

Friend or Enemy of the Cross

Introduction:

If we were all to be asked a series of questions by a pollster on the phone taking a survey, we would probably give three types of answers: *Yes, I'm for that; no I'm against that or I'm neutral on that question, I don't feel strongly one way or the other.*

In our reading from the Epistle today, from Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul gives not three but just two options concerning people's attitude to the Cross of Christ: his readers were either a friend or an enemy of the Cross. When he uses the term *the Cross*, he doesn't mean the symbol but what happened on the Cross.

Previously, Paul had written about persevering as Christians. Twice within three verses, he writes *I press on.* (3:12 and 14) He was pressing on *to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me* and he was pressing on *toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* He wants his life to demonstrate and live out what he believes. *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things* he writes. (3:15) He even exhorts his readers to *join with others in following my example and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* (3:17) This *pattern* was the way that they lived obeying God's Word found in Scripture.

When we are teaching children how to do something like cooking, playing sport or riding a bike we may say *copy me, watch what I do and you do the same.* That's what Paul is saying: *if you want to know how to live and persevere as a Christian, copy me, watch me and others with me.*

Paul then reminds his readers what he's told them before: there are two ways to live: as an enemy or as a friend of the Cross.

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1. ENEMIES OF THE CROSS: 3:18-19

Paul was in tears as he wrote these words. It distressed him so much that some of the Philippians lived as *enemies of the Cross of Christ*. Their minds were on earthly things. They were absorbed with the things of this world. *Their God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame*. They were not persevering as Christians. They were not pressing on following Jesus. They were living in the same way with the same values as the pagans around them.

Very sadly, the consequence of their choices was *destruction*. They would be cast out from the presence of the Lord. They would not inherit Eternal Life. They would not be in Heaven. Tragic! They appeared to be Christians but the fact that they did not persevere indicated that they were not genuine. They were Christian look-alikes, fakes, counterfeit.

2. FRIENDS OF THE CROSS: 3:20-4:1

By contrast, Paul refers to those who were persevering in the faith. Together with him, they were described as citizens of heaven! *But our citizenship is in heaven. (3:20)*

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Their lives were characterised by *eagerly waiting* for the Lord Jesus Christ to return to earth from heaven when he would *transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body*. (3:21) Their minds were not absorbed with the things of this world. They were persevering as Christians and like Paul, pressing on to live for the Lord in every area of their lives.

Their lives were lived to glorify Christ. They read the Scriptures and obeyed God's Word.

These *friends* of the Cross are described by Paul as *my joy and crown*. He had a genuine love for them. He longed to be in their company. They were in some sense the fruit of his ministry. He describes them as *dear friends*. He wanted them to *stand firm in the Lord*.

Every Pastor and every Christian who has a ministry to someone else has great joy when they see their friends standing firm for Christ against opposition, against the attacks of the devil, against the tide of ungodly thinking and behaviour.

3. PRESSING ON IN 2019

Some of us may have commenced something new this year: a new sport, a course of study, a new hobby or a new job. All of them will require perseverance. All will require us to *press on* toward some goal we may have set for ourselves or some goal set for us by others.

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If we are Christians, then God wants us to persevere and to keep growing in the faith. He wants us to live as Citizens of heaven representing him where we live. This will require determination. It will require prayerful dependence on God. It will involve regular Bible reading and prayer and being regular in meeting together at Church as God's people, sitting under the teaching of God's Word.

One of the reasons we gather for church is to encourage one another. As the writer to the Hebrews says:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Conclusion:

In 2019, as *friends of the Cross*, let's all:

- *Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess*
- *Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds and*
- *Not give up meeting together.....but encourage one another as we wait for Jesus to return.*