

Series: Philippines 2024

Title: Things Only Christ Reveals

Text: Philippines 3: 12-4:2

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As we go through Paul's letter to the Philippians, I read the whole letter often. I encourage you to do the same. It is important to read the whole letter so that we get an understanding of Paul's motive and aim in the letter.

At least two saints in the church at Philippi were not of the same mind. Paul does not say why. We know it was sin and pride. That is why Paul set forth the humility of Christ to them and urged them to be of the same mind.

It could have been over Paul himself--he was in prison and he said some were preaching to add to his bonds and many brethren had forsaken Paul. But he assured them he was in prison because Christ put him there. Christ had elected in Caesar's house and our Savior had blessed Paul's preaching to further the gospel of Christ.

Legalists could have instigated and fed this division. Paul begins chapter 3 with a warning to beware of the concision. They add to Christ's work, making some work necessary for salvation. It promotes fleshly religion, produces no rejoicing in Christ and produces much confidence in the flesh. The opposite of true religion which worships God in spirit, rejoices in Christ and has no confidence in the flesh.

Paul declared that he suffered the loss of all his former religious confidence and counted it dung, *that I might win Christ*. Paul is about to compare the life of faith to a race. The prize is Christ himself. The prize is *being found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faithfulness of Christ himself, that righteousness imputed to us through God-given faith in Christ*. We run the race looking to Christ alone that we might be grown by Christ in *the knowledge of him, and in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable to his death, that by any means we might attain to the resurrection of the dead*.

**Subject:** Things Only Christ Reveals

**Proposition:** Paul endeavors for unity by beseeching brethren to run the race looking to Christ alone, trusting Christ alone to reveal whatever we need to learn. We will take our text a section at a time.

## **PAUL ENDEAVORS FOR UNITY BY PROMOTING HUMILITY**

**Philippians 3: 11:** [Paul's desire was that *we might attain to the resurrection of the dead*.] **12: Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect:...**

This is where God's saints are at all times in this life of faith--knowing at all times *we have not attained, nor are we already perfect*. God's saints are new men: chosen by God our Father, redeemed by Christ our Savior, regenerated by God the Holy Spirit, perfectly righteous and holy but only in Christ.

We are a new man carrying around a dead, sinful old man of flesh all the time. We are brought into captivity by our own sin-nature. Sin mixed with all we do. We are often either cast down due to our own sins or puffed up due to our good works or due to the sins of others.

We have not walked in perfection as Christ walked. We have not been tempted in all points as the devil tempted Christ and yet remained faithful in all points. We have not suffered the depths that Christ suffered on the cross and remained perfectly faithful while suffering it.

And we never will so long as we carry the body of this death. The most mature saint is still a child in this life. Christ is teaching us how weak we still are due to our flesh. Christ is teaching us that we can do nothing except by Christ who strengthens us. He is teaching us that our righteousness, our perfection, is in Christ alone. But in ourselves, in this life, we will never get beyond saying, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect"*

If I am one of these sisters, being critical of others, and I hear the apostle Paul say he *has not attained, nor is he already perfect*. Paul, who was called up to the third heaven, given abundance of revelation of Christ. The one through whose preaching Christ established the Gentile church. This one Christ used to write a generous portion of the new testament scriptures. If Paul *has not attained nor was already perfect* then I am compelled to come down in the dust and say the same about myself.

## PAUL PROMOTES UNITY BY THE RULE OF FAITH

**Philippians 3: 12...but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

Christ "apprehended"--laid hold of Paul--on the Damascus road. Christ apprehended us in eternity when the Father gave his elect to Christ "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." Christ apprehended us when he purchased his elect by his own blood--we are his purchased possession. Christ apprehended us when he took dominion in our hearts in the new birth.

Therefore, being his possession, Christ gives us ONE DESIRE which is to one day be in full possession of our Redeemer in glory...*"that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."* Our desire is to be found in him with his righteousness alone, to know more of him now and forever, to know Christ's power to keep us both now and forever, to be made conformable to Christ--to right now submit to Christ in all our sufferings, even as Christ submitted to the Father, to trust ourselves and our brethren to him and one day to be raised in perfect conformity to Christ.

Have you apprehended, child of God? Paul said, *"Not that I have apprehended...but this one thing I do,..."* This one thing involves a few things *"Forgetting those things which are behind."* and *reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul often compares the life of faith to a race. Runners in a race do not look back--they run looking to the finish line--they bow their head down and forward and press to cross the finish line.

I have used the illustration of my grandfather teaching me how to till a straight row in a garden. When you begin using a tiller you think looking back will keep the row straight. But the key is to pick out an object at the end of the row and look straight ahead at that object. Our Lord said,

“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lu 9:62)

Hebrews 12: 1:...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

As for things that are behind, it is good to remember the pit from which we are dug. Our Lord said that to his saints through Isaiah. It is good to remember we were conceived in sin: we came into this world spiritual dead, rebels against God. But we remember our past simply to remember, it is Christ alone that made us to differ.

Ephesians 2: 3...[we] were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4: But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5: Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

The sin that so easily besets us is pride and self-righteousness. We are humbled and made merciful to others by remembering, Christ alone made us to differ. He had mercy on us and loved us even when we were dead in sins.

But we forget the things that are behind so that we have no option of returning to that life--Paul's former life was self-righteousness--he counted it all dung for Christ. Remember, Paul in the ship during the hurricane. Some tried to let down lifeboats. We have no lifeboats.

Acts 27: 31: Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32: Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

As for past sins that cast us down, do not dwell on them--*forgetting those things that are behind*. Christ justified God's elect. He bore our sins away to a land not inhabited. Therefore, God our Father says,

Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

We even forget our good works that are behind us. Looking to our past sins will cast us down and looking to our past good works will puff us up. When Paul recalled his good works in the cause of Christ, he said, "I am become a fool in glorying." (2 Cor 12: 11) "I labored--yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." (1 Cor 15: 10).

The Lord teaches us to forget our past, natural family ties--we love our unregenerate family and do what we can to help--but our family is the household of God. God says,

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; FORGET also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Ps 45: 10-11)

But knowing Paul's aim to encourage unity--we also forget past offenses from our brethren. Ruminating on past offenses hurts our own selves. It makes us critical and promotes division. Knowing God remembers *my* sins against him no more; knowing he has cast our sins behind his back as far as the east is from the west, for Christ's sake, "*forget those things that are behind!*"

Christ makes us do this--v13: *...and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. The mark is Christ. Christ is the prize. The prize of the high calling--the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Keep your eye on the prize!

It is impossible to look in two directions at once: impossible to look to Christ and to self, impossible to look to Christ and to brethren. If I am being critical of my brethren it should sound the alarm to me that I am not looking to Christ.

So if I am one of these sisters, and the Spirit of Christ convinces me: he will make me forget the past, forget past offenses, forget former sins and former confidences, and run the race looking only to Christ.

## **PAUL ENDEAVORS FOR UNITY BY REMINDING US CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST**

**Philippians 3: 15: Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [spiritually mature], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.**

If we are spiritually mature, be thus minded, walk by this same rule: forget the past and run the race by faith looking to Christ, motivated by his love, pressing toward the mark of being found in him alone And run knowing that Christ is in your midst and our Savior will reveal to each of us what we need to learn.

Philippians 2: 13: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. 14: Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

Pray for one another and trust Christ is able to reveal in your heart, and in the heart of your brethren, whatever we need to learn. Trust one another to Christ.

**Philippians 3: 16: Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.**

This is the rule that mature brethren walk by. It is the rule of faith which works by love. It is the rule of faith which is motivated in the heart by the love of Christ for us. It makes us forget things that are behind and run the race looking straight ahead to Christ above. That means when our brethren fall, we speak of Christ to them, we pray for them, we forget the sins behind us and we wait on Christ to reveal in their heart what they need to learn. When we are all minding this same rule then we have peace.

**Philippians 3: 17: Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.**

Paul is saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." He said that in 1 Corinthians 11: 1, "Be ye follower of me, even as I also am of Christ." Do you see how Paul is following Christ in our text? He is endeavoring for peace between these sisters. He is preaching Christ to them. He is preaching our flesh is sinful grass. He is beseeching them to forget the things that are behind and press on looking to Christ alone. There were many other leaders that Paul said they should mark and follow those men as those men followed Christ.

But there are some men we should not follow. Once again Paul gives a warning about the concision.

**Philippians 3: 18: (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is *their* belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)***

This includes worldly unregenerate sinners but Paul is again warning about the concision, legalists. He began this section of his letter warning them about the concision in verse 2. Note what Paul says in verses 18-19. Now see how Paul said the same about legalists in Galatians 6.

Galatians 6: 12: As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised;

In our text, Paul says "Their god is their belly, they mind earthly things." They observe laws concerning meat and drink. They constrain others to obey but they do not preach Christ and wait on Christ to reveal the gospel in the heart. Why not?

Galatians 6: 12...only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

Paul said in our text, "They are enemies of the cross of Christ." They will not preach Christ and trust Christ to reveal the gospel in the hearts of his people. But they are not keepers of the law. They want to glory before God in what they constrained you to do.

Galatians 6: 13: For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Paul said in our text, "They glory in their shame." They mind earthly things, constraining others and they glory in their shame in how they forced others to obey them.

Galatians 6: 14: But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16: And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Brethren, who were greater enemy to Christ, the woman caught in adultery or the Pharisee's that would condemn her AND HIM? Christ said to them "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you." You see your calling brethren. Christ saves sinners: weak, foolish, nothings. But not many mighty are called. Where is the wise? Where is the prudent? The offense is they glory, not in Christ, but in their shame. They glory in their touch not, taste not, handle not and what they constrained others to do. Do not follow them.

Paul has been beseeching us to we press toward the mark of the upward call of God in Christ.

**Philippians 3: 20: For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 21: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.**

We know Paul is warning about legalists because he said this same thing to the church at Colosse, warning them about legalists.

Colossians 2: 23: Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. 1: If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

## **THE POINT OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

**Philippians 4: 1: Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, SO STAND FAST IN THE LORD, *my* dearly beloved. 2: I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.**

**Now**, if I am one of these sisters, and the Spirit of Christ blesses this to my heart, then I am convinced of two things.

One, by not being of the same mind, by not walking by this rule, by being critical of my brethren, I am looking in the wrong direction, not to Christ. I am not forgetting the things that are behind. I am serving my belly and glorying in my shame, minding earthly things. I have not attained nor am I already perfect--I am a sinner.

Two, if the power of Christ's resurrection works in my heart, then Christ reveals even this to me. He reveals what I am to do. He works powerfully in me to make me do it. *"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

These are things only Christ reveals! May he be pleased to bless his word to that end!

**Amen!**