



How Can We Bring Heaven To Earth?

September 24-30, 2023

*****START THE VIDEO AT 3:00*****

MAIN POINT

At His return, Christ will exercise His sovereign power to transform Christians into His likeness. We press toward spiritual maturity with that hope.

INTRODUCTION

What qualities are you most drawn to in other people?

What would your spouse or a friend say is the quality that people are most drawn to in your life?

On more than one occasion in his letters, Paul called his readers to imitate him. Paul did not make this demand in an egotistical way; he simply was letting his readers know that he had given them a pattern by which to live. In the ancient world, the philosopher was to be the embodiment of his teaching, and a Jewish rabbi's students were to imitate their teacher in every detail. By imitating Paul, believers would be living the life Christ wanted them to live. Paul was pleading for the Philippians and others to give priority to faithfully serving Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

READ [PHILIPPIANS 3:17-19](#).

What patterns in Paul's life did he want the readers to imitate?
Look back at [3:2-16](#) for some examples.

Think about a person you look to as a pattern for Christian living or a person who has played a part in your Christian growth. What characteristics of that person have you tried to imitate?

Is your life such that someone could look to you as a model? Why or why not?

What was the point of Paul's warning in verses [18-19](#)? How did this relate to imitating Paul's example of serving Christ?

Paul described those who live for themselves as enemies of the cross. Is that a fair judgment? Why or why not? Why do you think Paul made such a bold claim?

In today's society, who would you say the enemies of the cross are?

Paul became quite emotional as he warned his readers against false teachers. Paul was moved to tears when he thought of those false teachers who were corrupting the true gospel of Christ. Undoubtedly these false teachers were claiming to be followers of Christ. However,

their doctrine was not in keeping with the true gospel Paul preached. Rather than center their lives on heavenly or spiritual values, truths, and goals, they were focused on earthly (material) things. They consistently pursued material things as their priority.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21.

The alternative to living for self, as the false teachers did, is living for Christ. Verses 20-21 give some insight as to what that looks like. While others focus on earthly things, we should focus on our heavenly citizenship.

How have your desires changed since you placed faith in Jesus for salvation?

What does “heavenly citizenship” mean?

How does being a citizen of God’s kingdom impact your daily life?

What does it mean to you to be an heir of God’s kingdom?

What do verses 20-21 tell us about the goal of spiritual growth—of God’s work in our lives? How does this goal motivate you to pursue Christ today?

By focusing on what God can do in the present and will do in the future, our perspective and priorities change. We no longer need to find our happiness, joy, and satisfaction in things of this world. We see that God is busy transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. Living for Him will lead to living *like* Him.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:1.

Again Paul demonstrates his love and friendship for the church at Philippi. He points back to everything he has written in the previous three chapters as the reason to maintain a firm foundation in the Lord. He points forward to the following verses to show how to stand firm. He remains ever concerned with believers’ spiritual lives.

What happens in our personal lives when we stand firm in the Lord?

What happens in our relationship with Him? In our relationship with others?

APPLICATION

What habits and behavioral patterns identify you as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven?

What do you look forward to the most when you think about eternity?

Of the tensions that exist between living on earth but having a citizenship in heaven, which tension is the hardest for you to balance? Why do you think that is? What is one thing you can do this week to try to live for eternity in that specific area of your life?

Reflect on the great privilege you have as a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven. How does the priority you give to serving Christ faithfully give evidence of your gratitude for that privilege?

PRAYER

Pray that in the midst of your roles that encompass family, work, and social contacts, you will be obedient to God's desire to transform you daily. Thank God for the freedom from sin and death available to believers in Christ through the gospel and for the hope you have that one day this transformation will be complete. Pray that you will be continually renewed in your pursuit of Christ.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

Paul urged his brothers in Christ to join in imitating him ([v. 17](#)). He was not bragging or holding himself up as the perfect model; yet he was the best example of Christ's follower they had. He urged the Philippian believers to fix their attention on believers who were following his example. The Philippian Christians were to pattern their lifestyles after Paul and other believers who imitated him—all of whom were following Christ's model.

With deep emotion, Paul warned his friends against enemies of the cross of Christ ([v. 18](#)). Paul described these enemies as unbelievers and wept because of their tragic condition and their negative effect on others in the church. They were enemies of the cross because their lifestyles contradicted their professed commitment to Christ. Paul declared that these pseudo-Christians were headed for destruction—that is, ruin in the sense of eternal separation from God ([v. 19](#)). Though they professed to worship God, they had made an idol of their stomach, a term for the wide range of their sensual (bodily) appetites. Their self-indulgence contrasted sharply to Christ's sacrificial self-giving. Rather than center their lives on heavenly or spiritual values, truths, and goals, the professing Christians were focused on earthly (material) things. The Greek term rendered are focused on means "to set the mind on," "to be intent on," and conveys continuous action. They consistently pursued material things as their priority.

In contrast, genuine believers' citizenship is in heaven ([v. 20](#)). Paul maintained that Christians were (and are) members of two realms. They were citizens of the Roman Empire and should be exemplary citizens. More important, they were citizens of God's kingdom and owed their primary loyalty to God. Their heavenly citizenship governed their earthly lives. Paul emphasized the creative tension in which believers lived: they eagerly awaited the return of Christ their Savior. Paul's emphasis may have been on the fulfillment or culmination of Christians' salvation at that time or their being delivered from persecution.

Christ has supernatural power to subject everything to Himself ([v. 21](#)). He is sovereign. With such unlimited effective energy, Christ will transform believers' bodies when He returns. The Greek word translated transform has the idea of changing something so it conforms to something else. The body of our humble condition is the physical body. The phrase His glorious body refers to the Lord's spiritual or resurrection body appropriate for eternity. Christ will change believers' bodies to be like His, not merely in external appearance but also in essential nature. Believers will reach full maturity.

The contents of [4:1](#) could be taken as the final thought of chapter 3 or as an introduction to chapter 4. Remember that when these inspired words were first written, they were composed without chapter and verse divisions. Regardless of whether verse 1 was intended to go with the thought at the end of chapter 3 or as an introduction to chapter 4, it contains a word of encouragement to Paul's friends in Philippi to continue strong in their faith.