

Side By Side: Gospel Partnership in Philippians

Live in Light of Eternity

By [David Strain](#)

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Philippians 3:12-4:9

Now if you would, take a copy of God's Word in your hands and turn in it with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3. Philippians chapter 3. We're going to read from verse 12 through verse 9 of chapter 4. You'll find that on page 981. Once you have your Bibles spread before you, let's bow before God as we ask Him for help in understanding it. Let's pray.

Father, this is Your holy and inerrant and authoritative and sufficient Word. Would You give us the Holy Spirit by whom it has been inspired and preserved so that our proneness to disbelieve might be replaced by faith, our proneness to misunderstand might be replaced by clarity, our proneness to twist the truth might be replaced by glad-hearted surrender and submission to the truth? Work in our hearts by Your Word and prepare us for the day when Jesus shall split the skies and we will go to be with Him forever, in Jesus' name, amen.

Philippians chapter 3, reading from the twelfth verse. This is the Word of Almighty God:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in

heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subdue all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Amen. Thanks be to God for His holy and inerrant Word.

Living in Light of Eternity

Lord Shaftesbury, the 19th century English social reformer, once confessed near the end of his life, "I do not think that in the last forty years I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord's return." I do not think that in the last forty years I have lived one conscious hour that has not be influenced by the thought of our Lord's return. Live in the light of eternity. That is the burden of Paul's message to us in Philippians chapter 3 verses 17 through verse 9 of chapter 4. The light of eternity really casts its rays over this entire section. You can see that quite quickly if you look at verse 20. Our citizenship is where? It's in heaven. "From it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body by the power with which He is able to subdue all things to himself." Paul's thinking about Christ's return and our glorious destiny. In chapter 4 verse 3 he talks about Euodia and Syntyche and Clement and the others "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." And in verse 4 he says, "the Lord is at hand." Jesus is coming. Live in the light of eternity is the burden of Paul's message. It is an ethical section; a section dealing with the Christian life - how we ought to live in community and relationship to one

another. And for Paul, one of the key ways in which we ought to be motivated to live a holy life on earth is to dwell often on our destiny in heaven. We're to live in light of eternity and as we do we'll live for God's glory here and now.

And so to help us live in light of eternity Paul does a couple of things. First he gives us two general principles to orient our thinking and then he gets specific. He gives us three specific instructions to equip us for life this side of heaven while we wait for Christ's glorious appearing. Two general principles and then three specific instructions.

A. Learn from Good Examples and Weep over Bad Ones

Two general principles. The first of them - learn from good examples and weep over bad ones. We all tend to learn that way, don't we, from examples, from people who've impacted us? Even our children, you know they imitate us, and I'm sure, as adults, you find yourself channeling your father or your mother even at inopportune moments. You're disciplining your child and those words come out of your mouth that you've heard from your parents over and over again. You've learned from their example. That's how it goes. And Paul is concerned that we learn from good examples and we are aware of the bad ones. You can see in verse 17 and again in verse 9 of chapter 4 that Paul presents himself as a good example. He's not saying that he is a perfect example of every Christian virtue. In fact, as verse 12 reminds us, he does not believe that he has been made perfect yet; he has not yet obtained. Rather, the example that he especially wants us to see in him is of a man pressing on, a man who wants to cross the finish line, a man living in light of eternity, living so as to win the prize of the upward call of God, the heavenward call of God in Christ Jesus. He's a model of someone living in light of eternity. Not just Paul, verse 17 - "Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." There are many people all around us living for God, seeking to pursue a life that honors Him, living in light of eternity, running so as to win the prize, living as a citizen of heaven, showing that they are bound for another country. Paul wants us to study their example and learn to imitate them.

But there are negative examples, people to beware of. So he wants us to see the good examples and to beware of the bad. Verses 17 to 19 - there are those, Paul says, of whom he has told us often and now tells us even with tears who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ." These are not Gospel people. They may be terribly religious but the cross is not the foundation of their lives; it's not the center of their lives. The cross-work of Christ has not captivated their hearts. They're not Gospel people. In fact, they're enemies of the cross of Christ. And look how Paul describes them. "Their end," he says, "is destruction." If your life is not founded on what Jesus has done when He gave His life a ransom for sinners at Calvary, the great tragedy is your destiny is death and hell forever. And Paul is saying, "Beware of those people. Do not follow their example because they will

drag you down with them.” “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly.” That might mean that they’re gluttons; more likely what Paul has in mind when he talks about their belly he’s using a word that in our context the synonym of which would be the heart. In Paul’s day one felt with your bowels; one’s emotions were in your stomach rather than in your heart. In ours, we think about the heart as the center of emotions. The belly was the center of emotions in Paul’s day, so he may well be saying these people are characterized by idolizing their feelings - feelings not facts; emotion not truth is what governs and regulates their lives. As a result, their moral compass is haywire and they have their minds set on earthly things. And because they do, they have their lives anchored in the cesspool of shame. In fact, their emotionalism and their earthly-mindedness has so disordered their moral compass that things that are shameful now become their glory. They boast in them.

Both Warning and Weeping

We see that all over the place in our culture and context today, don’t we? Shameful things now becoming virtues. Things that should never be spoken aloud promoted in the public square as the norm. And Paul says beware of people like that. Their lifestyle, though it may be at the very forefront of all that is praised in the culture, their lifestyle is altogether deadly; it is deadly. And so if we are to live in the light of eternity we must find and study good examples of people who are pressing on and seeking to live for Christ and we must learn to beware of the negative examples. The company you keep matters, do you see? The people you emulate and aspire to be like shape you. Are those with whom you are closest going hard after the glory and honor of Christ or do they make an idol of their feelings and do they boast in their shame? Paul issues a warning as he seeks to encourage us to be ready for the day when Jesus comes.

And then, Paul says not just, not just “beware of them,” actually he says “weep for them.” That’s part of the example he sets before us, isn’t it? Look at what he says. “I’ve told you often, and now tell you even with tears, they walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ.” Paul is not enjoying his denunciation of these people. There’s no self-righteousness in his heart as he points out their danger. He knows them personally. He’s been to Philippi. As he writes he can think of their names, of their faces, perhaps he’s admonished them face to face, one to one. And now as he writes warning the Philippians about them, he does so, weeping. Here’s the point. You are not likely to imitate the rebellion and sin of someone if you find yourself weeping over their rebellion and sin. If your heart is grieved over their lifestyle you will not easily be swayed to copy it. So as Paul teaches us to live in light of eternity he wants to say, “Join in following my example as I press on and join me in weeping over those who have turned aside into patterns of worldliness rather than copying them.” Live in the light of eternity by copying good examples and weeping over the bad.

B. Remember Your Destiny

Then the second general principle he gives us is - remember your destiny. Remember your destiny. Verse 20 and 21 - "our citizenship is in heaven." We don't belong here. This world is not our home. If you're to live in such a way that prepares you for eternity you need to constantly bear in mind where your citizenship is, where your roots are. Not here but in another world. Our citizenship is in heaven "from which we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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." Paul clearly has not read the *Left Behind* series because he doesn't seem to know anything about a secret rapture of the church followed at some later date by a second coming of Christ in judgment. For Paul, when Jesus comes that will spell the subjection of all things to Himself. We will be transformed and the wicked will be judged.

I love the language that Paul uses. It's really picturesque. What he literally says when he describes the great change that will come over the people of God at the appearing of Christ is "the body of our humiliation will be changed into the body of Christ's exaltation." The body of our humiliation will go, and in its place Christ will give us perfect conformity to the body of His exaltation. What a destiny we have! What a glory awaits! Oh for that day! Don't you find your heart singing with the apostle John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" for the day when my body is made perfect, it doesn't break down, decay anymore? For the day when sin will never again encumber me or ensnare and entangle me as I run my race? O for that day! Perfect fellowship with my Savior and with His people. Paul says, "Remember where your citizenship is. Remember Christ is coming. Keep your eyes on your destiny. It will help you live in a state of readiness here while you wait." That's what Paul says we should do with that great truth in verse 1 of chapter 4. "Therefore, my brothers," - so in view of all of this - "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown," - what should you do? Jesus is coming; heaven is guaranteed if you are a believer in Jesus. That is your sure and certain destiny. Does that mean you can take it easy? You can take your ease and coast into glory? Is that what he's saying? Look what he says. "Therefore, stand firm thus in the Lord." Not, stand still in the Lord; "stand firm in the Lord. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." He's saying, "Make progress, advance, do not retreat, stand firm. Steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Those whose citizenship is in heaven are identified by laboring to live as though they belonged there. Those whose citizenship is in heaven are identifiable. You can tell them apart from the world because they labor hard to live in such a way that reveals that they belong there. Stand firm in the Lord.

So two general principles for living in the light of eternity - imitate good examples; leap over the bad. Remember your destiny. And then Paul gets specific about how to get ready. Three specifics in verses 2 to 9 of chapter 4.

1. Replace Division with Joy and Gentleness

The first of them - verses 2 and 3. Replace division with joy and gentleness. If you're going to live as someone who demonstrates that you're a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, the first thing you need to do is replace division with joy and gentleness. "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." They're at loggerheads; there's tension between them. These are not false teachers, Judaizers, whom we have been introduced to in the first part of chapter 3. These are not enemies of the cross of Christ - chapter 3 verse 18. These are believers. Their names, Paul says, are written in the book of life. But even believers, citizens of heaven, their names are enrolled on the heavenly census as citizens of the kingdom of glory and grace, Euodia and Syntyche, and yet even citizens of the kingdom of heaven, this side of our Savior's return, live sometimes as though they were not. Isn't that true? Sometimes citizens of the kingdom of heaven live as though they were not. It's certainly true of me. I'm sure it's true of you from time to time. It was true of Euodia and Syntyche. One friend I have likes to call them Odious and Soon-Touchy. They were at war. Paul says that's not the way it's to be among the people of God. If you are living in light of eternity, living as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, you must learn to forgive. What are you doing with your anger? Do you let your resentments fester? Do you think it's godly? Does it display your citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to hold a grudge against your brother or your sister and to stoke the embers of your resentments? No, Paul would have us live in unity and learn to forgive one another.

In fact, he says we need to do something more than simply stop it. He says replace your resentment with different affections all together. "Let your gentleness be evident to all. Rejoice, I say again, rejoice. The Lord is at hand." We are not to grumble and complain; we are to celebrate Christ's victory. We are not to be people given to tension and anger and resentment. We are to be people, our reasonableness, or another way to translate it, "our gentleness is to be evident to all because the Lord is at hand." He's coming soon. Jesus is coming soon. The Lord is at hand. Are you ready? Does it show in the way you live with your brothers and sisters? The way you think of them and speak to them? Is joy the characteristic mark of your life or rather is it resentment and grumbling and a complaining spirit?

2. Replace Anxiety with the Peace of God

Replace anxiety, secondly; second specific - replace anxiety with the peace of God. Replace division with joy and gentleness; now replace anxiety with the peace of God. Verses 5 and 6 of chapter 4 - "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything." Those two clauses fit together so well, don't they? If you really believe the Lord is at hand then anxiety should wither and die on the vine,

shouldn't it? Our Savior is coming. The victory that He has won will be complete; His triumph consummated and we will be at peace. Why do we need to be afraid? Jesus our Savior reigns and He is coming soon. That's what Paul says, and yet knowing that, believing that, saying that, and fighting off anxiety - those are two different things. I believe Jesus is coming. It comforts me. And yet, worry and anxiety is an insidious and subtle temptation in my heart. I'm sure it is in yours.

By Prayer!

And so Paul gets even more practical. He tells us how you can fight anxiety and get a hold of the peace of God, dispelling our anxiety. He says - how do you do it? You do it praying. "In everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." Notice prayer's persistence in everything; not just in the crisis but in everything. So often we wonder why worry continues to plague us when we've been praying now that the crisis has struck. Paul says, "Perhaps, if you'd already been praying in everything when the crisis struck, the peace of God would already have been guarding your heart and mind in Christ Jesus." Pray in everything. Pray persistently. He piles us synonyms for prayer - supplication, thanksgiving, prayer. He piles them one on top of another to give us the clear impression of someone who prays and prays and prays. They pray on top of prayer on top of praying. Persistence. And the result, verse 7 - "the peace of God which surpasses understanding guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." It's a picturesque little promise, isn't it? Peace guarding your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It's a military term. Peace will garrison your hearts. It will fortify them like a peacekeeping troop is deployed to protect a hard-fought and won peace, Jesus Christ, Paul says, will deploy the armies of grace to encamp around your heart and mind to protect them against the onslaught of anxiety. Get hold of the peace of God that comes as you embrace the promise of God that Jesus is coming. Fight anxiety and do it by prayer in everything, with supplication and thanksgiving.

3. Think and Do the Truth

Replace division with joy and gladness, replace anxiety with the peace of God, and now finally Paul says, the third specific he gives us to help us live in light of eternity - think and do the truth. Think and do the truth. "From God's perspective," writes Don Carson, "the real measure of individuals lies in what they think, not in what they own or how well they deploy their gifts or even in what they do, but in what they think." Then listen to this - "If you think holy thoughts you will be holy. If you think garbage you will be garbage." That's Don Carson. That's what Paul says in verses 8 and 9. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Set your mind in these things. Fight base thoughts with

noble themes. Combat injustice by dwelling on equity. Deal with the filth of sexual impurity in your thinking by making purity and goodness and holiness your meditation. Fix your intellectual horizons on loveliness, on those things held in good report by everyone. "As a man thinks in his heart," Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinks in his heart so is he." Isn't that chilling, convicting? You can pull the wool over everyone's eyes by speaking right and doing right, but as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Think holy thoughts; you will be holy. Think garbage; you will be garbage.

Christ Himself: The Chief Pattern of the Christian Life

Ultimately, of course, the pattern of purity and goodness and virtue Paul sets before us is to be found exemplified in one place - in the character of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul says, "Think on these things," you can do no better as you seek to obey his exhortation than to fix your eyes on Christ. How will you fight the assailing weapons of sin and temptation? How will you live for the glory of God and live in light of eternity and persevere and run your race and press on and win the prize? Fix your eyes on Christ "who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorned its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." Think on these things. Dwell much on your Savior who embodies whatever is true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and commendable and excellent and altogether worthy of praise. You find these graces for yourself in His hands. He embodies them and He purchased them for you. You must go to Him and fill your eyes with your Savior who, Paul says, is coming soon. The Lord is at hand and so we are, all of us, to live in light of eternity. Let us pray.

Our Father, we praise You that Jesus is coming. Even so, come Lord Jesus! While we wait, we pray for grace to keep our eyes fixed on Christ that we may indeed begin not only to dwell on whatever is true and noble and lovely and praiseworthy, but we may ourselves begin to embody them and live them, not for our own praise or our own name's sake but for Christ's, that all glory and honor would be His. Help us to live in light of eternity and so be ready when the day comes and our Savior splits the skies and the body of our humiliation is exchanged for the body of Christ's exaltation. For we ask this in His name, amen.

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