

Introduction: Union with Christ and Its Fruits (3:8-11)

Last time we looked at Paul’s passionate desire to *know* Christ.

Knowing Christ does not just mean “knowing about him.”

But at the same time, knowing Christ cannot mean “knowing him”
apart from knowing about him!

If I said “you should know your wife” –
that includes both knowing *about* her,
and knowing *her*.

You cannot know Christ without knowing *about* him –
but you can know Christ without knowing *him*.

And that is why I want to recap what we saw in verses 8-11 last time,
because it lies at the root of what we’ll be looking at tonight.

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Everything else is worthless – like dung –
compared to 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 9 and be found in him,

Notice how “knowing” Christ here is translated into the language of “gaining” Christ –
and being “found in him.”

Just as Christ was *found* in the likeness of men,
so now I want to be *found* in him.

Union with Christ is not just a legal concept.

It is a vital life union.

And this vital life union incorporates the whole of salvation,
as we see in verses 9-11

It includes:

1) Justification (v9)

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—

Paul was “blameless” before the law –

but no one can be justified by the law (that wasn’t the point of the law!)

The righteousness that justifies is the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

And that is what I *have* in being found *in* Christ.

2) Sanctification (v10)

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

remember that there are three things here that Paul wants to “know”:

First is “him” – I want to know Christ!

The benefits of knowing Christ are splendid.

But you only get the benefits if you get *him!*

And Paul says that he wants to be found in Christ,
so that he may know *him*.

And when you know *him*, then two other things follow.

Second, I want to know the power of Christ’s resurrection.

When you are united to Christ,

that power is revealed as you receive the Spirit of God,

the power of the age to come that raised Jesus from the dead.

And the third thing I want to know is the fellowship of his sufferings.

I want to be conformed to the death of Christ –

to share, to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

Why?

Because the cruciform life – the life that is shaped like the cross –

is the only way to glory – the only way to share in his resurrection.

And thus, bearing the cross – living a cruciform life – leads to:

3) Glorification (v11)

that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not just that I may *know the power* of the resurrection –

but that I myself may actually attain the resurrection from the dead!

Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification

are not just theological propositions –

they are part of what it means to *know Christ* and be found in him.

But while these things *are* ours in Christ Jesus –

our understanding of them is only ‘in part’ in this life –

and when I say our ‘understanding’ – I am using the word in Paul’s sense,

not merely as a matter of external “knowledge”

but as including both knowledge and experience.

We, in the modern world, have divorced knowledge and experience.

We have wrongly separated “thinking” and “feeling.”

I wonder.

When I talk about “knowing” – “doctrine” – “thinking” –
what do you hear?

I have come to think in terms of Paul’s holistic conception of knowledge,
and so I tend to speak the same way.

But what do you hear?

Please listen carefully:

when I say that we should not separate thinking and feeling,
I am *not* saying that we should get rid of feeling!

What I am saying is that we should not pit them against each other!

I will not be a rationalist – and I will not be a mystic!

You cannot have doctrine disconnected from experience –

and you cannot have experience disconnected from doctrine!

Paul’s language of “thinking” throughout Philippians involves the whole person.

Let’s walk through Paul’s “thinking” language in Philippians.

Paul uses the verb “*phroneo*” (to think) 10 times:

1:7 – “It is right for me to *think* this way about you”

(interestingly the ESV translates this “it is right for me to feel this way about you”!

Which demonstrates my point that Paul does not divide thinking and feeling –
while at the same time showing how *we* tend to divide them!)

The next three references are all woven together:

2:2 – “complete my joy by being of the same *mind*...”

2:2 – “being...of one *mind*”

2:5 – “have this *mind* among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”

(you should all think the same thoughts –

and the sort of thinking that should characterize you is the “thinking” of Christ)

Here in chapter 3, verses 15 and 19, we encounter the next three usages:

3:15 – “Let those of us who are mature *think* this way,”

3:15 – “and if in anything you *think* otherwise, God will reveal that also to you”

3:19 – regarding the enemies of the cross, their “*minds* [are] set on earthly things.”

And in chapter 4 Paul will apply this by

4:2 – urging Euodia and Syntyche to *agree* in the Lord (to “have the same thoughts”)

4:10 – Paul will speak of how the Philippians have revived their “thinking” of him –

4:10 – the word translated “concerned” is this same word “to think”

In other words, Paul’s idea of “thinking” is not an intellectualist conception.

Our thinking – this common “mind” that we are to share –

is nothing less than the mind of Christ –

the cruciform way of life that puts the needs of others ahead of our own.

And therefore, no one could accuse Paul's conception of "thinking" as being devoid of action!
Thinking, for Paul, includes both our experience of our union with Christ,
as well as our action in being conformed to the image of Christ.

Let's see how this works out in the second half of Philippians 3 –
because Paul starts by pointing out that he has not yet attained to what he "thinks."

1. Pressing On: Perseverance in Union with Christ (v12-14)

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. 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, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Verses 12-14 are shaped in an ABAB pattern
that emphasizes the continual pursuit of what is already ours in Christ:

A Not that I have already attained (Iambano)...
B But I pursue (dioko) that I may reach (katalambano)
A I do not reckon to have reached (katalambano)
B But I pursue (dioko) toward the goal

The effect of this is to emphasize the pursuit –
the pressing on – the constant pushing forward that must characterize the Christian life.

John Chrysostom says well

“Consider how the pursuer strains in his pursuit.
He sees nothing, he thrusts away all who impede him with great force,
he cherishes his mind, his eye, his strength, his soul, and his body,
looking at nothing other than the crown.”

Notice how Paul says this:

*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.*

As Theodoret says,

“It was he who first caught me in his net...
for I was fleeing him and was turned well away.
He caught me as I fled.
But now I in turn am the pursuer in my desire of catching him,
that I may not be a disappointment to his saving work.”

In other words, my perseverance is rooted in my union with Christ.

Christ Jesus has made me his own – so therefore I press on to attain the resurrection –
I press on towards perfection.

This is a powerful statement of the “already/not yet” of the Christian life.
Christ Jesus has made me his own.
I belong to him.
I am in Christ.
Therefore I press on to make it my own!

Because of who I am in Christ,
I will not be content with my mediocre understanding and experience –
but I will press on to become what Christ has already made me.

And as if to re-emphasize the centrality of perseverance, Paul says in verse 13:

*13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.
(I'm not “there” yet)
But one thing I do:
forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,
14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

One thing I do.

The Christian life is about one thing.

The Christian life is not a complicated thing.

There is *one thing* I do.

And you can describe this “one thing” in a variety of ways:
“deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me”
“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”
“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.”
“press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”
“have this mind in you which is yours in Christ Jesus”

The Christian life is a single-minded pursuit of Christ and his upward call.
What is this upward call?

It is the call of humility –
it is the way of the cross –
it is precisely what Paul has laid out in Philippians 2
as the mind which is to characterize the church.

2. Mature Thinking Is Eschatological Thinking (v15-16)

In verses 15-16 Paul urges the Philippians to exhibit this common way of thinking.
When Paul says that the Philippians should all think this way,
he is not just talking about doctrinal agreement.
Though, it is only fair to add that doctrinal agreement *is* part of the equation!

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. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

“Think this way” in verse 15 is almost exactly the same phrase that we saw in 2:5.

In other words,

our common way of thinking – our common pattern of humility
and considering others ahead of ourselves –
is rooted in our doctrine of Christ.

If you don’t believe in the incarnation of the eternal Son of God,
then you won’t have this mind.

If you don’t believe in his atoning sacrifice,
then you won’t have this mind.

If you don’t believe that we have been united with Christ,
and are justified, sanctified, and glorified in him,
then you won’t have this mind.

But if you believe these things,
then you had better have this mind!

15 Let those of us who are mature think this way,

Paul has just said that he is not yet perfect.

Now he uses the same word when he says “let those of us who are mature [perfect] think this way.” (note the two uses of the verb “to think” here)

Augustine says it well:

“All of us who are running the race perfectly
should be aware that we are not yet perfect.

The hope is that we may receive perfection
in the place to which we are now running perfectly.”

Are you running perfectly?

That doesn’t mean that you never fall down –

it means that when you fall down (when you sin)

you repent – you get back up – and you start running again!

So maturity does not mean “moral perfection” –

neither does it refer to your grasp of systematic theology.

Rather, your *maturity* is measured by how much you “think this way” –

by how much your daily life is shaped by this sort of eschatological thinking.

The reason why I call this “eschatological thinking”

is because this mindset of humility is a mindset oriented toward the prize –

a mindset directed towards that future glory

that Christ has already received.

You do not bear the cross because you are a masochist – because you enjoy suffering –
rather you bear the cross, you press on toward the goal,
because you see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor at the finish line!

*and if in anything you think otherwise,
God will reveal that also to you.*

Paul is utterly convinced that all Christians will develop this way of thinking.
I find it interesting that while the various branches of the Christian church
have all sorts of differences in how we articulate various doctrines,
but share this common mind – as summarized in the Apostles' Creed,
which then becomes the pattern for Christian piety,
rooted in the humility of Christ.

16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Start where you are at – and keep pursuing the goal.

3. Mature Walking Is Eschatological Walking (v17-19)

Verses 17-19 then reinforce this by moving from the language of “thinking”
to the language of “walking” –

in other words, this common mind must be reflected in a common walk:

*17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the
example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with
tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly,
and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*

Notice that Paul contrasts his walk with the walk of the “enemies of the cross of Christ.”

There are two different walks:

the earthly walk of the enemies of the cross of Christ,
and the eschatological walk of Paul.

And the difference has to do with where your mind is.

If your mind is set on earthly things,
then you will have an earthly walk.

If your mind is set on heavenly things,
then you will have a heavenly walk –
a walk that is characterized by the mind of Christ.

Notice also that imitating Paul does not mean imitating one who is perfect!

Paul has already declared that he is not perfect.

He has not already attained to the goal of the resurrection glory.

But he says you should imitate me –

as well as “those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

Paul is not saying, “you should have the mind of Paul” –
no, the perfect mind – the mind of humility and should characterize all of us –
is the Mind of Christ.

Rather, Paul is saying that he is worthy of imitation
because “he is struggling in the same race that they are running.” (Silva, 207)

Do I want you to become just like me?

NO!!

Rather, I want you to keep focused on me – and those who have the same pattern of life –
because it is the pattern of Christ.

You don’t want to be like me –

you want to be like Jesus – (recall v10 – becoming “like Christ in his death”)

you want to be conformed to *him* –

and therefore what you imitate of me is my pursuit of Jesus.

The verbs here are useful:

In verse 2, Paul urged them to “watch out for” the dogs, the evildoers, the mutilation.

Now, in verse 17 he urges them to “keep your eyes” on the proper pattern of life.

They are both verbs of seeing.

Watch out for the bad way – see it and stay away from it!

But keep your eyes focused – the verb here emphasizes that you are to
concentrate your attention on the those worthy of imitation.

Because if you don’t you will be lured away by the enemies of the cross of Christ in verse 18,
concluding in verse 19 that:

*Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on
earthly things.*

This does not give us a whole lot of information about who they are –

but given the lack of other indicators,

suggests that they are the same people condemned at the beginning of the chapter.

They are earthly minded – they are oriented toward the flesh –

and they glory in the very things that should cause them shame.

But whoever they are in Paul’s day,

it is not difficult to see the warning for us:

there is a total contrast between the mindset of the cross

and the mindset of earth.

If you are driven by this-worldly concerns –

if what happens in this life is what matters most to you –

then you do not have the mind of Christ.

Or to say it another way,

anyone who tells you that there is another way to glory besides the cross

is an enemy of Christ.

Anyone who discourages you from the cruciform life –
the life conformed to the cross of Christ –
has their mind set on earthly things.

And all this – indeed, one could say, the whole epistle –
is summed up in verses 20-21:

**4. Because the Power of Christ Already Is Already Manifested in Our Heavenly
Citizenship (v20-21)**

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Some have suggested that verses 20-21 were originally part of the same hymn as 2:6-11.
It certainly fits the same theme!

Because our Lord Jesus Christ –
the one who humbled himself and endured the cross –
is seated at the right hand of the Father.
And he has received the name that is above every name
as King of kings and Lord of lords,
and therefore, our citizenship is in heaven.

And the power of that heavenly kingdom is now (already) a present reality
in the midst of this present evil age.

Moises Silva says well:

“Paul does not here draw a *direct* connection
between the fact that we belong to a heavenly commonwealth
and the obligations that are therefore incumbent upon us.”
(In other words, Paul does not say, “because your citizenship is in heaven,
therefore you must do x, y, and z.”)

“Rather, Paul proceeds to build his case on the character of the *hope*
that such a commonwealth provides.” (Silva, 214-215)

In other words, the point here is not, “therefore go act like a heavenly citizen!”
Rather, the point is “therefore, you have hope.”

I know –

some of you were hoping that Paul would spell out what it means to be a heavenly citizen
How do I *live* as a heavenly citizen?!
(Is Paul a “two kingdoms” guy, or a “transforming culture” guy?)

But he has already told you how you are to live!

In every aspect of life.
In every relationship you have.
In every situation you face.

You are to have the mind of Christ –
modeling the humility of Christ,
not seeking your own interests, but the interests of others
pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus.

What Paul is saying here in verses 20-21
is that your hope in the midst of this “pressing on” –
is nothing less than Christ himself.

And from heaven,
we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,
by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

There are three words in the first half of verse 21 that are central to what Paul is doing:

- 1) The Lord Jesus Christ
“will transform” (the word here is related to the word used in 2:8,
“being found in human form”)
that just as Christ was found in human form,
so now he will transform our lowly bodies –
- 2) literally – “the body of our humiliation”
(the same word also used in 2:8, where Jesus humbled himself)
- 3) “to be like” (literally, to be conformed to) his glorious body.
This is the same word used in 3:10, where Paul said that he wanted
to know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection,
and to know the fellowship of his sufferings –
being *conformed* to his death (“becoming like him in his death”).
And the root here of “to be like” is the same root (*morphe*)
that was used in 2:6-7 to speak of how Christ was in the form of God,
and took the form of a slave.

In other words,
our Lord Jesus Christ – the one who was in the form of God –
the one who humbled himself and became like us in his humiliation –
he will transform our body of humiliation
(as we live out our cruciform life – our life of conformity to the cross)
to be like (to be conformed to) his glorious body.

That’s the hope that Paul points you toward.

That’s the goal – the prize – the upward call in Christ Jesus – towards which you press on.

And how will he do this?

by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
“The point, quite clearly, is that Christ’s great eschatological power –
that power that abolishes all earthly authority,
making all enemies, even death, a footstool –
assures the fulfillment of His promise.” (Silva, 216)

Or as he said it earlier in 1:6

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ.”

And that resurrection power is what has begun its work in you.

You have been united to Christ –

you now partake of his resurrection life because you partake of his Spirit.

And that is why you can continue to press on – to pursue the upward call –
the upward call of the cruciform life.

That is why Paul concludes:

Conclusion (4:1)

4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

In 1:27 Paul had opened the central body of his epistle, urging the Philippians to live

“worthy of the gospel of Christ”

so that he might hear “that you are standing firm in one spirit.”

Now he concludes the central body of his epistle

with the same exhortation,

“stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”

There are few sentences in Paul’s epistles as loaded with terms of endearment as this one.

My brothers,

whom I love and long for,

my joy and crown,

stand firm thus in the Lord,

[and as if he cannot bear to stop there]

my beloved!

To be a citizen of heaven means that you press on through all earthly trials,

that you might attain (by any means possible) the resurrection of the body –

any other goal that you seek

any other prize that you desire

leads to destruction.

Because “one thing I do”

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

So when someone asks you, “what are you doing this week?”

Say, “just one thing – I’m pursuing the resurrection!”

I’m pursuing the resurrection, to make it my own,

because Christ Jesus has made me his own!

Let us pray.