

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.*

For those of you with small children or for those of you that have done the parenting thing already and have grown children or just teenagers, you know that children, especially toddlers imitate everything. Watching my girls grow up is a great blessing and I wouldn't trade it for the world. I enjoy watching them learn and try new things. I also enjoy watching them imitate just about everything. When mom is cooking, they want to cook. After a diaper is changed, they want to change their babies diapers. I put my boots and coat on to head over to the office and they want to "go to work" to pray. They even repeat back words and phrases. I used the word "probably" awhile back and for weeks it was all they said, even in the right way. Toddlers soak everything up...from the good to the bad.

Today in our Epistle Reading...St. Paul writes these words: <sup>17</sup> *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*<sup>1</sup> Paul isn't being one of those guys that's trying to call attention to what he does. He doesn't want to a stumbling block to others and lead them into sin. He writes to the church in Corinth. <sup>32</sup> *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,* <sup>33</sup> *just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.* **11** *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* <sup>2</sup> He's not seeking his own advantage, for He has already talked about having the same mind as Christ earlier to the church in Philippi. **2** *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,* <sup>2</sup> *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* <sup>3</sup> *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* <sup>4</sup> *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* <sup>5</sup> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup> *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* <sup>8</sup> *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*<sup>3</sup> St. Paul is writing to the church in Philippi that their minds and attitudes should not just like Paul...but more so like Christ.

St. Paul is adamant that the people, the members of the Philippian congregation, keep their eyes on those who are living the example of Christ in their lives. He is concerned for their

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Php 3:17). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (1 Co 10:32–11:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Php 2:1–8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

wellbeing. He is concerned that they could go off and start imitating those that are enemies of the cross. Rightfully so, as we'll see as we look at the verses in a few moments.

Earlier in chapter 3, St. Paul talks about he has set aside the things that bring confidence to the flesh...He is straining forward to what lies ahead, that being the resurrection of the dead through his sincere faith in Christ. There were many though in and out of the church that did not set aside the things that bring great confidence. St. Paul throughout his writings writes about the enemies of the cross and how we should not follow after them. Now he warns about them again: <sup>18</sup> *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*<sup>4</sup>

The letter to the Church in Philippi is known to many as the book of Joy, and for the most part it is a book full of joy, and full of encouragement. This is even when Paul is writing from the chains of the gospel in his prison cell. Yet, here in chapter 3, Paul warns them to not imitate the bad examples. Their minds are set on earthly gain. Their minds are set on their flesh and ultimately rejecting Christ and the righteousness He won on the cross.

P.T. O'Brien in his commentary on Philippians comments on why St. Paul was so urgent in his admonition to imitate his own example and pay careful attention to those live according to this godly pattern. He writes: "Because he is deeply concerned about the pernicious influence of the many who behave in a way that is diametrically opposed to this pattern and by their behavior live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their ungodly example was, unfortunately, not new, but Paul has to warn his readers again, perhaps because the situation had deteriorated and the evil had grown."

You have influence over your child, probably more so than anyone else, they will imitate you...for the good and for the bad...you see that probably more so than you'd like to admit.

Satan knows how to use influence...whether it be yours over your children or society over us. Just think to the advertising slogans. "Just Do It," "Be All You Can Be," "I'm Loving It," "The Best a Man Can Get." It's a focus on the "belly". It's a focus on the self. Satan wants us to imitate the selfishness of mankind. He wants the Old Adam to win out in our lives.

Satan knows how to use influence...politicians are influenced by money and power. We see this more so now in an election year and at the untimely death of Justice Scalia. The Media influences people, it doesn't speak the truth or give the full truth." There are so many pernicious influences in our lives that live diametrically opposed to the pattern of Paul and more so of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is being pushed to the side all across America and the world. He's being pushed out of schools, governments, homes, families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and yes He's even being pushed out of churches, because people are

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Php 3:18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

diametrically opposed to Him. They don't like how He lived or the message He preaches. Since He preaches Law and convicts them of their sin. Perhaps you even don't like the Law he preaches and how it convicts you of your sin. Perhaps you too are offended at what He speaks to you, through His Word and the mouths of His preachers. Perhaps you too are okay with Christ being shoved to the side...even in your own lives. Perhaps you are beginning to imitate those that are enemies of the cross.

So I plead with you, as St. Paul pleads with the church in Philippi. Pay attention to the Christ-centered examples in your life. More so than that... "Stand firm in the Lord." Stand firm in the Lord who met you at the font, who gave you the New Man, who crucified the Old Adam in you, and raised you up to imitate Him – to live for Him. You see Jesus Christ could imitate only one...His Father. Jesus Christ imitated His Father's mind-set. His mind-set then was to give up everything to save you—even His very life. Paul shared that with you earlier in His epistle as I read earlier from Philippians 2. He became a servant for you, became obedient unto death even death on the cross. You see he emptied himself of everything for you so that He could "imitate" you. You see He was filled with your sin, your selfishness, the times you go after the things of this world, the times you set your minds on earthly things, the times that you focus more on self-righteousness than on the righteousness of Christ.

A righteousness that Jesus Christ won on the cross for you, where He received His glory and won glory for you. It was then out of the tomb that Jesus walked and showed Himself to be the exalted one of God. It was then that Jesus gave you life eternal when He defeated death itself.

As Jesus Christ defeated death, you too have been given the victory over death. You were given that victory when you brought to the font and you were buried and raised to new life in Christ. It was there that you were made citizens of God's Kingdom. Have you thought about? Where your true citizenship lies. Does it lie right here in the United States of America where her citizens are constantly bickering about one thing or another, sometimes over rather important moral issues and sometimes over those things that cause us to lose focus on who we are to be imitating? You might be thinking more about your citizenship here in America in 2016 as we are headed down a historic path.

Let me tell you, it doesn't really matter if we have a second President Clinton, a third President Bush, a President Trump or President Cruz, or even a President Sanders...it doesn't ultimately matter if the next Supreme Court justice is politically liberal or conservative...what truly matters is that you are citizens of a greater Kingdom...You are citizens of heaven. <sup>20</sup> *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>21</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> For our imitation is like Paul's we look forward, not to the past...we look forward to the coming of our Savior again, who will transform so that we can imitate Christ to the fullest.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Php 3:20–21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

When our Savior returns He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. Jesus has the power to do it and He will.

As Jesus Christ is your Savior, you've been given Lenten imitation. Really you are called to imitate the mind of Christ...a mind-set that looks past the riches of the world, the successes that give confidence to the flesh. You've been given a mind-set that imitates Christ, that lives for Him. It might even cause you stand up for your faith and speak the truth of God's Word...both the harsh words of the Law and the sweet message of the gospel. St. Paul calls us to Stand firm in the Lord. Stand firm in Jesus Christ. Stand firm in your only true Savior, Jesus Christ. Remember he's not a political Savior...He saves your soul from sin, death, and the devil. He gives you eternal citizenship in heaven...rather...in the new heavens and the new earth that He will give to us when he returns. Even though you walk the way of your cross here on earth, know that He is with you and will always be with you, and you always have Him as an example to imitate...but He's more than an example to imitate...He's your Savior.

Next time you see a toddler imitating his or her parents, you can be reminded of the imitations that St. Paul urges us to live by...but even more so, we can be reminded of how a Son imitated the mind-set of His Father and saved your soul!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, your Lord and Savior, your Lenten King. Amen.*