

LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

STUDY TEN

It's a Mad, Bad, Sad World, But . . .

Philippians 3:17–4:1

The role of the Christian is unusual, but it is not impossible. I suppose the best words to use would be, our role is unique. We have a unique relationship as compared to all other living beings on earth . . . for our citizenship literally is in heaven.

—Charles R. Swindoll

EVEN though the earth is not our home, it is, for the present time, our residence. And living here, we face powerful pressure to abandon our heavenly Father and adopt the prodigal lifestyle of a lost and rebellious world. This situation raises the questions, *Why does God leave us in such a hostile environment? Why doesn't He move His own into heaven just as soon as they're converted?* We'll begin to answer those questions in this study of Philippians 3 and the early part of chapter 4.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord desires to meet you in His Word. Pause for a few minutes and turn to Him in prayer. Ask Him to clear your thoughts and open your eyes to the truth of His Word. Write out your own prayer of preparation below.

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

It's a Mad, Bad, Sad World, But . . .

Philippians 3:17–4:1



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Take some time to write down thoughts and passages of Scripture that come to your mind when you think of what it means to live as a Christian in a dark world.

Read John 16:1–2, 13, and 33. How do these verses provide perspective on the Christian's place and purpose in the world?



Observation: The Christian's Marching Orders—Philippians 3:17–19

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look for central ideas. Paul began this section of his letter by reminding the Philippian Christians that this world is not their home. And that's a good thing!

Paul went into command mode as he exhorted the Philippians to live by his example and learn lessons from those who pattern their lives after his.

The Value of Following Good Examples—Philippians 3:17–18

Read though Philippians 3:17–18. What key words indicate Paul's emphasis on the importance of following his teaching and learning to live faithfully?



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Paul used two words (verbs!) to describe what it means to follow his example. Can you find them in verse 17?

*Dear brothers and sisters, _____ your life after mine,
 and _____ from those who follow our example. (NLT)*

The Challenge of Living with Bad Apples—Philippians 3:18–19

Paul expressed deep emotion when he described people who lived as “enemies of the cross of Christ.” What clues did he include that reveal how deeply he felt (Philippians 3:18)?

Contrast is a literary device the biblical writers skillfully employed to emphasize a point. How did Paul contrast the traits of those who live as enemies of the cross with those who live as citizens of heaven?

Enemies of the Cross—Philippians 3:19	Citizens of Heaven—Philippians 3:20–4:1

Paul clearly desired that the Philippian believers be reminded of the importance of living as citizens of their *true* home: not Rome but heaven!



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Philippians 3:17–4:1



Interpretation: The Example of Paul's Experience—Philippians 3:20–4:1

Once you've looked closely at the literary clues in the text through observation, you are ready for interpretation! Interpretation involves a process that helps answer the question, *What does the text mean?* Using your observations, you can begin to gain insight into what the original author, in this case Paul, intended to convey.

We Are Bound for Heaven

Paul painted a beautiful picture of what it looks like for the Christian to live as those bound for their heavenly home!

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control. (Philippians 3:20–21)

Paul used the powerful metaphor of *citizenship* to drive home his point about how Christians should live while on earth!

Reading reliable *biblical commentaries* can help you understand more deeply the author's intent in writing Scripture. Consider William Barclay's helpful insights into Paul's compelling metaphor:

Here was a picture the Philippians could understand. Philippi was a Roman colony. Here and there at strategic military centers the Romans set down their colonies. In such places the citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their time—twenty-one years—and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman dress was worn; Roman magistrates governed; the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth they remained unshakably Roman. Paul says to the Philippians, "Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship."¹



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Becoming Paul's Joy and Crown

Often, the problem we face as Christians is being so earthly minded that we are of no earthly good! How do Paul's words about our heavenly citizenship help us overcome that mind-set (Philippians 3:21)?

What ultimately awaits us as followers of Christ?

How does knowing our weak earthly bodies will be transformed into glorified heavenly bodies help us live on earth as citizens of heaven?

How did Paul describe the Philippian Christians in relationship to himself (4:1)?



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How might this also have motivated them to keep their focus on things above?



Correlation: The Reality of Our Heavenly Perspective

Correlation compares passages of Scripture to help us interpret the passage in view. Paul's intense focus on the reality of Christ and the believer's heavenly identity runs as a thread throughout his epistles. Perhaps Paul's most compelling teaching on this topic is found in the opening refrains of his letter to the Colossians.

Read Colossians 3:1–11. As you do, circle key phrases or underline words that remind you of Paul's words in Philippians 3:17–4:1. Make some notes in the space below about how these passages compare.

In your own words, how would you summarize Paul's message to both the Philippians and Colossians about how to live while here on earth?



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Application: Taking It to Heart

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate our hearts. One of the most effective ways to develop pointed application is to answer questions about your own life. Here are a few to get you started. Feel free to compose a few of your own if you are thinking of teaching this passage to a group of students or young adults.

1. Does your present conduct match your heavenly citizenship?
2. Are you unshakably committed to Christ even in those remote corners of your life where no one else sees you?
3. Do you care more about your affairs on earth than investing in the things of Christ? How do your priorities align with your citizenship in heaven?

Take a few moments to prayerfully reflect on your own life and your mind-set here on earth. Ask the Lord to point out ways in which you can be more heavenly minded and focused on Christ.

You know what? It isn't a problem of being so heavenly minded we're no earthly good. I think it's a problem of being so earthly minded we're no good at all . . . especially when we buy into the earth's system so completely that there's no difference between how we live and how those outside Christ live their lives. Remember: You've got the message that makes all the difference in the world!
—Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I'm renewed today in my desire to live on earth with my mind and affections fully fixed in heaven with Christ. Thank You for making a way for me to know You and to be certain of my eternal destiny in Christ. How I praise You and long for the day when I shall see Him face to face. May Your name be exalted in all the earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, rev. ed. The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 69.



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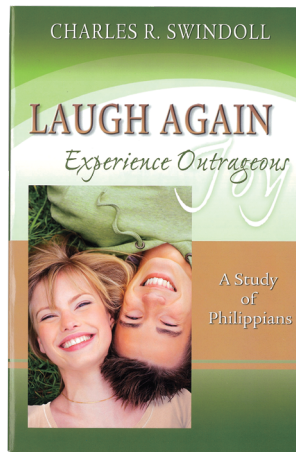
Philippians 3:17–4:1



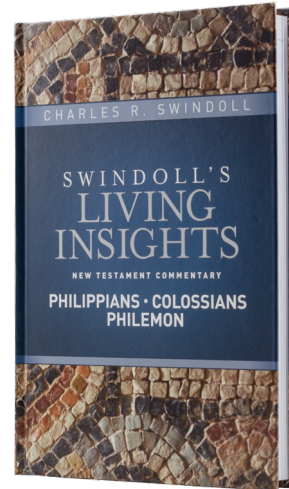
Tools for Digging Deeper



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