

Philippians 3:17-4:1 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. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. ^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

How do you stand firm in the Lord?

1. Remember where your citizenship is
2. Follow good role models

At the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. 300 Spartans held off thousands of Persians at the narrow coastal pass. The gripping story is told in the movie, "300." Those 300 stood firm against overwhelming odds for three days and they would have lasted longer if not betrayed by a traitor.

At the Alamo in Texas, about 100 Texians, as they were called, led by James Bowie, William Travis and Davey Crockett, held off 1500 Mexican soldiers for thirteen days in 1836. Travis gave all of them a chance to leave, but no one did. They all stood firm in the face of overwhelming forces. They stood firm until the end when General Santa Anna's army slaughtered them all.

What does it take to stand firm in the face of overwhelming odds? Where do you get that kind of courage, that kind of backbone, that willingness to die for what you believe in? The Apostle Paul, writing to the Christians in Philippi, encouraged them to stand firm in the Lord. How do you do that? How do you stand firm in the Lord?

What helps us stand firm is remembering our citizenship. *But our citizenship is in heaven.* Go to almost any college campus and you will find people from all over the world. They live here and go to school here, but they are not citizens here. Their allegiance is to their own country. They speak its language and watch its websites. We call them foreigners or aliens. Paul wants us to think of ourselves that way.

"The baptized Christian is born a citizen of heaven through baptism. We should be mindful of this fact and walk here as if native there. . . . Through baptism Christ has taken us into his hands, actually that he may exchange our sinful, condemned, perishable, physical lives for the new, imperishable righteousness and life he prepares for body and soul." (Martin Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. 8, pp. 356-357)

Perry Glanzer observed that "we enter the world as strangers not knowing who we are." Christian parenting and Christian education are to help us know our identity. Glanzer said, "Education can inform children of their identity but it can also warp their self-understanding. One study of high school text books found, 'The underlying world view of modern education divorces humankind from its dependence on God; it replaces religious answers to many of the ultimate questions of human existence with secular answers; and, most striking, public education conveys its secular understanding of reality essentially as a matter of faith.'" In other words, public education has a religion all its own. We call it secularism that removes God from everything.

Glanzer also suggested, "Young resident aliens may lose their identity unless parents and the resident alien community, the Church, carefully cultivate it." That's one reason why we spend so much money on Christian education. Through education at school and at home we want to cultivate the identity that we are citizens of heaven.

As baptized citizens of heaven, we should see ourselves as foreigners in this world. We are just visiting and we don't belong here. We are longing to go home. Think of a boy away at summer camp. He is homesick and just wants to go home and sleep in his own bed. He wants to get away from the greasy camp food and eat his mother's home cooking. He wants to get away from the bullies at camp and be with his friends. He looks forward to Friday when mom and dad said they would be back to get him.

And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul wrote. Jesus promised that he would be back to get us and so we look forward to that day when he will come back to take us home. Jesus promised, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3)

But what will it be like there, in heaven? I think that is the most asked question a pastor receives. We don't know a lot about what it will be like but Paul tells us this: *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Do you like your body? For young people body image is very important. It can contribute to how they feel about themselves as a person. As we get older, it's not so important. Many give up on their body image altogether. Some like the old joke that says, "I'm in shape. Round is a shape."

Paul tells us here that Jesus will transform our lowly bodies. Our bodies are lowly. No matter how good of shape you are in, our bodies get sick. They become diseased. They have things like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. No matter how good your health is, at some point you will get old; your body will get weak and it will cease to function altogether.

But Jesus promises to glorify these bodies. He will raise up the very same bodies that we will leave in the grave, but they will be glorified. No more subject to decay, disease or death. They will function perfectly and live eternally.

So if we want to stand firm in the Lord, we always need to remember our identity. We are strangers here. Heaven is our home. And in order to get home we need to stand firm in the Lord. We do that by also following good role models.

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. Paul is not talking about unbelievers; he's talking about those who would call themselves Christians, but live contrary to their identity. Earlier in this letter Paul called them the circumcision group. These were false teachers who were claiming that you had to follow the Old Testament law to be a real Christian. Their god is their gut, he says. They are driven by their appetites for more – more honor, more prestige, more money, more followers. Their glory is in their shame. They brag about their circumcision as if that is their glory.

Their mind is set on earthly things. All their planning, thinking, desires and wants are focused on this life. They can't look beyond the horizons of this world. These are not the role models for us to follow. They are not helping people stand firm in the Lord. Just the opposite, *Their destiny is destruction.*

Instead, Paul tells us, *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.* We stand firm in the Lord by imitating Paul and those like him. And what did Paul do? He considered everything rubbish apart from Christ. Christ is not only the means of our salvation; he is the ultimate good in this life and the next. He is the One who should occupy our thoughts and our dreams. He is the One for whom we are waiting, and whose coming we desire. That's the pattern Paul gave us and that's the example we should follow.

Paul's words give a reason to stop and ask ourselves: Could we invite others to look to us as examples? Does our life show Christ in all that we do and say? The world desperately needs such examples, because there are all too many bad examples around.

So how do we stand firm in the Lord? We can stand firm when we remember our identity. We are citizens of heaven. So we stand firm in the Lord when we live as citizens of heaven. Regular use of the Lord's Supper helps us to reinforce our identity as citizens of heaven. That's why we want to make use of it often. We stand firm in the Lord when we know and follow the life and teachings of those who stood in the past.

We are not like the 300 at Thermopylae or the Texans at the Alamo. We may face overwhelming odds in our battle against Satan, the world and our flesh, but we never stand alone. Jesus who died for us and rose again is with us always until he transforms us to heaven. *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*