

Order of Worship for August 18, 2013, title, "Owning the Faith", text, Philippians 3:8-16  
Opening Song:

Welcome and Invocation: Isaiah 65:17-25

Message Theme: God calls us to live by faith in the finishing grace of Jesus Christ

Worship Theme: Praising God for His patience and renewing, forgiving grace

Sunday Evening in the Word  
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 4:1-6  
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

**Opening Song:**

"Awesome God"

Overhead

**Welcome**

**Invocation:**

Isaiah 65:17-25

**Special Music:**

"You Raise Me Up"

by Brooke Leonard and Christina Walborn

**Ministry Moment:**

Missions

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

"Our God"

Overhead

"Your Are My Hiding Place"

Song # 700

"I Surrender All"

Song # 596

**Offering and Offertory**

**Message:**

Philippians 3:8-16 "Owning the Faith"  
Pastor John Bronson

**Response to the Word:**

"Cares Chorus"

Song # 627

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:**

5:30-7 pm in the Church Library  
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 4:1-6

“The Prayer Closet”

August 18, 2013

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

## “The Prayer Closet”

*“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith”* (Matthew 21:22)

This week let us be united in praying for:

**Ian Carlisle:** ARM to Butte County Jail: please pray for the health of both Ian and Roxanne so that he can get give the ministry his full attention again; for their upcoming move; for financial donors to the ministry; that the hearts of the inmates continue to be reached and that the inmate mentoring program continue to flourish

**President Obama:** the Lord will keep him from all evil; the Spirit will convict him of the truth; the Father will draw him to true faith in the Son

**Oroville Christian School:** the Lord will watch over the returning faculty and student body for friendship and thankfulness for the school; the Spirit will impart wisdom for the faculty to ensure every child is welcomed and encouraged in learning; that as the Lord adds new students to the school He will also draw new families into the life of the church

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** Tim Hammonds, Air Force (son of Tom and Cindy): for God’s leading in his decisions to be a career officer or go back to the civilian world; for his college coursework to go well; that he listen for and hear God’s voice

**Young Adult of the Week:** Nathan Giordano, CSU Chico (son of Tim and Laura): starting his final year at CSU Chico please pray that he has a successful year and that he is able to find the right graduate program for his specific Biology interests

**Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family:** Bob Boettcher, Carol Bernerd, Carol and Scott Koehler, Carole Lindsey, Dick & Jane Miller, Ellen McNabb, Joe Avery, Phil Peterson, Randy Bowen

(please call the office to request updates)

1.

The title for today's message is "Owning The Faith" and the text is Philippians 3:8-15. We continue in the study of this little book which is nevertheless rich in its lessons and its instruction for us. I will begin by reading the passage. I am reading the English Standard Version.

(3:8) *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (3:9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— (v. 10) that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (3:12) "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (3:13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (3:14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (3:15) Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. (3:16) Only let us hold true to what we have attained."*

Last week's message stressed the point that we demonstrate the worth of the gift of salvation through faith in Christ, we demonstrate this by the degree to which it elicits or draws out from us or moves us to refocus our lives and renew our minds according to the nature of the gift. It is a free gift, but when that gift comes it begins to impose powerful expectations upon us. The measure of how much we value that gift is simply found in the degree to which our lives begin to respond to those expectations from God.

Another way of approaching the same thing is to ask in what way a person owns the faith that they have received. Paul tells his readers in chapter 3:8-9 how he owned the faith. Look back to verses 8-9. What he says is likely to raise some eyebrows as well as some questions. This is what he says:

*"For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith..."* As biblically defined Christians we in this room may have some difficulty coming to grips with what Paul has just said, with what he means when he says that he does what he does in order to gain Christ. Paul is hardly likely to get something so basic in the faith wrong, so we can be sure that he is not putting in question that we already have Christ. Isn't that the meaning of being saved? Surely he is not putting that I question. He is not, in other words, shifting from the affirmation that we are irrevocably adopted as the children of God through the blood of Christ. He is not shifting from that to a kind of provisional adoption depending on whether or not we live up to a standard, which by the way is the Roman Catholic point of view, that we are saved conditionally. Whether or not you live up to a certain standard determines what your standing in the end will be. That is not our own persuasion in reading the scriptures.

Notice that Paul says nevertheless that he "might gain". That is central to his statement. Therefore Paul is speaking of something that is progressive or cumulative over time. That is clear enough in verse 8 unless we want to say or affirm that Paul came to a complete and instantaneous realization of the superior worth of knowing Christ to all that formerly had been in his life. [This would be to believe] that the minute Paul said, "I believe in Jesus," the entire spectrum of his understanding shifted and he has a complete and total devotion to Jesus Christ alone and a complete understanding that He means [for true faith and practice as a new covenant believer]. Well, perhaps that was possible for Paul. We know that before Paul became a Christian he was an intensely religious man. That was what impelled him in his persecution of the church. He was a man of tremendous theological learning. He knew the Old Testament better than probably anybody in this room. So perhaps in the situation of Paul it would be reasonable, or possible at least, to think that when he accepted Christ, all of those issues were clarified instantaneously in his mind.

But that is not the case for most of us. Indeed, a significant part of the process of sanctification, growing in our faith in the lord, is the progressive of the realization of the greater worth of knowing Jesus as Lord over all other claims on our hearts. We gradually own the faith by learning to set aside one thing after another which we once valued more than knowing Jesus but in the course of time we have come to realize, oh no, this is what I want, this is where I will focus my life, this is where my hopes zero in and draw their strength. So over time Jesus becomes more and more and more to us, as we know more and more what His grace is to us.

All of what I have just said is clarified in verses 9-10. This is what Paul says, he wants to be “...*found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*” If you reflect on that you begin to recognize that what Paul seeks is not his salvation, it is not salvation in the sense of assurance or eternal security. That is not [the issue that] he is raising here. It is not even the concern about forgiveness of his sins, as important as each of those is. Rather, what animates Paul at this point, what animates his soul, what draws him to pursue Christ, is to gain a personal experience of Jesus Himself and the death transcending power demonstrated in His resurrection.

What am I doing here? What I am doing is addressing a serious shortfall in most evangelical believers’ understanding of the faith. We think that the high point of salvation is when we come to personal faith in Jesus. That is a fantastic moment. It is a necessary moment. It is a great moment. But it is not the best moment! It is not the greatest moment, and it is not the moment for which we have been created and saved. The moment for which we have been created and saved is the moment when we finally come to a full knowledge and realization of the blessed goodness of our God, and the greatness of His salvation, and the certainty of an unending increase of our adoration and praise of Him as the Great Living One. God wants us to mature to a full grasp and comprehension of His righteousness and His goodness, His faithfulness and His justice. He doesn’t, in other words, want us to remain babies in a nursery, but to reach for full maturity, as Paul says to the Ephesians, according to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ Himself! That is what He wants!

There are a couple people in this room who are approaching a monumental moment in their lives. They are going to be married: wow! And in the normal course of things—here is a piece of information. The fire [in the hills not far from the church] is raging, but that is not the most expensive thing in the world. [I think that] weddings are the most expensive things in the world! The average wedding in America today costs \$28,000. But nevertheless what you need to understand is that those young couples probably think that the day of their marriage, the wedding and then the wonderful delights of the honeymoon to follow, oh that is going to be glorious. And I certainly hope that it is. But let me tell you as a guy that has been married almost 40 years, or maybe it is almost 50: anyway I have been married a long time, it gets better! Recently we had the opportunity to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of a very fine couple [in this congregation]. They have been married now for 50 years and one week, and it is better. That is the intent of God in our walk of faith, that it gets better as we focus ourselves in what He intends on our behalf.

So the power that Paul is interested in, the power that he wants to gain is the power to overcome sin and resist temptation and remain faithful through every adversity. Doesn’t that sound tantalizing? Doesn’t that sound like, “Yes, that is exactly what I want”? Further, as Paul says in v. 10, this will enable Paul to share Christ’s sufferings, even to the point of being like Christ’s death, whether that refers to Christ’s death or Paul’s death being like Christ comes to the same thing. In other words in these verses Paul is not talking about his eternal condition after death or even his present condition standing before God so much as he is speaking of his spiritual and moral condition as he stands in the midst of humanity. Where do we stand?

Whatever hesitancy we may have had regarding Paul’s statement that he wished to gain Christ and be found with the righteousness from God that depends on faith, whatever hesitancy we might have about those, they will be

cleared up as we go down through verses 12 through 16. I want us to turn to those verses now. This is what he says, *“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature...”* Wouldn't it be nice if you could put your name under that: the mature!

What Paul says is that he is not yet perfect. Apparently Paul is drawing a parallel between two things, and it is important that we understand this parallel. What Paul says is that he wants to attain the resurrection from the dead. Then what he says is that he is not already perfect. So he is drawing a parallel between those two things, a parallel between being resurrected from the dead and being perfect. This is not the way that you and I tend to think about or speak about these things. We think that the resurrection is what happens after our physical death and at the advent of Christ. When is the resurrection? It is when Jesus comes back. That is our common understanding, it is how we talk about it and the Bible talks about that way as well. It has to do with the second advent of Jesus. We are right to do this; but we are wrong to do it if we think this is all that it means. It means more. Paul says that he presses on to make this his own. The “it” refers, again, to “already perfect” and “resurrection from the dead.” Perhaps here the central issue is clarified in the next phrase: this is what he says, “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Obviously Paul is not casting doubt on a person's salvation or eternal security in Christ, that is what he refers to when he says Christ has made me his own; it is a done deal. Paul in this case is not using the word “resurrection” as a parallel to “saved”. That is what we tend to do. As he says, Christ Jesus has made him his own. Paul is not pressing on in order to gain salvation. Rather Paul is using “resurrection” as a parallel for “perfect”, and that is best understood with these kinds of phrases: “fully matured”—I press on to be fully matured, perfect; or “fully empowered” perfect; or “completely like Christ.”

Paul knows that he is not yet fully empowered. He knows he is not yet fully matured. He knows he is not yet fully like Christ. But he presses on in order to arrive at that condition. Paul knows that he belongs to Jesus; Jesus has made him his own. But that glorious new arrangement is not the end of the line, as it were, for new things and critical changes in Paul's life. He is not yet perfect. Perhaps he is far from perfect. The truth about the Christian life is that we are challenged to live and operate from a position of strength. What is our position of strength? [It is] in Christ. This is why we are told on a constant basis that when we wake up in the morning the first thing you want to do is to remind yourself, “I am in Christ; that is where I am and I am a Christian, that is who I am; and I am serving Jesus Christ, that is what I am about.” That helps us to get rightly oriented. So we know when we are in Christ that Christ has overcome. That is the affirmation. He has had a victory march over all of the powers of darkness and evil. That is our strength. The irony, what most of us wish was different, is that we are also expected to meet the challenges of life from a context or circumstance of weakness. What is that? It is this: that we find we almost instantly trip over ourselves, stumbling against inner weakness. We have sin trained bodies. Not only do we have bodies that do not readily cooperate with the intent to be the mature, consistent servant of God, but we find ourselves in a world that is also sin saturated. We cry out to the Lord! This, then, is the context of our sanctification or growth in grace and truth.

Luther said we are sinners saved by grace. That is correct, we know that experientially. Paul knows that at the last day all believers will receive new and sinless bodies. They will be glorious after the manner, if perhaps not quite to the same degree, as Jesus. Won't that be a day, when we are magnificent in our glorified new bodies! Hallelujah! What Paul is aiming at in his personal life is as close an approximation to that perfection that he can manage under current conditions. He does so, we need to be clear about this, not primarily for personal glory – although Paul has no problems with wanting that kind of glory, he was not indifferent to it. But what Paul wants to be is effective in his servant. Paul wants as fully as possible to be Christ for others. That is his drive.

When you read the letters of Paul and you begin to focus on Paul as a man you recognize that he is intensely practical or application centered in his approach to the Christian life. After confessing that he is not yet perfect, notice what he says in verses 13-14: Paul goes on to say, "...one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on..." I want to pause and think about this for a little bit. Something lies behind Paul, something he wants to forget. Apparently this is something that is not acceptable to Christ, and therefore it is not acceptable to Paul either. Therefore behind Paul, meaning his own life, there is something he wants to forget, and he wants to forget it because it is not acceptable to Christ. (Are we beginning to identify?) I got that far [in working through these verses] and I said, I have got a couple of questions I want to ask Paul. I wonder what it was he wants to forget, and I also wonder how recently it was a problem. I think that most of us when we read these words, particularly if you are familiar with biblical history and track well [with the Bible's narrative], the normal assumption is that Paul must be referring to something way back, a long time ago, most likely from before he was saved. If you know about Paul, he was the persecutor of the church, he describes himself as being a man of anger and hatred and a furious anger against Christians. Paul had a lot to forget. So we can understand him saying, "I want to forget all about that stuff." But is that what he is saying? Listen carefully to the words. It appears to me that Paul is referring to current realities, not past ones. Listen again, "*Not that I have already obtained it [the resurrection from the death grip of sin], nor that I have already obtained [perfection, or mastery over sins presence and irruption within me which weakens me and renders me less than I want to be, especially less of a servant of Christ to others that I know I need to be].*" It sounds very much like Paul continued to struggle with some kinds of sin in his life, sins which he intensely desired to be rid of. Don't you wonder if that is what he is referring to in Romans 7, if you are familiar? You might want to turn there and read. "I find that good thing I want to do I can't, and the evil thing that I did not want to do, I do!" What is that about? I don't want to be that way. What is that about?

I am going to switch you just a little bit. I am staying on the same topic. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:7-11). This is what he says and what I want you to do is I want you to read or listen to these verses as if you are Paul who just wrote what he wrote to the Philippians: "...to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" The Corinthian believers are suing one another. Now he goes on and he will describe who they were. "*But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, or idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*" I want to think about this for a moment. Do we think that in each of these cases named there was a kind of magic line drawn through their lives such that the day they were saved, the day they accepted Christ's death for their sin, the day they repented of their sin and sought forgiveness from the Lord, the day they placed their hope for eternity in what God has done for them in Christ and no longer in what they could do for themselves, that on that day they were entirely freed and secured from all future sins, even from those very sins which Paul has named? The answer is, No. We do not believe that. We do not believe that because we know full well it is not true in our own lives, nor in the lives of anyone we know. We wish it was true. Don't you wish it was true? Don't you wish that God in His grace would make a magic line, just draw it through your life and one side you were a rotten sinner like you are today, and on the next side of the line you are magnificently free of sin, no more problems with sin. Wouldn't you say a hallelujah to that? But that is not the way it is. Now someone is bound to come to me and say, "But pastor John, I knew, or I know, or somebody I knew knew or they know, somebody that the day they were saved they were instantly freed of "x" sin. Do you know anybody like that? I do. My comment is this: Hallelujah! Praise the Lord and may that number increase. But this is a case where the exception proves the rule. The reason we say hallelujah is because it is so rare. This is why we hear Paul say so clearly, "*I press on.*"

Jesus made this comment: "He who endures to the end is the one who is saved." All of us are familiar with that. But did you ever ask this question, "Saved from what"? It is not reasonable for to say, "Saved from going to hell" for that runs counter to the entire teaching of Scripture that once we are saved, we are saved. God doesn't give up on the people He saves. So what are we being saved from [in Jesus' statement]? How about from falling again under the sway of sin and fear and judgment? That is a good answer. Those of us who have sinned on occasion ask ourselves: "How did I get myself in this mess? Why am I here again? Why has the light of grace dimmed? Why has the joy of His salvation grown less? Why do I feel myself alienated from God? Why all of a sudden do shadows of fear cross my mind?" Oh yeah, [we ask those questions]. I press on so as to not fall again into that condition. Paul says he strains forward. Paul says he stretches himself forward, repeating himself in the earnestness of his desire to impress on his readers how it was with him. As a Pharisee he would have given a very different answer as to how it was with him. If we look at Luke 18:9-14 we have the little parable that Jesus told of the contrast between the publican and the Pharisee who both went in to the altar and prayed to God. This is the way the Pharisee spoke to God: "O, I am so glad I am not like that sinner. I tithe. I fast. I pray. I keep myself unstained from the world." That is how Paul would have answered when he was a Pharisee. But you know it is very interesting as you read this passage that Paul does not fall into the opposite error either. The opposite error is ours. I am probably the only really flaming Pharisees in the room, but here is the twenty and twenty-first century American: "O how glad I am that I am not a Pharisee. I am not all up-tight about the Law and being good and moral and all that. Oh no, that is not me. I'm quite laid back and relaxed and I know that God loves me and I am just fine. Hallelujah!" The next time you encounter that remarkable degree of confidence you might let these words of Paul go through your heart and mind: *"I press on for the goal of the prize of the up-ward call of God, I press on."*

What is this prize which has become Paul's goal? Could it possibly be heaven: no? It cannot be heaven. Is it the joy of eternal life? No, it is not. Why not? Because these things are given, they are gifts to us from God. We do not earn these things. They are freely given out of the immense grace and goodness of God. They are not rewards. They are not prizes. So what is the prize? Beloved I believe that the prize is the up-ward call itself. Did you ever play a sport and one day you suddenly realized, "I'm doing it! I am making the moves; I'm following the pattern. I am integrated with the team. I am running almost in the front!" Did you ever have that experience? That's really exciting, and it moves me to go on. That is right. This is what Paul said to the Romans (12:1-2), *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* Wouldn't that be a moment? When you can walk past those stores in the mall that use almost hard pornography in order to advertise their goods, and you can walk past and avert your eyes and give thanks to God and know, "I am not corrupted by this rot!" It is the grace of God and the graciousness of God and I rejoice. I press on that I might not fall into the places to where they would pull me down. Is that not joy!

What Paul says next is perhaps something of a surprise to us. We generally take what Paul says as equally applicable to all, but notice that Paul in v. 15 draws a critical distinction. That distinction is between those who are mature in the faith and those who are not. The author of Hebrews alludes to the same distinction in Hebrews 5:11-14. This is what the author says,

*"About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."*

What is the level of our moral sensitivity?

We have come to have in our culture a deep suspicion and even an antipathy for any form of inequality. How would you all respond if I said, "I would like for the most mature Christians to gather on my far left? I would have

to look for a new pastorate! One way of understanding the turmoil of our day, especially where government policy touches our lives, is the ideologically driven insistence that all people be treated equally. It is in the name of equality that our government is gradually destroying our freedoms. This is no surprise to those who have an honest knowledge and understanding of people. A collection of people placed under identical circumstances or under identical conditions of life will soon create significant equalities. The irony, the deep irrationality of our current ideological passion for equality is that it is joined with an insistence on respecting diversity. What is diversity? Diversity is simply the recognition that people either viewed singly or as the endless spectrum of groups [into which they] form themselves are not alike, and that [unalikeness] very soon is discovered to be unequal. So it seems we have a culture which is devoted to the notion that we can find differences that don't make any difference. And the minute you assert that your difference has an impact on other people's lives you are accused!

Seeing as how the culture is the water in which we all swim this attitude has been taken into the church as well. It does so with curious and generally negative results. Is it not true, beloved, that we often are more insistent that we are all just sinners saved by grace than that anybody is an admirable saint transformed by the grace and power of God? Far more often do we hear that we're all just sinners, I'm just human, you can't expect much from me, than "That is an admirable person whom I highly recommend [that people] would copy." We can easily respond to every claim to advancement toward maturity in the faith as if it was slightly sinful boasting. "Did you hear about Frank? Oh yeah, I heard about him. Does his devotions every day. Yeah." So we give sorry comfort to those who freely admit they seem barely able to get by, rarely read the word, skip as many services as they attend, and have all kinds of troubles in life. "O well, we're just sinners saved by grace." What? We are not just sinners saved by grace. We are sinners filled with the Holy Spirit. We are sinners who have the Word of God. We are sinners who are engrafted into the body of Christ. What is this "just" business? We think we are defending the weak, but aren't we sometimes just giving comfort to the spiritually lazy and undisciplined? Don't you sometimes wonder what we are about? Would these words make any sense in our normal conversation: "*Let those of us who are mature think this way...*" Who [are those mature ones]? And if we cannot answer the question as to who are the ones who are mature, what does that say about us as a congregation? This is the end of the message: are we a congregation which encourages people to press on, to forget what lies behind and to strain forward to what lies ahead?

Let us pray: Father in heaven, Paul said "when I was a child I thought as a child I talked as a child, I acted like a child; when I became a man..." We want men. We want women. We want those who know the power of God, able to resist sin, remain faithful through every adversity, to extend strong arms and strong hearts to embrace those who are still struggling along the way, for all of us, even the more mature, are so far short of the perfections of Jesus; but oh that is where we want to be. May it be so by the grace and the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. If “the degree to which [the gift of salvation] elicits from us or moves us to refocus our lives and renew our minds according to the nature of the gift itself” is the indicator of what Christ means to us, what does Christ mean to you?
2. Does Christ mean more to you today than when you first believed? In what ways is this demonstrable in your life?
3. Have you wondered at times how you might gain more power for effective faith and life in Christ? What have you done to have this happen?
4. What kind of person do you hope to be in five years?
5. How would you handle finding out that someone you greatly admired in the faith had an ongoing struggle with a serious area of weakness or sin?
6. What do you see as the relative importance between what a person has done in the past to what they hope and plan to do in the future?
7. How serious are you about being holy? What do think it means for a person to be holy?
8. Which is more troublesome to you, treating unequal people equally or treating some people differently than others based on...?
9. Who are three or four of the most mature Christians you know?
10. How can we best spur people on to spiritual maturity?