

Theme: CONFORM TO CHRIST

- I. We imitate Paul's example of faith and life
- II. We belong in heaven, from which we await our Savior
- III. We await our Savior in steadfast faith

Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13, EHV)

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 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!

Fellow citizens of the heavenly kingdom,

The little girl in the bathroom tries her best to put on her mother's make-up, just like mom does it. The two-year-old boy puts on dad's shoes and walks around in them. The toddler brushes his hair just like his father does. Children learn by example. But they can also pick up bad behaviors from bad examples. Although children, like all people, are inherently sinful, kids weren't born knowing naughty words, nor did they come to this world angry at traffic. Parents are important models for their children.

As we follow Christ, we have lots of models. Parents, pastors, teachers, sponsors, family, friends; in the portion of God's Word we consider today, we also see the apostle Paul is a model of the faith. As we follow him, we see his encouragement to us is to CONFORM TO CHRIST. Jesus isn't just a model to build your life around; he shapes your life around himself.

Paul puts himself forward as a model of the Christian faith. He encourages brothers and sisters to follow his example. But what part of his example do we want to follow? Clearly he doesn't mean his past—persecuting the Church. No, Paul encourages us to follow the example of his faith and the life that follows.. But Paul doesn't simply tell us to take him at his word! He encourages us to “**keep our eyes on those who live**” as he does. With those words, Paul tells us to hold up his example—and the example of those like him—and scrutinize it. We are to test and examine it.

The factory worker does that. Thousands of products fly by, and in an instant, he or she compares them to the model. Yet if the example they compare all the products to is flawed, the end result will be flawed too. If the model is right, then the products must conform to it to pass the test of quality.

Paul also points to the product as the test by which we are to scrutinize our examples. The end result of those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ? Destruction. The outcome of their way of life is eternal death.

But do you weep over them, as Paul does? Or is there ever a part of you that is glad they'll get what's coming to them? After all, it's what they've earned. They made those choices. They followed bad examples.

And so do I. And so do you. How many of us haven't served our stomachs more than our God at some point? Who hasn't worried about worldly woes instead of pondering the promise of paradise? And the disgraceful things you've reveled in—you know them. What things would you be ashamed to admit you've done? You know the sins you keep going back to. We haven't lived up to the model. A part of me hates this section of God's Word because it reveals how defective I am. I ought to be pulled off the product line and thrown into the garbage.

That is the outcome of that way of life. Destruction. The end of the line. *Any* compromise of sin makes enemies of the cross because it ignores what the cross is: God's judgment on sin. But in that cross, in that judgment also lies our hope.

Although the destiny of God's enemies is destruction, that is not the end of Paul's model. In English, the word "but" marks a contrast, but in Greek it's the same word translated "for" in verse 18. Paul gives another reason to follow his model: "**For our citizenship is in heaven.**" Those who imitate Paul's life belong in heaven. That's the result of Paul's example. Why?

The answer is the very next words: "**We eagerly await a Savior from there.**" Those who admit they haven't followed the right examples, but instead wait for a Savior, will be saved. By faith we understand we belong in heaven because of the Savior.

As we await the Savior from heaven, by faith we look back to his first coming. He came down from heaven because we didn't CONFORM TO CHRIST. And he set a new pattern. Instead of the pattern of glory that is in shame, his pattern was humble love. He conformed to his Father's will. God's judgment on sin came down on Jesus, not on you. He humbled himself to the point of death. He came to the cross to carry your sin and mine. There, he saves. That's what a Savior does. He delivers us. He saves us from being God's enemies. He saves us from the destruction of hell. He saves us from ourselves.

By faith in Jesus, you can be sure you are going to heaven. There's no doubt about it. That's the outcome of imitating Paul's pattern—the pattern of trusting in Jesus and his power. It isn't our efforts to follow his example, but Jesus' own power to save that makes us citizens of heaven. Even now, we set our thoughts on heavenly things. We don't belong in this world. We are in the world, but the world is not in us. Instead, we CONFORM TO CHRIST.

And if that sounds impossible for you to do, it's not impossible for Jesus. It's his own power that CONFORMS YOU TO CHRIST. His power brings everything under his control. He is the ruler of the heavenly kingdom. He conforms you to his image. It's a transformation that happens after Jesus has rescued you. This is the outcome of the way of faith. Jesus transforms you to be like him.

It's like an extreme makeover. If you're not familiar with that show, or with the home edition that followed on its success, the premise is simple enough: show runners would pick ordinary people with various problems and transform their looks or their houses to make them stunning. Jesus performs his own extreme makeover on us. He conforms us into his pattern. The pattern is lowliness, humility. That's where it starts. Like Jesus humbled himself on earth, we remain humble and lowly during our earthly life. We remain in our lowly bodies. Bodies still subject to the effects of sin. Bodies in which we continue to struggle against sin. Jesus defeated our sin on the cross, and he rose. He ascended into heaven. When he returns in glory, he will also transform us. We will join him in glory. He will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body. Our bodies will no longer be susceptible to the effects of sin! No more decay or sorrow. No more pain or funerals. Jesus died for sin once for all. By faith, we take hold of this pattern. By faith we understand the Christ will transform us to be like him.

In light of all this, Paul encourages the Philippians and us to stand firm. He tells us to “stand firm in the Lord.” The way we stand firm in the Lord is to follow the example of Paul. It is to imitate his faith. We put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who saves. We cling to Jesus and his promises. We CONFORM TO CHRIST as we follow Paul’s example. We imitate Paul’s faith, trusting Jesus’ power.

And we imitate Paul’s example of life. No, you don’t have to live as a 1st-century missionary or become a preacher. Instead, we follow Paul who himself sought to CONFORM TO CHRIST. By faith we imitate Christ, much like children imitate parents. We know he loves us. To love him back we imitate that love in the world.

Can you see how Paul did it? Look how many words Paul uses to show his concern for the Philippians! He calls them, “my brothers and sisters, you whom I long for, my joy and my crown” and lastly “dear friends.” Of those words, consider just the last: dear friends. The word is the kind of love that sacrifices all for the good of another. It’s the kind of love that Jesus himself showed on the cross. As Jesus gave his life for his brothers, Paul cared deeply for the Philippians. Follow that pattern. CONFORM TO CHRIST. Love one another! Check up on each other! Ask what you can sacrifice for each other. As you wait eagerly for the return of the Lord, walk together in love and faith! Encourage each other.

And remember where home is. We say home is where the heart is. Your citizenship is heaven. That’s where we belong. Consider the heavenly things. Watch for Jesus. Like children mimic their parents, imitate Paul’s faith. Follow the faith of all who believe what Paul believed. CONFORM TO CHRIST because he saved you from your sins and will transform your body to be glorious, like his. Stand firm in this faith until the Lord comes again. Amen.

“The things that you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: Keep doing these things. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:9, EHV)