

Sermon for October 4, 2026 – The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 3:17-4:1 (EHV)

Theme: **Stand Firm in the LORD.**

- 1) Weeping for Christ's enemies.
- 2) Rejoicing in your Christian Commonwealth.

¹⁷Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body. ¹So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends.

We live in a society that is hostile to biblical Christianity – not only outside the Church, but within. What do I mean? The norms and values of the Western world have shifted, questioning all authority, especially that of the Bible. Less obvious are the shifts happening in Christianity. Some church bodies are changing with the world: approaching God's Word with the same relativistic approach as secular society, trying to explain away what the Bible clearly calls sin as not actually being sin. Other church bodies go to the other extreme: making regulations and laws where God has not. The problem is that neither approach keeps our focus on Christ and the salvation He won for us. Both approaches focus on ourselves and our own subjective interpretations of the Bible.

So how should we respond to the pressure we feel to adapt, change, or give up our simple God-given faith in Christ? The same way Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi. **Stand Firm in the LORD.** 1) Weeping for Christ's enemies. 2) Rejoicing in your Christian Commonwealth.

Part One: Stand Firm in the LORD... Weeping for Christ's enemies.

Our situation today is not all that different from what Christians in Philippi faced in Paul's day. The issues of homosexuality, abortion, abuse, greed, violence, and selfishness were alive and well in the Roman Empire. The way people defended those sins may have differed from today, but they were nevertheless present. On top of this, false teachers infiltrated the Christian Church. Some taught that the Gospel gave people a license to sin.ⁱ Others taught that faith in Christ was not enough to save – that Christians also had to keep Old Testament Sabbath, dietary, and circumcision laws. It is against this group, known as "Judaizers," that the apostle Paul warns his original readers.

Outwardly, these Judaizers put on a good show. They looked like ultra-pious Christians: perfect examples for the Philippians to follow. But their teachings led people away from Christ –

encouraging the Philippians to put their trust in their own righteousness, rather than Christ's. It was a deceptively dangerous doctrine.

Instead of following the example of the Judaizers, the apostle Paul encourages: ¹⁷*Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you.*

To be clear, Paul is not telling people to follow his example because of how great he is. Shortly before our text, he confessed all his former self-righteousness as “rubbish” compared to the righteousness that is offered to us through faith in Jesus. He explains how he keeps pressing to take hold of Christ because Christ Jesus took hold of him.ⁱⁱ He wants to grow ever in his faith by keeping his eyes fixed on Jesus and the everlasting life Christ won for him on the cross.

Paul wants all Christians to imitate him in keeping Christ's cross before our eyes at every time, place, and aspect of our lives. Clinging to the Gospel in such faith naturally affects our speech, actions, and behaviour as the Holy Spirit works in us a desire to thank God for His wonderful salvation. And notice that the apostle doesn't just invite us to follow his example, but to “*join together*” in imitating him. He wants us Christians to encourage each other in our faith. Alone, we easily waver. Together we stand strong.

And we need the Holy Spirit to work through our mutual encouraging of each other with the Gospel. Why? Paul explains:

¹⁸*To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping.* ¹⁹*Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things.*

To whom is Paul referring with these words: the Judaizers or the immoral Roman society that surrounded them? The answer, I believe, is both. You see, anyone who puts anything ahead of Jesus – regardless of how pious they might otherwise seem – becomes an enemy of the cross. How so? Unless centred in Christ, all teachings (even if they seem holy) steer people away from Jesus and onto themselves. Though very opposite, both legalism (making laws where Scripture doesn't) and moral relativism (claiming there's no absolute truth) make a person's own feelings into a god. Both focus on earthly living rather than on Christ and His work for us. Both separate people from Jesus and end in destruction.

And it's not just the world that falls into these sins. We do too. Our sinful pride wants to believe that it can earn God's extra favour by going over and above what He commands. It wants to stand smugly in judgment over people who don't come to church as often, volunteer as much, or do the things that we do. On the other hand, our sinful flesh is constantly attempting to redefine God's law to permit the questionable things we want to do. It says stuff like, “Getting wasted is obviously a sin, but getting tipsy should be okay.” “It's obviously wrong to sleep with someone you have no intention of marrying, but it should be okay if we're engaged.” “It's wrong to hit someone, but I should be able to express my anger to him in words.” Yes, the outside world is not the only one tempted to live as enemies of the cross. Our sinful flesh tempts us to do the same.

Praise God for the undeserved love, patience, and mercy He exhibits towards His enemies – not wanting a single one of them to be lost.ⁱⁱⁱ How did God demonstrate this grace to us? While we were still His enemies, God sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself by dying on the cross for our sins.^{iv}

If Jesus did that for us while we were still His enemies, what should our attitude be toward those who still are His enemies, who try to entice or force us away from Christ? Should we wish evil on them? No, God's Word encourages us to weep over them instead.

Considering all the persecution Paul experienced from the unbelieving Jews, Judaizers, and unbelieving Gentiles, why would Paul weep over them? Because he knew they would end up in hell if they didn't repent. Understanding this truth moved the Apostle to stand firm in his mission of sharing the Gospel with everyone, prayerfully hopeful that even enemies of the cross would repent and be saved.

God wants you to have the same attitude: praying for those who may persecute you in the same way that Jesus prayed for the very people that crucified Him, saying: "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*"^v

Why does God want you to do this? One reason is to keep you sharing the Gospel with the people in your life – returning any hatred or hostility you may face with love and mercy. That is what it means to speak the truth in love.^{vi} Another reason is to prevent you from following the world – understanding that most of what our godless society champions has no lasting value. It's only in Christ that you find your true purpose and hope, as the apostle Paul writes:

Part Two: Stand Firm in the LORD... Rejoicing in your Christian Commonwealth.

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body.

The word translated in our text as "citizenship" could be more literally translated as "commonwealth" - a word to which the Christians in Philippi could easily relate. Why? Because Philippi was a Roman colony.^{vii} Even though its citizens lived in a strange land, far from home, they were governed by Roman law and protected by Roman power. They were proud to belong to Rome even if it seemed so far away.

By faith in Jesus, we Christians are part of a more beautiful and greater commonwealth of people, spanning every continent on earth. The LORD of heaven is our king; by faith we are His citizens.^{viii} He will never abandon nor forsake us.^{ix} He promises to rescue us from all our enemies,^x including death.^{xi} How can we be so sure? Because He suffered, died, and rose again for our salvation. It is finished – our sins are paid for in full. We are reconciled to God. All that remains is our bodily redemption,^{xii} which will happen when He comes again on the Last Day to bring us home to paradise.^{xiii}

I imagine Canadian soldiers, serving overseas or way up north, probably get homesick as the days drag on. They treasure letters and care packages from family and friends because they remind them of home and give them hope. Similarly, we Christians are strangers in this world. Heaven is our home. Living as foreigners in the world might make us feel lonely and homesick. How wonderful it is for us to receive God's letters and care packages – His Word and Sacraments. Through these means of grace, He gives us hope, reminding us of what's coming. Through these means He encourages Christians to band together under the Gospel to encourage one another as the Day of our deliverance inches ever closer.^{xiv}

The Apostle says: *So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends.*

Because we belong to God's heavenly Commonwealth by faith, Paul encourages us to stand firm together – doing all we can to encourage one another in the truth. And this last verse of our text shows us how.

Paul calls the recipients of this letter his “brothers” – family members he loves and longs to see. They were his joy and crown of victory because their faith showed that he had not laboured in vain.^{xv} They gave him hope and encouragement in the difficulties and trials he faced. Even when he was far away from them – stuck under Roman house arrest, he nevertheless rejoiced in the heavenly commonwealth he shared with them.

Let Paul's example spur you to find joy in each other, brothers and sisters in Christ, as we encourage one another to stand firm in our common faith. The secular world and false Christian teachers put a lot of pressure on us to give up our faith. How wonderful it is that God has given us each other to encourage one another through Word and Sacrament. As we lead each other to Christ and His promises in Scripture, we both strengthen and are strengthened to live our lives to His glory. His mercy moves us to weep for His enemies and do all we can to share the Gospel with them in love. May the LORD ever lead us to treasure our Christian commonwealth in His Word, standing firm in His Gospel as we eagerly wait for Him to fulfil His last promise to deliver us home to Himself in paradise. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Jude 1:4

ⁱⁱ Cf. Philippians 3:12

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Peter 3:9

^{iv} Cf. Romans 5:10

^v Luke 23:34 EHV

^{vi} Cf. Ephesians 4:15

^{vii} Cf. Acts 16:12

^{viii} Cf. Ephesians 2:19

^{ix} Cf. Hebrews 13:5

^x Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

^{xi} Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

^{xii} Cf. Romans 8:23 & 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

^{xiii} Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

^{xiv} Cf. Hebrews 10:25

^{xv} Cf. Philippians 2:16