At the top of ► the right column, put the heading, “Things I do because I’m headed home to heaven.”

With the ledger in mind, prayerfully ask God some questions: “Lord, are You okay with my ledger?” “Does something need to change?” “Do I need to break away from the pack of carnal Christians?”

And perhaps you could ask, “What one thing needs to change first?” Don’t force it. This isn’t an exercise in legalism or self-righteousness. Pray and wait for God to lead you.

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<sup>13</sup> Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988). 83.

It might involve eliminating one item on the left and replacing it with a different item on the right. Or it could involve moving one item from the left to the right, reflecting a change in motivation for the very same event. For example, maybe you now go to work just to make enough money so that you can be comfortable. Maybe you move it to the right so that you go to work to represent Christ well there. Big difference.

The idea is this: Don't make yourself at home; we're not there yet.