

Identity – Philippians 3:17-4:1

I. INTRODUCTION – Read Vs.

A. World Cup

1. The World Cup is in full swing in South Africa.
2. Soccer fans all over the world are tuned in via TV, radio & the web.
3. People who've not been interested in soccer are getting caught up in soccer fever.
4. All over town, you see vehicles with a flags of different countries as people root for their favorite teams.
5. There's a park across from our house where soccer teams practice every evening. As they play, they listen to the World Cup & either cheer or moan for their team.
6. There are places right here in Southern CA where people of different nationalities gather to cheer on their home-country's team.
 - a. The **British** meet in **pubs** to root for England.
 - b. **Aussies** gather in **saloons** to cheer on Australia.
 - c. **Germans** pack a **ratskeller** to support Deutschland.

B. Our Citizenship

1. This is a picture of something Paul says in these verses.
2. As the people of God, we have a **unique citizenship**, a **shared identity** that effects everything we are & do.
3. [Pray]

II. TEXT

A. V. 17

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

1. As I was preparing the message, that first word **leapt** off the page.
2. Paul called the Philippians, "**Brothers**." That's amazing!
3. Paul wasn't just Jewish; He was a dyed-in-the-wool, **hardcore Jew**.
 - a. He was a leader of the Pharisees, a Jew among Jews.
 - b. The Philippians, on the other hand, were **hardcore Gentiles**.
 - 1) Philippi was a **center** of Greco-Roman culture.
 - 2) When Paul first went there, there were so few Jews there wasn't even a synagogue. [Acts 16]
 - c. It was in Philippi that he was arrested, beaten, & thrown into prison.
4. Outwardly, it seemed Paul would **hate** the Philippians with a passion.
 - a. The **hostility** between Jews & Gentiles was well known throughout the Roman Empire.
 - b. But faith in Christ had dramatically changed Paul's view of the Philippians.
 - c. And not just the them, but all people.
5. He no longer saw people as Jews, Greeks, Romans, Gauls, Egyptians, or Syrians.
6. As a follower of Jesus there were only 2 categories; the Lost & the Saved. Brothers & **potential** brothers.
7. Look around. We're quite a hodge-podge.
 - a. We have a lot of **ethnic diversity**. Our **national origins** are many.
 - b. We come from dozens of **social tribes**; surfers, skaters, punks, gangsters, preps.
 - c. None of that matters anymore. The differences that used to be so important to us before Christ have fallen away.
 - d. And now Jesus unites us. We are **brothers** in Christ.

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example,

8. The example he refers to is what we looked at last week in Vs. 1-16.
 - a. The grace of God isn't an excuse for spiritual laziness.
 - b. On the contrary, it fuels a holy ambition to **press on** in loving & serving God.
9. In v. 16 Paul said however far you've already come in the Faith, **double it!**
10. Here he calls us to **join together** in following his example. Then he says - and note [look carefully at] those who so walk [live; lifestyle - a pattern of behavior], as you have us for a pattern.
11. Paul not only calls the Philippians to follow **his** example, but to watch closely the lives of others who are a good example of following Jesus.

- a. A large part of the Christian walk is learned by seeing others do it.
 - b. Nothing can replace the power of a good example.
 - c. Jesus didn't just talk to the disciples; He said, "**Follow Me.**"
 - 1) Remember, a disciple is someone who wants to be just like the rabbi.
 - 2) To that end, they followed him 24/7/365.
 - 3) They lived so close to their rabbi the dust from his feet covered them.
 - 4) They wanted to know what he would say or do in any & every situation.
 - 5) Then they sought to *imitate* him.
12. This is why fellowship is **so** important to the Christian life.
- a. It's difficult to follow the example of someone you never spend time with.
 - b. Never underestimate the value of just hanging out with the brethren.
 - c. It doesn't always have to be a church service or follow a plan.
 - d. It's good sometimes just to talk, pray, encourage each other.
13. There's a passage in Hebrews 10 with special poignancy for us – Vs. 24–25
 Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting [encouraging] *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.
14. Hear the word of your pastor: We need to hang out with one another more.
- a. If you're "too busy," to, then you're too busy.
 - b. We always find the time for the things that are important to us.
15. Paul had no problem calling the Philippians to follow his example, which they well knew because he'd spent time with them.
- a. There's no **arrogance** in Paul's invitation here.
 - b. He'd just admitted he wasn't perfect; he hadn't arrived.
 - c. But he **was** going all out in loving God. He was aimed in the right direction.
 - d. **That's** what he called them to emulate.
16. Several years ago there was a big debate in the media about examples & models.
- a. There'd been some high-profile scandals involving politicians & athletes.
 - b. Commentators were lamenting the bad example these celebrities were leaving to young people.
 - c. One famous athlete said, "I don't want to be anyone's example. I just want to play ball. But no one should take me as their role model."
17. Despite such protests by celebrities, the world holds its stars up as **examples of success**.
- a. Thousands blindly tag along – aspiring to the image of their heroes.
 - b. They buy the jersey, plaster posters on the wall, idolize & ape them.
18. You know **where** Paul was when he wrote this? **In prison**.
- a. And he has the audacity to say to the Philippians, "Follow my example."
 - b. We need to overhaul our idea of success.
 - c. It's not wealth, power, or fame.
 - d. **Success is faithfulness to God**. Few were better examples of that than Paul.
19. We have some great examples here! Some real saints.
- a. I'd like to name them but they'd be embarrassed, so I won't.
 - b. There are amazing prayer-warriors here. - **Senior saints** who in the midst of physical pain & weakness spend hours every day in prayer.
 - c. There are **young people** who could be hugely successful in the world who are on or headed to the mission field.
 - d. There are **women** who could make their mark in running a business who've chosen the honor of raising a family & running a home.
- 4) There are **men** who could be famous in sports or Hollywood, but have risen to the more noble calling as a husband & father.
 - 5) There are **singles** who've set aside marriage to devote themselves to serve Jesus without distraction.
20. **THESE** ought to be our examples! Not the parade of flashy but vacuous lives the world puts before us.
- B. Vs. 18-19

1. That is, they **claim** to be Christians
of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of [watch this] the cross of Christ:
2. They aren't enemies of **Christ**; They're enemies **of the cross**. More in a minute -
19 whose end *is* destruction,
3. They're lost.
whose god *is their* belly,
4. Not Jesus.
and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—
5. Instead of sin being embarrassing, they delight in it.
who set their mind on earthly things.
6. Their mindset is thoroughly worldly. They are **unconcerned** about the things of God.
7. Earlier in the chapter, Paul warned them about **false teachers**. Here he warns them about **false brethren**.
8. They have to be careful about who they look to as their examples because not everyone who claims to be walking with the Lord, is!
9. The **key** for discerning who they are is in Paul's description of them as **enemies of the cross** of Christ.
 - a. They **like** Jesus. They **call themselves** Christians.
 - b. But they don't like the cross & that whole "**dying to self**" thing.
10. Let me explain what was happening in Philippi Paul is referring to.
 - a. Philippi was a microcosm of what was taking place all over the Roman Empire.
 - b. It was a Greek city that had been made a Roman colony.
 - c. It was the perfect blend of Greek & Roman cultures.
 - d. Writers from that time say a brooding-boredom dominated the Empire.
 - 1) People had little trust in government because politicians were corrupt.
 - 2) The old religions were just that Old.
 - a) People had tired of them.
 - b) They offered not hope, no inspiration.
 - 3) People were disillusioned & there was little prospect for change.
 - e. As a result, many showed great interest in anything new.
 - f. They gave any new idea a hearing, even if it was only to break the monotony of the same old thing.
 - g. Sometimes, out of sheer boredom they'd **join** a new movement – just to add some excitement to their bland lives.
11. When Paul arrived in Philippi with the Gospel & performed miracles to verify it, some **genuine** converts were made, as well as some who weren't so genuine.
 - a. Christianity was a new movement that offered something different.
 - b. At first, because **everyone** were new, it wasn't clear who was a real believer & who was a fake.
 - c. But over time, genuine believers grew in grace while the pretenders didn't.
 - d. Oh, they sang the songs & went through the motions.
 - e. They knew all the right words & when the church met, they joined in.
 - f. But they weren't living the life of a believer.
 - g. They were Sunday morning Christians, but pagans on Monday thru Saturday.
12. Let's say I announce that Macy's is going to be giving away clothes to everyone for the next week. They've shipped in their entire inventory from all over the nation so the racks will never go bare.
 - a. We all jam in & start trying on clothes.
 - b. Then they announce over the intercom that as long as you stay in the store, you can try on & wear any clothes you want, but when you leave – those clothes are yours & you **have to wear ONLY them** the rest of your life.
 - c. Some who'd say, "Great" & walk out with a new wardrobe.
 - d. Others would try on dozens of different clothes, but when it came time to leave, they'd take nothing.
 - 1) They've got old clothes at home they really like & want to keep.
 - 2) They don't want to be limited to **just** the Macy's wardrobe.
13. When we come to faith in Christ, we exchange what we were for Who He is.

- a. We die to self & become the vessels of His resurrected life. ***We've put on Christ.***
 - b. We don't just come here on Sundays, sing songs, study the Bible, then go back to the life of the world when we leave.
 - c. Some here today are like those at Macy's who try on clothes but when they leave, nothing's changed – they go right back to who & what they were before they came.
14. Look at how Paul's heart broke over them. He wasn't angry at them, he wept over them.
15. I have to pause here & appeal to you to take an honest look at yourself right now.
- a. Are you walking the walk or just talking the talk?
 - b. Have you put on Christ?
 - c. What's your mind & heart set on today; heaven of the things of this world?
- C. Vs. 20-21

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Our citizenship is in heaven

- 1. There's a lot of interest in citizenship today because of the immigration debate.
- 2. US citizenship is a highly valued possession millions would love to obtain.
- 3. As many benefits as US citizens enjoy, believers in Christ have a much higher & more privileged citizenship.
- 4. I've met people who were born & raised here in the US to immigrant parents.
 - a. Those parents love the US but want their children to honor & appreciate their ethnic history.
 - b. Though they've never been to their parents' homeland, they speak the language & follow many of the same customs.
- 5. We are citizens of heaven, but live in a foreign land.
 - a. The Word & Spirit teach us the language & customs of our homeland.
 - b. And as Paul says in v. 21, we look forward to the day when we get to go home.
- 6. We don't have a flag we can put on our cars to identify that we are believers.
- 7. There's no flag for the Kingdom of God, but there is a banner.
- 8. God's banner over us is love. [Song 2:4]
- 9. That's the language we speak, the life we live.

Stand

D. 4:1

^{4:1} Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.