

Standing Fast In The Lord

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Pastor John Miller

Follow with me in your Bible beginning in Philippians 3:17. It's really a continuation of what we looked at last Wednesday night (last Wednesday night we looked at verses 13-16). Paul says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. 18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ," this is Paul's concern, there's enemies of the cross of Christ. He's weeping and telling them to beware and how to stand. He says, "Whose end is destruction," he's describing those of the enemies of the cross of Christ, "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,) 20 For our conversation," or our citizenship, "is in heaven," or in the heavens, "from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 21 Who shall change our vile," or lowly or humble, "body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

It's interesting that in Philippians, which is a theme of joy, we find Paul weeping. Paul is weeping in the book of Philippians, the book about joy and rejoicing. Let me tell you why Paul is not weeping. He's not weeping because of his circumstances, because in Philippians 1:21 Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." No matter what happened to Paul, he didn't really care as long as Christ was being glorified, so he had a single mind and didn't worry about his circumstances. Secondly, Paul is not weeping because of others and how they are treating him. In Philippians 2:5 we see that Paul had the submissive mind and said, "Let this mind," or attitude, "be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," and talked about the humble mind. Paul wasn't weeping about his circumstances, he wasn't weeping about how people treat him, that's many times what we weep about. Paul was actually weeping these tears because he had the spiritual mind.

Paul had a single mind, Christ be glorified; he had a submissive mind, others more important than myself; and now he has the spiritual mind, he's brokenhearted over the way some professed—underline the word "professed"—Christians are living. Notice verse 19, "...who mind earthly things." These are enemies of the cross of Christ because their minds are not on Heaven, on Christ, they're on things of this world, on earthly things. The people that Paul is weeping over, or weeping about, are professed believers; but they are heretics, they turn away from the truth of the gospel. The danger is, and it still exists today, they are among the true believers in the church.

There's a difference between a true Christian that possesses eternal life and a "professing" Christian that says with their lips, "I'm a believer in Christ," but there's no reality of Christ in their heart. Many times people say they're believers but they don't have Christ, so they're not genuine or authentic believers, they're "professing" Christians but not possessing Christ in a real way.

In Philippians 3, Paul is calling us to have a spiritual mind and to stand fast in the Lord. As I pointed out in Philippians 4:1, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." This is the wrap-up or application of what he says in verses 17-21.

Paul gives us three ways or steps we need to stand fast in the Lord. There's a lot of information in these verses. I cannot exhaust them. I'll do my best to touch the high and important points, and I hope that you understand them when you leave here tonight. I want to give you three things you need to do to stand fast in the Lord in light of the dangers of false teachers. Here's the first: You need to follow good examples. You need to follow the good and godly examples of true teachers who are teaching orthodox Christianity and follow their example. Look at verse 17. "Brethren," he's writing to believers. It's interesting that verse 17 opens with the word "Brethren," and Philippians 4:1 opens with "my brethren dearly beloved." He's speaking to the brethren in verse 17 and says, "be followers," there's the key, "together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." He starts with following me and then says, "Follow us," and he's probably referring to Timothy and Epaphroditus as well. He starts by saying, "Look it. Follow me. Be followers of my example."

The word "followers" is an interesting key word there. It actually means imitators. We get our word mimics from it. When our girls were little, we have three daughters, they would sometimes dress up like mom and would like to have tea parties and make like they're cooking. They'd have their dolls and wanted to act like a grown-up mommy. They'd mimic mother. Maybe a little boy will get tools, follow his dad around the garage and make like he's sawing or using a wrench or maybe he's got his own little lawn mower and follows him around the yard. Many times they mimic their parents.

Paul, as their spiritual father, was saying, "Imitate me. Mimic me. Follow me." Paul was not prideful to say that, Paul was humble. He admitted earlier in the same chapter, "I have not yet attained." Remember he said, "I am not yet perfect," but he was mature. That goes back to verse 12, by the way. He's actually saying, "Mimic me," or follow me, be my imitators, because he was following Christ, he says to the Corinthians.

I wonder, can you say as a believer to other believers, "Pray like I pray. Work like I work for the Lord. Study the Bible the way I study the Bible." If you were an example of believers, what kind of believers would exist today in the church? If everyone prayed like you, if everyone served like you, if everyone gave like you, if everyone witnessed like you, what kind of a church would exist? Paul was a pattern, an example, of who we should follow—the real, the genuine thing—so he says, "Be joint imitators," literally.

Paul also said, as I pointed out, "Brethren, be followers," or imitators of us because you have us for an example. That word "ensample" is where we get our word typos. It means a type. It was used of an industrial dye that was used to make an imprint on something, so we would make an imprint on something, it would be a pattern, it would be a type. "I am your pattern of what a believer should be. You should follow me." You want to follow the genuine, authentic teachers

of the Word.

Notice Paul said, verse 17, “and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” The word “mark” there means to give careful scrutiny to. It means study their lives. Look at them carefully. Someone said, “If you want to see farther than other men, then stand on the shoulders of giants.” One of the ways to do that, by the way, is to read biographies of great men and women of God. You should be allowing yourself to be saturated and inspired by reading about great men of God, great women of God, great missionaries of God. You can learn from their lives. It’s like looking at life on their shoulders. It’ll inspire you to follow their pattern as they followed Christ.

Paul wants us to follow his example. This takes us back again in context to verse 12 where Paul, you’ll remember he said, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus,” so it involves a dissatisfaction, a sanctified dissatisfaction, of where you’re at with the Lord and that you want to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Secondly, you want to have a determination, go back to verses 13-14. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” We saw that we are to be, “...forgetting those things which are behind,” don’t let it control us; “and reaching forth unto those things which are before,” and pressing, verse 14, “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

If we’re going to follow Paul’s example, then we need to go back to verses 12-13. We need to have a sanctified dissatisfaction, a sanctified determination, and then a sanctified discipline, verses 15-16, “...as many as be perfect,” or mature, “be thus minded,” in other words, if you’re going to be a mature believer, have the same mind or attitude that I have, “and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule,” notice that phrase, “let us mind the same thing.” Without skipping a beat from verses 16-17, Paul says, “Mimic me,” follow me. What an amazing person Paul the Apostle was—not proud, not cocky, not “I’m perfect.” He knew that he had a strong walk with God. He knew he was an apostle of God. He knew he was preaching the gospel of God, the truth of God’s Word, and he said, “Follow me,” so we should be able to say that to other believers. We want to impart to them the truth of God’s Word.

The lessons for us: Are you following Paul’s example? Secondly, are you being an example to others? It’s so very, very important. Are you an example for others to follow? Every Christian ought to be able to say, “Follow my example.” Write down 1 Timothy 4:12 where Paul says to Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation,” or living, “in charity,” love, “in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Timothy was timid, and Paul says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear,” which is timidity, “but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” “Timothy, though you’re young, you can be an example of the believer in word, in living, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity.” As I said, verse 17, he’s to be a type.

Write down as well, verse 17, the NIV says, "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." That's verse 17 from the NIV, "...you have us as a model, keep your eyes," mark them, watch them, follow them. I remember as a young Christian I got my eyes fixed on some men of God that were older than I, men who were preaching and teaching the Bible. I watched their lives. I watched their behavior, and it influenced, encouraged, and challenged me. Then, in my years of ministry, I've also been a reader of biographies. One of the great books that really impacted me is a book called *Ordained of the Lord*, by E. Schvyler English. It's about Harry Allen Ironside. If you want to get a book to read, get this book. It's an amazing book. Also, Warren Wiersbe has written a book called *50 People Every Christian Should Know*. I think we actually have it in our store, and that just popped into my brain. I didn't say that because I'm trying to sell books. Originally it was called *Walking with the Giants*. I love that. Read about men and women that were used by God. Find out the secret of their lives, and follow their examples.

You know the story is told that Benjamin Franklin was the one who invented street lighting. In Philadelphia, when he introduced street lighting, no one wanted street lights. They all thought Benjamin Franklin was out of his mind, but he actually then put street lights in front of his house. Everyone walking by saw the warmth and light from the street lights in front of his home. They liked it so much, they started putting street lights up all over Philadelphia, and the rest is history. Today we have street lights because of that one individual that let his light shine in a very dark place.

Paul is insistent that we follow his good example. Many were following bad examples. Notice the second point he makes in verses 18-19. The first is in verse 17, follow good examples. Secondly, he says, flee bad examples. This is simple, again, but so important. Follow the good examples; flee bad examples. By the way, if you're a parent raising children, even if your children are older, married, and out of the home, you still want to be a good example to your children. Amen? You want to be a good example to your grandchildren, and maybe even great grandchildren. I'm kind of at that point now where maybe the Lord will let me stick around long enough to have great grandchildren. That's kind of an awesome thought, but I want to be an example that they can follow in my life. This is more so the heart of what Paul wanted to get to—flee bad examples.

Go back to verses 18-19. Paul says, "(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" He says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them," study them, scrutinize them, keep your eyes on them, "which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." The reason is because there's a lot of bad examples out there. Notice, "(For many..." the word "for" in verse 18, by the way, too, indicates the reason he wanted them to follow him, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. The reason he wanted them to follow the good examples is because there's a lot of bad examples. It's really a tragedy when Christians follow bad examples or they follow false teachers. Paul says, "(For many walk," so there were many who were following wrong teaching and false teaching.

Back in Philippians 3:2, Paul talked about them being, "...dogs...evil workers...the concision," beware of them. The whole context of Philippians 3 is these false teachers, which I happen to believe, we can't be dogmatic, but in context are what are known as Judaizers, which were legalists; and those who were also libertines were taking great liberty and using the grace of God for lasciviousness. I'll explain that more in just a minute.

Today in the church we have both legalists, they add laws and rules or rites and rituals to Christianity to be saved, and those that believe that being under the grace of God gives them a license to go out and live however they want, that God's not concerned about holiness, so they're what's called libertines. We have legalists and the libertines, and they're with us in the church today. We'll come back to that thought.

Notice, as I said, verse 18, "(For," this is the reason why, "many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping." In Acts 20:31, Paul was meeting with the elders from Ephesus in a little spot called Miletus on the Aegean Sea. He said, "...that by the space of three years," I was with you in Ephesus, and he used the phrase, "...night and day with tears," telling you that you need to be careful about false teachers.

It's interesting today when the preacher warns about false preachers. If you're preaching the Bible, you're going to be warning about false teachers because it's in the text. But when you do that, people get upset sometimes, "Well, that's not nice," or "That's not kind," or "That's not Christian," or "That's not loving." If you study your Bible, you'll discover there's a lot of stuff in the Scriptures about warning about the false. Jesus Himself said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." "Grandma, what big teeth you have!" They look like sheep, talk like sheep, smell like sheep, but they're wolves in sheep's clothing. Jesus said the wheat and tares would grow together in the church, and you wouldn't be able to always distinguish the two. God will separate them. You need to be biblically grounded and discerning and filled with the Spirit and careful about who you follow, who you emulate, whose pattern you're living by. Make sure they're following Christ, and you are following Christ in His Word as well.

Paul says that he's weeping over these individuals, so he cared about them. Paul is compassionate. Notice this statement here, verse 18, "...that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Whenever I read that statement, and I've studied it now for a few days to preach this tonight, I preached it many times before over the years, I wish I could convey the importance of the Doctrine of the Cross. That is central to Christianity. Every Christian needs to understand the cross of Jesus Christ—Jesus came from Heaven into the world to die upon the cross. Everything in the Old Testament was pointing to the cross; everything in the New Testament points back to the cross, and God became a man, gave Himself as a substitute on the cross to redeem us, to reconcile us, to be the propitiation for our sins. You can't neglect the Doctrine of the Cross or understand Christianity without understanding the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world.

These false teachers, as do all other false teachers, weaken or lessen the significance or the

importance of the power of the cross. That's so very, very dangerous because that's central Christianity. If your doctrine of the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, is wrong, then you're in big danger. You need to have the incarnation right, you need to have the crucifixion correct, you need to have the resurrection right, and then His ascension, exaltation into the right hand of God the Father in Heaven. It's so important.

So, "...they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Why? Well, take the legalist, and I said they're with us today. In Paul's day, he's probably talking about Judaizers who remember were adding circumcision as essential and necessary for salvation. They were also adding dietary laws, Mosaic dietary laws, "Don't touch that. Don't eat that. Don't drink that." They were legalists. They had dietary laws, they had the rite or the ritual of circumcision, and that actually was an enemy of the cross of Christ because Christ, when He died on the cross, His death was sufficient to save us from sin.

Remember when Jesus died He said, "Tetelestai," it is finished, which means paid in full. You don't work to add to the finished work of Christ. Anything that someone says you must do in order to be saved, apart from just receiving the gift by faith in Jesus Christ, is adding to the cross. That's an enemy of the cross of Christ, or taking away from it. "Well, you have to be baptized," or "You have to be confirmed," or "You have to go to catechism," or "You have to do the Sacraments," or "You have to have communion," or "You have to go to confession and pray these certain prayers or have a certain haircut or wear certain clothes." That's legalism. That's an enemy of the cross of Christ. Anyone that doesn't hold to the Doctrine of Christ alone—faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone—is adding to the cross and are enemies of the cross.

Should our lives be transformed and produce good works for His glory? Yes, but that isn't what saves us. That's the fruit of salvation. Faith alone saves, but faith that saves is not alone. It will produce fruit, but that isn't what saves us. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." When a cultist knocks on your door, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! "Hi! I'm a Jehovah's Witness. I'm from the local Kingdom Hall, and I'm here to talk to you about Jesus or the Bible," or whatever. Ask them the question that was asked by the Philippian jailer to Paul the Apostle in Acts 16, "...what must I do to be saved?" What did Paul say? He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He didn't say, "Get baptized," or "Get a haircut," or "Come to church this Sunday and take communion," or "Put on our special underwear, wear that." He didn't say, "Don't drink coffee," or "Don't eat meat," or "Don't do this," or "Don't do that," or "Worship on a specific day. You must worship on Saturday." He just said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

When the thief on the cross turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, would You remember me?" Jesus said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." That was a look of faith. When Jesus was teaching Nicodemus, that Jew in John 3 saying, "You must be born again." Even as Jesus was lifted up and the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, and people looked and they lived, "...even so must the Son of man be lifted up," that whoever looks to Me in faith will be forgiven and healed of their sin. Salvation is "...by grace...through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the

gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” These are legalists, and they’re with us today.

There’s also the danger of the libertines. The idea of libertines is that they take license thinking that the grace of God is so great that it doesn’t matter how I live, that I can live a sinful life and it’s okay. That’s another issue, but it’s a dangerous thing to presume upon the grace of God. You can read in Galatians where Paul talks about having been forgiven by faith, are we now made perfect by the flesh? You can’t live in a sinful lifestyle and say, “I’m a child of God.” Your life should produce fruit of holiness because you are born again, so “...they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”

By the way, write down 2 Peter 2:1-3. Let me read it to you. Peter says, “...there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter is warning the same as Paul is warning in the book of Philippians.

Notice the description. It’s threefold. First of all, it’s “...whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,” not heavenly things. “...they are the enemies of the cross of Christ,” but described as their God is their belly. Why? Because as Judaizers, they were all about dietary laws. In Colossians, Paul said they say, “Don’t eat that. Don’t drink that. Don’t touch that.” They’re all about what you eat.

Now, it’s okay to have a diet that you feel is best for you or you want to eat, but what you eat is not a matter of spirituality. You’re not more spiritual because you don’t eat meat. You might be more healthy, but you won’t be more spiritual. You’re not more spiritual because you don’t eat certain foods or drink certain things. Jesus said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man,” right? “but that which cometh out...those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” The important thing is your heart before God, but their “...God is their belly.” The libertines, on the other side, were drinking, getting drunk, living licentious lifestyles, and that’s a dangerous thing as well, so their God is their appetites.

Secondly, “...and whose glory is in their shame.” Again, the legalists, the Judaizers, were boasting about how many converts they had that they saw circumcised or submitting to Judaism. They were Judaizers because they were telling people, “You can’t be a Christian unless you become a Jew. You have to be Jewish in order to be a Christian,” so they were Judaizing individuals. They were telling them, “You must proselytize into Judaism.” They were glorying and boasting in their legalistic standards. It would be like someone today boasting and prating around about how many people I baptized and boasting in that. Paul says, “I thank God that I baptized none of you,” when he wrote to the Corinthians, “but Crispus and Gaius.” If baptism was necessary for salvation, why would Paul say, “I thank God that I baptized none of you”? If it was essential for salvation, he certainly wouldn’t have said that. They boast in their

rites and rituals.

Many times when you think you have to do something to save yourself, then what do you do? You boast. "I pray so much. I read my Bible this much. I don't drink that. I don't touch that. I don't eat that. I don't do that. I'm a good person." Christians become known for what they don't do rather than what they do, so it's the negative. Their shame is something they're glorying in, something they should be ashamed of, and the same with the libertines. Their minds are on earthly things. That's the problem. That's really, in many ways, the root cause and source of the fact that they are enemies of the cross of Christ—their god is their belly, their glory is their shame—because their minds are on fleshly things, natural things, carnal things.

In Colossians 3, we're going to actually study that on Sunday morning, Paul talks about setting your affections on the things above not on the things of the earth. The word "affections" means your mind, so they were focusing on things of the earth. Jesus warned us to beware of these false teachers.

Here's the third step. Step one, follow good examples, imitation, and vigilance, mark them; flee bad examples, those who are enemies of the cross of Christ, watch out for the legalists, watch out for the libertines, watch out for those who add to the Scriptures or take away from the Scriptures; and thirdly, focus on expectations or look to Heaven and Heaven's Lord. Set your mind on things above. Be expecting Jesus Christ to return. One of the best ways to stand fast in the Lord in the last days is to be looking for the Lord to come at any moment to take us to Heaven.

Verses 18 and 20 starts with, "For," so Paul's contrasting those who, "...are the enemies of the cross of Christ. Whose end is destruction." By the way, I didn't mention that in verse 19, notice their, "...end is destruction." I do believe that is eternal separation in hades or hell from God because of their false gospel. When people have a false dependence and false faith, they end up in destruction and destroyed. "...whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Why should we not have our mind on earthly things or God be our belly? Because "...our conversation is in heaven." This literally would read, "our citizenship is in the heavens."

As a Christian, this world is not your home. Amen? Your real home is in Heaven. Down here you're just a pilgrim, you're just a stranger. Your real home is in Heaven. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you," in Heaven. He called it "my Father's house." He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." We need to have our minds set upon Heaven. The problem with a lot of Christians is their minds are on earth rather than Heaven.

"For our conversation," citizenship...that word in my King James Bible, "conversation" is actually better translated citizenship. Philippi was a Roman colony, that means that the believers in Philippi would understand what Paul is talking about because they were Roman citizens but they weren't in Rome. Many of them had never even been to Rome, but they were citizens of

Rome. They were a Rome away from Rome. It was a little pocket of Rome. It was a colony of Roman citizens there in Philippi.

As Christians we live now in this world, but our real home is in Heaven. I love what Charles Erdman said, "They," referring to the citizens of Philippi, "were under its care. To it, they owe their allegiance, in its register their names were enrolled, their conduct is regulated by its laws, their hopes are centered on its glories." They were citizens of Heaven. Let me break it down for you. When you're a Christian, your name is on record in Heaven as being a citizen of Heaven. When you're a Christian, you are to speak Heaven's language.

Have you ever traveled to foreign countries and didn't know the language? Any country that is not English speaking, I'm in trouble because that's all I can do is speak English, and I can't do that very well either. I've made several trips to China. I have a son that speaks Mandarin Chinese, I don't know how he ever learned that, but I remember spending a few weeks in China. After two weeks of hearing nothing but Cantonese and Mandarin, I just wanted to get back to the United States and hear English. I remember coming off the plane, going through customs, hearing the people speaking in the airport. I started eavesdropping on their conversations just because it was...Ahhh! It was refreshing and so nice to be able to understand what they're saying, what they're talking about. We spent hours on trains. They have propaganda televisions in the trains in China spilling out the propaganda in Chinese. We'd listen to that for hours, and I had no idea what they were talking about. When you come back to your home and speak the same language, it's like, "Ahhhh! I can understand."

With Christians, when we talk about the Lord and spiritual things, we speak Heaven's language. Unbelievers think it's like a foreign language to them, "What're you guys talking about?" They can't even relate to that. Also, because we're citizens of Heaven, we obey Heaven's laws. God's laws supersede man's laws, and when man's laws would cause us to disobey God's laws, we must obey God rather than man. We march to Heaven's laws.

Lastly, notice verse 20, "...we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ," so our name is on Heaven's record, we speak Heaven's language, we obey Heaven's laws, and we look to Heaven's Lord. I love verse 20. "For our conversation," citizenship, "is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice back in verse 8, Paul was counting; in verse 14, he was pressing; now, in verse 20, he's looking. The words "look for" is actually looking and waiting for indicating an earnest expectation. This is what Christians are exhorted to do in the Bible, "...look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ," to come again. Don't forget about the coming of the Lord. When you don't believe Jesus is coming again, you lack motivation for service and godliness and holy living. Now, he's looking. I love that. Paul's waiting and looking with anticipation.

The word "look" actually connotes the idea of stretching out the neck or twisting the neck. Sometimes when you're on the freeway and the traffic slows down, you think, There must be an accident, and the accident is on the other side of the freeway going the other direction, but your side of the freeway is rubber-necking, right? "Oh! Look at that!" "Can we just get going here?"

Yet, that's the idea that as Christians we should be stretching out the neck looking everyday for Jesus Christ to come again.

There was a man who was the President of Moody Bible Institute for years. His name was Joseph Stowell. He was in Chicago, and one day he went to visit the little children in a Christian orphanage home. As he was getting a tour of the home, he noticed that there were little handprints, the kids had their handprints all over the windows. He asked one of the directors, "Why are there so many handprints on the windows?" He said, "Because we teach the kids that Jesus is coming, and all they do everyday is stand and lean against the windows looking up for Jesus Christ to come again," so their little fingerprints are all over the glass. How apropos that is. We should be looking everyday in anticipation and expectation. If I'm going to stand with the Lord in the last days, I need to keep my eyes on Christ. He's going to be coming again for me. How marvelous that is!

This coming of the Lord is described in verse 21, "Who," so His whole title, "...the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ," we're looking for the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior. Notice these two basic things that are going to happen when the Lord comes, "shall change our vile body," body of humiliation, "that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." This is a passage on the rapture of the church. I want to make that clear. I believe this is a clear rapture passage. You say, "What do you mean by rapture?" The rapture is that event where Jesus Christ doesn't come back to earth, but He comes in the clouds. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 4, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up," the Greek word is harpazo. It means to be caught up or taken up by force. It says, "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first," that's their physical bodies, and that's touched on in this passage, then Paul says, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up," harpazo, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. That is the classic rapture passage.

The rapture is when the Lord comes back from Heaven to catch up His church, those who are living and the bodies of those who have died. They're with the Lord, He comes back with them, they are reunited with their bodies and their bodies are transformed. That's why he says our bodies will be changed, "that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body," so a metamorphosis will take place. This is a rapture passage. The rapture passages are this passage here, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, and then John 14. There are some other rapture passages, but those three, and this one, are some of the clearest passages in the Bible about the rapture. I believe the rapture happens in Revelation 4:1 when John says, "...and the first voice I heard...said, Come up, hither." That's when the rapture takes place, the church is in Heaven, Revelation 4 and 5, the tribulation starts in Revelation 6, then Jesus comes back in the Second Coming, Revelation 19, seven years later after the antichrist is revealed and makes a covenant for seven years.

The rapture is not the Second Coming. The rapture is a catching up to meet the Lord in the air. The church will come back in Revelation 19 in the Second Coming. That's the second advent, but this is a rapture passage. It pertains only to the church when all true believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and those that have died, their bodies will be resurrected.

That's so important.

Now, what happens when Jesus comes for His church? Look at verse 21. We get new bodies. Everybody that's old and decrepit says, "Amen!" Some of you young folks with your bad bods say, "Oh, I kind of like my body. I've been working on it pretty hard lately." Just stick around a little while, Buckaroo, and you'll value this verse. Notice verse 21, "Who shall change our vile body," my King James Bible says "vile," an unfortunate translation. What it literally means is humble body. Some render that bodies of humiliation. Now, you can pump it up, and build it up, you can have a bad bod, but sooner or later your bad bod's going to go bad. It's subject to humiliation. Eventually, we all do degenerate, so because sin entered the world and the curse, our bodies are subject to sickness, disease, and death. When we are raptured, we get our new bodies. This is phase three. Remember that? Justification, sanctification, glorification. He saves me, He sanctifies me, and one day I will be glorified. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so our bodies will be resurrected and we'll have glorified bodies in Heaven.

You can read all of 1 Corinthians 15, it's all about the resurrection, but it begins in verse 51 and says, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" That's the rapture. We're going to actually conquer the grave by going from life to life.

Everyone's hope, and it was Paul's hope as well, is that he would be raptured while still alive, but we can't have a guarantee that that'll happen, but it could happen. The rapture of the church is what's called "imminent." Nothing has to happen prophetically or on God's timetable for the rapture to happen. It can happen tonight, so you must be ready, watching and looking for Christ to come again.

In this verse, Paul's describing the transformation that takes place, "Who shall change our vile body," of humiliation, "that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." The body that Jesus came out of the grave with, ascended into Heaven with, is a glorified, eternal body, so are our bodies. Our bodies will still be us, but it will be new and improved. You see, flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. You cannot go to Heaven right now the way you are, you gotta have a new body to be able to breathe the air, to be able to be in the presence of God. The new body will not have any sin, it will not have any sickness, it will have no weakness. You won't have to take your blood pressure in Heaven. There'll be no inhalers in Heaven. There'll be no insulin in Heaven. There'll be no wheelchairs in Heaven. There'll be no ambulances in Heaven. There'll be no need of doctors, Jesus will be there. Our bodies will be transformed. Paul says, "Our humble bodies, our lowly bodies of humiliation, will be changed, '...like unto his glorious body,'" that's the third phase, glorification. Didn't Scripture say, "...when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." So, no matter how weak, no matter how frail, no matter how decrepit or how much pain you endure here on earth, one day it'll all be gone—no more sin, no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more tears for they'll be wiped away. What a glorious prospect that is!

This verse is so marvelous describing that we should live in anticipation of our Lord from Heaven. That's where our home is, and He's coming back. John 14 fits it perfectly, "In my Father's house...I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again," I'm going to take you to Heaven, you'll be with Me for all eternity. So, "And be found in him," verse 9, that's justification; verse 10, "...know him," that's sanctification; "...also we look for the Saviour," that's glorification.

Here's the second thing that happens when Jesus comes back, notice it says, "...he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Interestingly, I believe that statement looks forward to the Second Coming of Christ when He comes to reign on earth and establish His Kingdom for a thousand years which will flow into the eternal state. He's going to, "subdue all things unto himself."

The word "subdue" is a military word which means to arrange in rank. It means to put in order. Did you know the world is out of order? We pretty much know that, right? As much as we would like to think, politics is not going to save us. Vote? Yes, vote. Yes, be engaged. Yes, speak the truth. Yes, stand for righteousness. We're not going to save the world by voting or politics. The gospel, "...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. This world is not our home, and we're not to say, "Well, I'm not going to engage in the culture." We're to be salt and light, but we're not to think that we can vote righteousness in or legislate a new kingdom on earth.

There's a false teaching in the church, kind of a kingdom-now theology, a dominion theology where they think that church can take over the world, Christianize the world, and then the world gets good enough for Jesus to come back. Like He's up there waiting for us, "Can they get their act together so I can come back?" That ain't gonna happen. There won't be a perfect world until He that is Perfect comes, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Read Revelation 19 when He comes, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," and establishes His Kingdom on earth. He will, "...subdue all things unto himself."

In conclusion, Philippians 4:1, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown," notice Paul lavishing these endearing terms, "my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown," here's what he wants to say, "so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." That's his theme, "...stand fast in the Lord." Let's pray.