

"Whose Side Are You On?"

Text: Philippians 3:17-4:1

May the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ lead you to contemplate and appreciate the priceless gift that was thereby earned for you – the forgiveness of your sins and Eternal Life. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Has anyone ever asked you the question that serves as our theme this morning? Usually they add an "anyway" at the end, as in "Whose side are you on, anyway?" The question itself usually hints at betrayal. "I thought you were on my side, but what you just said or did makes me wonder." What if Jesus himself were the one asking the question of you? How would you answer? Obviously we would all answer with a passionate, "Yours Lord!" Is that, though, what our day to day words and actions would indicate? Do the friends that we choose, the clothes that we wear, the way we manage all that the Lord has given us declare our allegiance to our Savior, or do something else? Would Jesus have to ask, or would the answer be obvious to all who know or observe us? Jesus himself once said that we could not be friends with the world and friends with him at the same time. Sobering, isn't it?

Joshua once asked a similar question of the Jews as they entered the Promised Land. Our text for this morning does the same of us. That text is found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, beginning in the Third Chapter:

^{NKJ} **Philippians 3:17 - 4:1** *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 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: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. 4:1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.*

These are the words of God. Here – when dealing with the Word of God – we never need to be on our guard or skeptical, for here we have only truth and light. That our God would today guide and strengthen us through

these words, so we pray: "**Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Would it be too extreme to suggest that the Christian Church today needs something like a military IFF system to identify friend or foe? You've probably heard of that system. Every allied aircraft sends out a coded signal identifying itself as friendly to all other allied aircraft. Our text seems to indicate that something along that order is absolutely necessary in the spiritual realm. In fact that is the sum and substance of our text for this morning, where we are not only encouraged to identify both friends and foes, but also how to do so and why it is so important. Surely this is the kind of nuts and bolts practical advice that every single child of God ought to treasure.

First of all, then, just who are your true enemies, how do you identify them, and why is that process so important?

It is probably safe to say that gentle Christian folk don't tend to think in terms of having enemies. Enemies – as the world thinks of enemies – are for the cut-throat movers and shakers of this world. The rich and powerful are the ones who have enemies, for the most part because they *make* enemies. Those who want to be something in this life are generally not afraid to grapple and claw their way to the top, stomping on anything and everything in their path. Folks like that just come to expect that they will have enemies – and generally do.

But what about those who care very little for the things of this world? What about those who live instead for the world to come – **whose citizenship is in heaven**? How or why should we be concerned with the identification of enemies?

The fact is it is precisely because we don't tend to think in those terms that we need the warning of the Holy Spirit in our text for this morning. We need to be reminded of the facts of life *as they apply to Christians living in a sinful world.*

So just who are our enemies? Pay attention here, because the answer may surprise you. Everyone can identify those who pose a physical threat as at least a potential enemy. No one has any trouble identifying ax murderers and sexual predators, for example, as those that you are probably not going to invite to backyard family cookouts. But that's not the sort of thing that Paul is talking about, is it? He's talking about "mutilators" of a much more dangerous sort.

Some of the history of the congregation in Philippi might be helpful here. The congregation in Philippi was founded by the Holy Spirit during Paul's Second Missionary Journey. You may recall how Paul first preached to some women as they prayed on the banks of the Gangites River. There were apparently so few Jews in the area that no synagogue had been established in Philippi, so those who worshipped did so at a spot along the river. The first converts to Christianity in this area were Lydia and her family, with whom Paul later found lodging. The city, you may also recall, was thrown into an uproar by those who suffered economic loss when Paul cast the demon out of their fortune-telling maiden. On a subsequent visit, Paul was imprisoned and there met and converted the jailer and his family. The congregation eventually grew to be one of the most important in Macedonia.

So who were the enemies against whom Paul warned? The pagan Romans? The unbelieving Jews? The Philippians actually had no trouble identifying such threats. Their hatred and animosity was painfully evident. Who then? Who was it that represented such a subtle yet deadly threat that Paul found it necessary to send this warning to his beloved Philippians? The problem was not those who had already identified themselves as enemies; it was those who had been identifying themselves as friends. The threat did not come from without; it came from within. The Philippians knew to lock their doors, but did they know to look in their closets?

There was in Philippi a group that came to be known as the Judaizers. Maybe you've heard of them. In general, the Judaizers were those who tried to blend Christianity with the religion of the Jews. What made the problem so difficult was that what these false teachers promoted *seemed* right. The problem with the Judaizers was that they held to a perverse form of the Jewish religion. Old Testament Jews were saved the same way we are today – through faith in the Savior. The Old Testament faith looked forward, while ours looks backwards. Over the centuries, however, the Jews had corrupted their faith, opting instead for a religion by which they tried to earn their path to heaven by their works. The result was that when Christ finally appeared, they developed a perverse sort of religion by which one must not only believe in Jesus, but supplement or augment that belief with certain works that had to be performed. The most notable was circumcision – and so it was that Paul came to label them "*the mutilators.*"

Any of this starting to sound familiar? If it doesn't yet, it almost certainly will in a bit.

It really isn't hard to see how this perversion of the true Christian faith would resonate with the Jews. Many of the Jews had been raised on the idea that God's love had to be earned by human action. They had been taught, from little on, that only the wicked failed to celebrate the prescribed festivals, eat the proper food, and offer the required sacrifices. To fail to circumcise your son, in their minds, was to exclude that son from God's love and the kingdom of heaven. That's what they'd been taught; that's how they'd been raised.

While God certainly had commanded such things as symbols and reminders of the coming Savior, everything changed when that Savior finally arrived. Paul described all of these things as "***shadows of things to come.***" (Colossian 2) The need for all such things ended – found their completion – in Jesus.

That is why Paul had to identify the Judaizers as enemies. They didn't *seem* like enemies. They undoubtedly *seemed* like good, moral people who were just trying to do the right thing. I have little doubt that they were compassionate, conscientious, and moral – good people all.

Yet Paul described them as "***enemies of the cross of Christ.***" Hear his words well. Allow them to sink in and struggle to come to terms with their full import. "***Enemies of the cross of Christ!***"

How could they be? How was that possible? The same way that it was possible for Jesus to have to say to Peter, "***Get behind me, Satan.***" The "cross of Christ" is not just an object; it is the symbol that represents an entire religious conviction. "The cross" represents the simple truth that Jesus Christ alone saves. It was Jesus, not man, who appeased God's wrath toward sin through his innocent death on the cross. In this way "the cross" stands in direct opposition to any and all work righteousness. To imagine that man must add *anything at all* to pay for his sins is to exist as an enemy of Christ Jesus and the cross that he alone could bear. "***Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law.***"

Our text says of such enemies that "***their god is their belly.***" What in the world does that mean? Were they drunkards and gluttons? Maybe, but there is probably more, since such perversions would have been easily identified by God-fearing folk everywhere. While we tend to think of the heart as the seat of emotion, the people in Paul's day thought in terms of the stomach or "belly." (We actually have something similar when say things like "*Go with your gut.*") Thus

these enemies could very well have been very pious individuals *who were nonetheless guided by their own gut instincts of what was true and right, rather than by the Word of God.* To them it just *seemed* right that man must do his part – and that then became their truth, their religious conviction.

What were the stakes here? They couldn't be higher, since Paul says of these enemies: **"Their end is destruction."** Clearly time to sit up and take notice, for not only is this a question of heaven or hell, the Church today is being attacked by the very same enemies.

Though Paul took no pleasure in pointing out such adversaries (**"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping..."**) point them out he did – repeatedly. The danger is that great. Across the ages he now calls out also to you and me, and today, if anything, the danger is even greater. Many Christian churches today have turned to spiritual mush. They pose a clear and present danger to the true faith precisely because they are now guided not by the Word of God but by their own "bellies" or emotions. Whatever *feels* right is right. They seek to blend much more than just abortion, homosexuality, and the like with the cross. They effectively do away with the cross altogether by allowing that there are many paths to God and by denying the absolute truth of God's Word.

Our text represents the New Testament equivalent of Joshua's call, challenging you to identify which side you are really on: the One True God, or one of the others. In practical terms words such as these teach us that dear old Aunt Millie and Uncle Albert – devout folk who believe that they are earning heaven by their words – are to be identified as spiritual enemies. Friendly, likeable Cousin Bill and his family – pious Mormons – spiritual enemies of the cross. Sisters, brothers, friends – anyone who adheres to something other than salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ – enemies all of the cross of Christ. Harsh? Certainly. Bitterly frustrating? Clearly. Why else do you suppose Paul wept at the very thought? Yet denying the reality of the situation does nothing at all to help the situation.

This is exactly the sort of thing that Jesus was talking about when he referred to the sword that would divide even the closest family ties. Today, more than ever, we need to recognize that there are two sides in this struggle. All who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are enemies... *but enemies that can and must be won!* That's exactly why Paul also said that Christians are supposed to be **"more than conquerors."** Our goal is not to defeat our enemies but to win them over.

Dear Christians do not lose sight of the nature of the struggle we are in, nor of the very clear line between friend and foe that has been established by our God. Ignorance is not bliss and apathy damns. There is one narrow road to heaven, and that is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. In him alone we have full and complete forgiveness for our countless sins. Because of Jesus Christ, we too will one day share in that glorious transformation described by Paul in our text. Therefore **"stand fast in the Lord."** Because of your God-given faith in Jesus Christ, you are on the right side – the winning side – and you have the mandate to make that winning side even bigger. Identify your enemies, and by the power of the Word of God turn them into true Christian friends. Amen.

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Jeremiah 26:8-15** Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die!"⁹ "Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant?'" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.¹⁰ When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the LORD's house.¹¹ And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, "This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears."¹² Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard."¹³ "Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you."¹⁴ "As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you."¹⁵ "But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

NKJ **Luke 13:31-35** On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You."³² And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.'³³ "Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem."³⁴ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"³⁵ "See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

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The Second Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#148- (Verses 1-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 15.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 26:8-15) Speaking God's Word faithfully has always involved a risk. The first is that man might hear and reject the path to life. The second danger is that those who reject the message then vent their rage and frustration upon those who brought them God's Word. Note that both of these dangers lie outside of our control. The same One who called us to speak has also promised to protect us.

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 13:31-35) Hundreds of years after Jeremiah spoke the words of our Old Testament lesson, the Jews still had not learned their lesson. They still refused to hear the words of those sent by God. Their rejection of the Son of God, contrary to His will, sealed their doom.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Red Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#457- (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have In Jesus"

The Sermon - Text: Philippians 3:17-4:1 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Whose Side Are You On?"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Red Hymnal page 22

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#310- (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24)

The Distribution -#306- (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Hast Prepared"

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 29)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#644- (Red Hymnal)

"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (49) 2010 Average (49) Wednesday (33)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC – Pastor Joel Fleischer is considering the calls to Clarkston and Orofino. Jamestown has scheduled a call meeting for this coming Wednesday.

Council Notes – Five Council members plus the Pastor attended the Feb. 23 meeting. Full minutes and financial reports are available from Sec. Loren Ollenburger and Treas. Fred Adams. Offerings for January fell short of budgeted needs by \$1,118. Expenses were \$473 under budget for a net loss of \$645 in January. Several property-related items need attention, including the portable microphone (repair/replace \$230), the basement carpeting (replace \$500), and the storerooms (clean/arrange). Trustee Coordinator Baumgarten asks that anyone who finds any of the wooden pew buttons return them to his mailbox. Council voted to switch to a different paper towel dispenser to reduce cost and eliminate waste. Council is reviewing and updating the Usher-Cleaner duties. This year's Confirmation date will be set in consultation with Hansen family.

Easter Flowers – Last day to sign up for Easter Flowers.

CLC History Books – Those who have signed up are asked to pre-pay. Books will be delivered mid-March.