

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1

When was the last time you used a **pattern** for something? I'd be willing to guess that it wasn't too **long** ago. Patterns are very **common**. They're also very **useful**. Patterns are used by carpenters and cabinet makers - by tailors and seamstresses, - and by manufacturers of all sorts of parts and equipment. Whenever we want something to turn out the **same way** over and over again, we use a **pattern**. Every time you use an **instruction** booklet, or a **recipe**, or **trace** a picture on a piece of paper, you're following a **pattern**. And if you follow that pattern very **closely**, the end result will be almost **identical** every time.

With that in mind, I'd like you to consider the theme for today's sermon: **Live According To The Pattern**. If we would all **do** that, it would seem that we would all be pretty much **alike**, that is, if we would all live according to the **same** pattern. However, God in His wisdom, **made** each of us to be **different**. He didn't just take Adam and Eve and **clone** them, so that every man and woman on the earth would be exactly like the originals. Instead, He used different **physical** patterns, and different **mental** patterns, and different **emotional** patterns for **each** of us. So, while we genetically receive **attributes** from each of our parents, those genetic combinations are so widely **variable** that we end up being just as **unique** as every individual snowflake - each with its own **beauty** - each with its own **pattern**.

Yet, in spite of all our **differences** and idiosyncrasies, God wants us all to **live** according to only **one** pattern - **His** pattern. This is the pattern which the Apostle Paul diligently tried to follow, and which he encouraged others to follow also. In our text for today He told the Philippians, "*Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you.*" When these words are read apart from the rest of this chapter, Paul almost seems to be boasting about how great **he** is. However, in the preceding verses as well as in his **life**, Paul clearly indicates that **Jesus Christ** was the **pattern** he gave them, and the **example** they were to follow. Paul's life served as a model of humble, **Christ-centered** trust. Paul knew that he had not personally **achieved** perfection in his life. He had a thorough understanding that it was through Christ **alone** that perfection had been **given** to him. That meant a **lot** to Paul, so out of thankfulness, he continued to strive to live the kind of life which **God** wanted him to live - and he encouraged **others** to do the same.

Paul was very much aware of the fact that he and his beloved friends at Philippi were all in the same boat. **He** was no better than **they** were. They were all

brothers - fighting the same fight against sin, running the same race of life. I think it must have been a real **pleasure** for the Philippians to receive **encouragement** from the Apostle Paul, because of his deep **sincerity**. Paul was no **phony**. He had a **genuine, personal** interest in all those whom God had placed into his spiritual care. In fact, you can practically **feel** his caring as he 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**.”* What an excellent **pattern** for us to follow - a pattern which so **obviously** reflects the love which **God** has shown to His children.

However, there is also **another** kind of pattern found in our text - a pattern which Paul warns the Philippians to **resist**. It's the pattern of the **world**. He wrote, *“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.”* Once again, Paul was able to show his love for the Philippians - by **repeating** his **warnings** to them. When warnings have gone unheeded, they **need** to be repeated. These warnings were meant for **members** of the congregation - members who were becoming entranced by the pattern of the **world**. These members **said** that they were following **God's** pattern, however, their **lives** showed that they were following the **world's** pattern. So, which one do you **believe**? There is a saying which goes like this, *“Your **talk** talks and your **walk** talks - but your walk talks **louder** than your talk talks.”* Or in other words - **actions** speak louder than **words**.

Sometimes I get the feeling that **we** are **also** becoming entranced by the pattern of the **world**, and it starts already when we're **children**. Children need **heroes** - people whom they can look up to for guidance and advice. Some of the heroes touted by the **world** are **sports** figures, some make **movies**, others are **politicians**, and still others are even **make-believe**. Dozens of heroes bite the dust each year to make room for the **new** and **improved** ones - bigger and stronger, faster and smarter. But, the heroes which are presented by the teachers in our **Lutheran** schools are much **better**. Early on in our Lutheran Elementary Schools and Sunday Schools we have the opportunity to teach our children about the heroes of the **Bible** - men and women who were looked up to because of their **faith** - **not** because of their actions. In every class which is taught, we have the opportunity to teach our children about **Jesus** - the **ultimate** superhero. **He** is the one who has paid for all our **sins** - **He** is the one who has done what we **couldn't** do - Jesus **rescued** us from all **evil**.

But, let's get back again to the city of **Philippi**. Why was Paul so concerned about the **patterns** he was seeing in the people's lives **there**? He was **concerned**

because Paul could see where those patterns were **headed**. Every **pattern** has predictable **results** if it is **followed** - and concerning those who were following the **world's** pattern Paul wrote, "*Their **end is destruction**, their god is their appetite, and their **glory is in their shame**. They are thinking only about **earthly things**.*" Such words must have been very **painful** for the Apostle Paul to speak, because he was writing to his dearly loved brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, he didn't want to see them **self-destruct** - and that's exactly what would have **happened** if he had said nothing at all.

You know, **we** are just as susceptible to the destruction found in following the pattern of the **world** as the **Philippians** were. Let me give you an **example**. We all **believe** that inheriting eternal life in heaven is the single most important goal for each and every one of us. It's **far** more important than getting the highest grades in our class, or the fanciest stereo system, or the most powerful computer - it's **far** more important than having a great car, or the right clothes, or the perfect hairstyle, or the biggest house in the nicest part of town, or anything **else** in this world. Yet, what do we spend most of our time and talents **doing?** - that's right, working on getting the best grades, or the fastest car, or the right social status - and all of the **other** things which the **world** says are so important. Let's be sure that **our** minds don't get all wrapped up with **earthly** things, because we don't really **belong** here. **Our** citizenship is in **heaven!**

It's so easy to **forget** that, isn't it? Jesus has promised to give us **heaven**, but for the time being, we live in **this** world. Heaven is supposed to be **beautiful**, yet how do we **know** - we've never **seen** it. Perhaps it would help if we compared our perspective of **heaven** to a person standing **outside** one of the great European cathedrals, and looking at the stained glass windows. Looking from the **outside**, the windows appear to be just a lot of dirty glass. Their **real** beauty only becomes evident when you are standing on the **inside** of the cathedral. **There** you see the sunlight shining through the windows, bathing your surroundings in magnificent color. Heaven **will** be beautiful, but we won't know just **how** beautiful until we finally **get** there, and see it from the **inside**. And we **will** get there too - because **heaven** is the predictable result of having your **faith**, and **using** it to **Follow God's Pattern**.

We **know** that the beauty of heaven is there, and we know it is ours. We are **citizens** of heaven, currently living in a foreign country. Our **life** comes from heaven, our **laws** come from heaven, and our **prayers** ascend **to** heaven. We even have many friends and relatives who've already taken up **permanent residence** in

their heavenly mansions. And some day, in God's good time, we will **join** them - but only if we **stand firm** in the LORD. Dear friends, don't be deceived by the pattern of this **world**, but rather, **Live According To God's Pattern**. Amen.