

"Conformation Prevents Transformation"

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 whose side you were on? 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 makes me wonder.*” What if Jesus himself were the one asking the question of you? How would you answer? Obviously with a passionate, “*Yours Lord!*” Our day-to-day words and actions sometimes tell a different story. The friends that we choose, the clothes that we wear, our speech, our actions, and the way we manage all the time and treasures that the Lord has given us don’t always declare our allegiance to our Savior. Our goal, of course, is that our commitment to our Savior would be so obvious no one would have to ask. That’s part of what we ask each day in the Lord’s Prayer when we pray, “*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*” No one ever has to ask God’s holy angels whose side they are on. Nothing they ever do or say ever calls their allegiance into question.

You and I are not holy angels. So it is that our text for this morning asks the question of us, and does so for a reason that could not possibly be more important, since *conformation to this godless world prevents the transformation that our Savior wants to be ours*. That text is found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, beginning with the 17th verse the Third Chapter:

^{ESV} **Philippians 3:17 - 4:1** *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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. ¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*

This is God’s Word. 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 his own words, so we pray: “**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**” Amen.

Secular entities recognize the obvious need to distinguish between “friend and foe.” The military has whole complex systems designed to quickly and definitively identify who is an ally and who is an enemy. How important do you suppose it is today for the Christian Church to do the same? Our text speaks to the absolute necessity of doing just that. That is, in fact, the central message 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*.

Gentle Christian folk tend to bristle at the thought of “enemies.” Enemies – as the world thinks of enemies – are for the cutthroat 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, claw and scratch their way to the top, stomping on anything and everything in their path. Individuals 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 – those ***whose citizenship is in heaven?*** How or why should we be concerned with the identification of enemies?

It is no doubt precisely because we don't tend to think in terms of “enemies” 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? 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.

The congregation in Philippi, to which our text was addressed, was founded by the Holy Spirit through Paul during his 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, who then invited Paul to stay with them. The city, you may also recall, was later thrown into turmoil 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 in Philippi against whom Paul warned? Surprisingly, not the pagan Romans or the unbelieving Jews. The Philippians had no trouble identifying those threats. The hatred and animosity of the Jews and Romans 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. Paul's warning referred to those who had been identifying themselves as friends. The threat did not come from without; it came from within. This enemy wasn't pounding on the locked front door; they were already standing boldly among them. Paul needed to make sure the Philippians knew exactly how to identify them.

The enemy in Philippi was the group that came to be known as the Judaizers. 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 Judaizers 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 – both looked in faith to the same Savior. 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, the Judaizers developed a perverse religion that tried to blend salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus with salvation by works. The most notable work they demanded was circumcision – which is why Paul came to refer to them as *"the mutilators."*

It really isn't hard to see how this perversion of the true Christian faith both started and resonated 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 had been taught, that's how they had been raised, so when Jesus finally arrived they just tried to *add* him to their existing belief system – something akin to trying to mix light with darkness.

That's exactly why Paul had to identify the Judaizers as enemies. They didn't *seem* like enemies. They undoubtedly *seemed* like good, moral, extraordinarily religious people who were just trying to do the right thing.

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"!**

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. "The cross" therefore 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. So also Paul wrote to the Romans: **"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law."**

It would be impossible to overstate the importance of Paul's warning, since he says of those 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 same threat is a very real and present danger for God's Children today.

Though Paul took no pleasure in pointing out such adversaries (**"...of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears ..."**) he nonetheless felt the need to identify them – 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. Every church today that preaches spiritual mush poses a clear and present danger to the true faith. Every church body that is guided not by the Word of God but by society or by their own thoughts or emotions – by whatever *feels* right – represents a threat to all who cling only to the truth of God's Word and what that Word teaches. Those who truly understand and trust in **"the cross of Christ"** must also conclude that there are not "many paths to God." Every such alternate path is a denial of Christ and the cross, and therefore a path that can lead only to eternal torment in hell. In fact you will not find a better definition of "enemy" than one who promotes a

path that will lead unavoidably to hell.

Yet note two additional truths in our text. First, there was nothing prideful or mean-spirited about Paul's warning. Paul was not gloating. He was not pointing to himself as better. The fact that some existed as enemies of the cross of Christ broke his heart. Why else would he write that he is telling them these things "**with tears**"?

Which brings us to the other great truth in this text, which is the very purpose for Christians to honestly identify who is actually an enemy of the cross. We are to identify them as such *because they are souls that can and must be won*. Note that Paul does not say they are *our* enemies but that through their unbelief they exist as enemies of the cross. Identifying enemies of the cross means identifying targets for our Christian love and witness. It means identifying those that desperately need the very thing we have been commissioned to share with them. That's exactly why Paul also said that Christians are supposed to be "**more than conquerors**." Our goal is not to destroy unbelievers but to win them over. How can we win over those who are living in unbelief if we refuse even to identify who they are? How is it loving to allow someone, anyone, to die peacefully as an enemy of the cross of Christ?

The first step then has to be to recognize the ongoing crisis that is unbelief. The second is to recognize that unbelievers conform to the world, and conforming to the world prevents the transformation also mentioned in our text. Here we see the true, ultimate Christian love in Paul's message. He is not telling us to identify enemies of the cross so that we can know who to hate but to identify who desperately needs what we have to share. We want for them what has been given to us – life eternal, undeserved, through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

So also our text does not leave us with bitterness, anger, arrogance, or hatred. It identifies the amazing gift that our God wants to share with those who are not now in line to inherit it, which is the *transformation* that will be given to every single one of God's children on the Last Day. Hear again the incredible promise that God the Holy Spirit holds out to us in our text: ***But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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.***

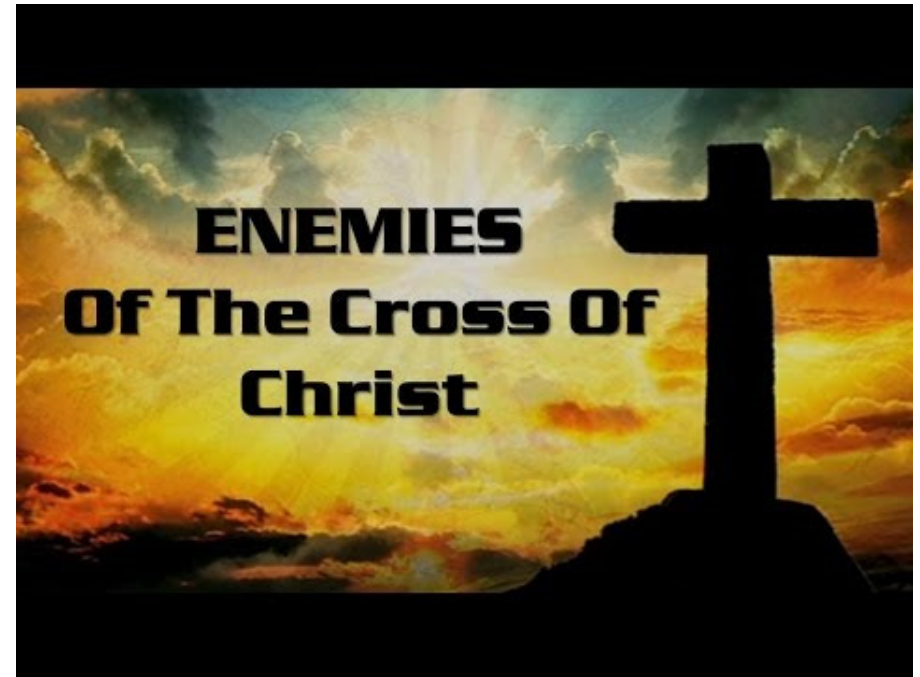
Conformation to the world prevents this transformation. Thus the obvious need for Paul's warning. It does no one any good to pretend that all will be well for those who do not trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their

sins. Ignorance is not bliss and apathy damns. There is one narrow road to heaven, and that is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. He alone is light and life. 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. Again, no pridefulness here. No arrogance of condescension. Only peace and joy – which we can freely share because we have been given a never-ending supply. Amen.

ESV **Jeremiah 26:8-15** And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall 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 inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.¹⁰ ¶ When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD.¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."¹² ¶ Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard.¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you.¹⁴ But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you.¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

ESV **Luke 13:31-35** At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."³² And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'³³ Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!³⁵ Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

ESV **Philippians 3:17 - 4:1** Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ 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.¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Second Sunday in Lent – March 16, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 3 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First 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 might 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 and to bless our witness.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 23 (Page 36)

The Second 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, finally, of the Son of God himself sealed their doom. Be aware, however, that we today share the unbeliever's natural tendency to reject that which we don't want to hear. We too need to be open to correction.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 296 (SoC)

"In Silent Pain the Eternal Son"

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

"Conformation Prevents Transformation"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn -144 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -144 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (40) Wednesday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Jonathon Schnose has returned the call to Faith of Manchester, MO. That congregation has now called Pastor Paul Krause. Pastor Caleb Schaller has accepted the calls to the tri-parish of Grace of Valentine, NE, Peace of Mission, SD, and St. Paul's of White River, SD. St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA has called Pastor Thomas Schuetze.

Midweek Lenten Services – A reminder that our Midweek Lenten services continue every Wednesday evening through April 9th.

Easter Flowers – The deadline for ordering Easter flowers is next Sunday. There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for all who would like to place an order.

CLC Youth Camp – Registration for the camp at Pillager opened yesterday, March 15th. The camp is open to students entering grades 6-12. For more information: <https://youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp>

Singing to the Lord a New Song – Our second hymn this morning is from the new hymnal and is therefore new to us. As we have in the past, it will be introduced by a duet singing the first stanza with the congregation joining in stanzas 2 and 3.