

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have seen good examples verses bad examples. A friend, RAS Sievert was a Christian teacher and basketball coach. He had his kids work hard at basketball fundamentals. They lined up practicing dribbling, lay ups and shooting in practice and before basketball games. They practiced different plays and defenses after school. Other coaches did not push their players as much. I have seen coaches roll out a basketball and let them warm up on their own. RAS's teams won many games. It had to do with practicing and being prepared. He loved the children that Christ had placed under his care and he set a good example for his kids.

More important than a sports competition is our spiritual lives in Christ. St. Paul knows this. In chapter 4, verse 1 he says... **Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!** We are to stand firm in our Christian faith and life. How do we do that? Paul is offer coaching and a good example for our spiritual lives. He points us to the Christ and his cross. **The Cross of Christ Gives Us Strength to Stand Firm.** Let's listen to St. Paul.

1. Don't be like the "many".

St. Paul notes that among those who claim to be Christians, more than a few **"live as enemies of the cross of Christ."** What are they doing? We need to understand because we want to avoid this bad example. We don't want to be like the "many."

A. There are two examples that the Philippians were tempted to follow.

1. The first one would be to be like Paul in his early years. He was a pharisee. A pharisee strictly followed the Old Testament ceremonial laws of Moses. After the first Pentecost a number of pharisees came to believe in Jesus as their Savior. Some, however, insisted that some of the Old Testament laws and rules still had to be followed. These men became known as Judaizers.

Modern day versions of this would be Christians that insist we worship only on Saturday. Or they insist that we must not eat meat on Friday. Or they insist you have to keep the 10 Commandments in order to be saved.

2. A second example of Christians who are enemies of Christ, are those who

believe that since they have forgiveness they can engage in any sin they want. Paul says their god is their “stomach.” When our stomach desires food we often give it what it wants. Human nature has all kinds of sinful desires. To have “your god as your stomach” is to feed the sinful desires. Lust, greed, gluttony, hate, etc. Some Christians think they can indulge sinful desires because after all, “I am forgiven.”

In the mid-week Bible classes this last week we were provided with an example of a Lutheran pastor of the ELCA. She gave an expletive laden speech to 30,000 teenagers at a youth rally. She encouraged them to embrace as “okay” homosexuality, trans-gender people. She characterized a sinful life style that goes against the Bible as being good. She was okay with people feeding their sinful desires and not repenting before God.

B. St. Paul has strong words for such people. In verse 18 he says they are enemies of the cross of Christ and he goes on in verse 19, **“Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”** So some are enemies of God’s grace because they urge people not to repent of sin, but to embrace sin. Others like the Judaizers, tell people Christ has not done enough, you have to add your own good works. All of these “enemies” do not consider sin a real, serious offense which no human can remove. They despise the precious blood of the Son of God that was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

C. This is a warning that we need to pay attention to.

1. As Christians we are naturally attracted to form friendships with other Christians we meet. Not all will be Lutheran or WELS. It is also natural that discussions will come up about God and salvation. Christians like to talk about salvation. We need to recognize that those who are not grounded in the Bible and in salvation by grace may not have the same understanding we have. Some may tempt us to *“not worry about doctrine, but just live for God.”* Some will promote salvation through good works. St. Paul speaks against this in Ephesians 2:8,9, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.”** If we add our own good works for salvation, we despise grace and become enemies of the cross of Christ. We have to be so careful that we don’t consider our church attendance, our contributions to church as something necessary for salvation. Then we become enemies.

2. The other thing that makes us an enemy is abusing grace. I had someone who

was skipping worship at church tell me, “*God won’t punish me, I am forgiven.*”

If we do not repent of the sin of despising God’s word and staying away from worship, there is no forgiveness. If we indulge in some addiction and we think, “*I’m okay. God will forgive me.*” Such an unrepentant attitude will not receive forgiveness.

3. The apostle makes clear the end of Christians and all those who are an enemy of the cross of Christ. “**Their destiny is destruction.**” There is no salvation even if they use their mouth to call Jesus “Savior.” He will say, “**I don’t know you.**” We should take this warning seriously and use another example as our guide.

2. Be like St. Paul.

Today St. Paul says, “*Be like me. Be like others who give a good example.*” In these examples we see strength that the cross of Christ brings.

A. It is tempting to ask what famous saints is Paul talking about? Who are these heroes of faith that the Philippians should follow? He says, “**Keep your eyes on those who live as we do.**” He isn’t pointing to anyone who we would call “famous.” He is directing the Philippians to ordinary people in the church.

What is special isn’t the people, it is their attitude.

1. One of things Paul was famous for was his humble repentance. In Ephesians 3:8 he confesses, “**I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people.**” St. Paul knew his sins. He knew that he had not only done damage to God’s church in his early years as a persecutor, but he had sinned against God and deserved eternal damnation for his sins. When Paul saw his sins against God it affected him deeply. What really changed him was the Gospel. He was baptized into the name of Jesus. This was after he had heard that Jesus had died on the cross for his sins. He had escaped condemnation. He was saved!

2. This salvation worked a humble attitude in Paul. This didn’t just happen with Paul. Salvation worked in every believing Christian who had heard God’s call to repentance and received his forgiveness. A modern way of saying it is that “*Paul was blown away by God’s grace.*” Every Christian in Philippi who had experienced the same thing, had the same awe and humility before God. Which means they didn’t live trusting in their good works and they didn’t run around sinning as if it didn’t matter. Rather they humbly followed Jesus.

B. It is THESE examples that St. Paul holds up and says, “*Watch them. Imitate them.*”

1. I mentioned RAS Sievert in the introduction. He was a Christian day school teacher. He is in heaven now. I believe the kids loved him and followed his example, because of the energy he put into teaching and coaching them. The kids could see he cared. He cared and had this humble attitude because he was focused on Jesus. He got that by following older Christians in his life.

2. Today Jesus puts people as examples that we are to watch. What we will see is that they humbly follow Jesus and listen to his word. We imitate them. As we listen to Jesus, we are sorry for our sins. We earnestly desire to be forgiven and to do better. We have in his word the forgiveness of sins and the strength to stand in him.

C. The people Paul was writing to lived far from Rome. Many of them were Roman citizens. They were very proud of their status. St. Paul reminds the Philippians that not only are their sins forgiven, but they are citizens of a much greater country called “heaven.” Someday when they died, they would be transformed. Their earthly, temporary bodies would be changed by God’s power to glorious bodies and would live in heaven. So he wants them to not give up their stand in Jesus, but to eagerly await his return from heaven when he would bring them into glory.



Conclusion: “*It’s worth the wait.*” A Heinz Catsup commercial over the years extols the virtues of waiting for their thick red catsup sauce to get out of the bottle and onto the dinner plate.

St. Paul would say to us today, “*Stand firm. It’s worth the wait.*” Our citizenship is in heaven. We are going to live with Jesus in glory forever. Right now we are waiting. We shouldn’t look just anywhere for Christian examples. St. Paul tells us to look at him and other examples around us. We humbly repent of our sins and find grace and strength in Jesus. So we stand firm. We stand firm until he takes us into glory. Amen.

THE SECOND LESSON - Philippians 3:17-4:1

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!