

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 3:12-4:1, Preached @
Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on September 14th, 2008

Intro:

Last week Paul contrasted what a true believer looks like, and what a religious person looks like. The true believer lives "In Christ," by repentance (Of his/her self saving mechanisms), through faith. The resume of the religious is one of merit, works, reliance on the "Flesh," and self-glory, while the resume of the believer is one of grace, repentance, humility and God reliance. This is no doubt a foolish message to those that want to take credit for their own virtue and spirituality. He reminded the Philippian church that even he, a dedicated Pharisee, wasn't good enough to take away his sins, and establish his own righteousness (**Philippians 3:9**). There is no doubt that this type of claim sounds lame in our culture. It certainly seems to be quite exclusive, and the fact it doesn't appear that "Good" works are rewarded, which doesn't make sense to us. How can a "Sinner" (However you define that) who believes in Jesus have a relationship with God, and a "Good" person who doesn't believe in Jesus not have a relationship with God? The gospel found in the scriptures is not culturally sensitive. From the Old Testament into the New Testament, we see a God who demands that we worship Him, and Him alone, and that we worship Him the way He wants to be worshipped. He is God, and He doesn't run a democracy; He is a benevolent dictator that loved us enough to send His Son so that He could be justified in saving us from eternal destruction. Man has a choice to turn to God, but "Chooses" not to, but what man doesn't have a choice to do is choose his own path to God, especially when all of the other pathways glorify the self, and not the God who saves.

In our passage today, Paul continues by reminding us to "Stand firm...in the Lord" by understanding that what God has begun, He will "Perfect" (**Philippians 1:6**) in His timing. Paul himself hasn't obtained it yet. We are in an already/not yet state. We can't get frustrated that we aren't exactly where we think we ought to be. We are called to obey and submit to His will, and allow God to provide the circumstances and situations that shape our lives.

From the Head...

Striving Toward Perfection (Philippians 3:12-16)

Here we have the interesting paradox that is Christianity. I believe the gospel teaches that there is nothing you can do to earn your salvation, or gain favor with God (**Romans 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5**), yet we see Paul "Pressing" and "Straining" toward the goal. The enigma is relieved in part in **verse 12**, when Paul tells the Philippians that he has not already obtained the goal of "Knowing Christ" intimately, and being aligned perfectly with His will. Paul doesn't have full understanding of Jesus, nor a perfected righteousness, which appears to be the contextual parameters for the word "*This*" in verse 12 (See **Philippians 3:8-11**). There were many in Paul's day (Especially the Gnostics), as well as many in our own day, that believe that they can obtain a level of perfection in their own flesh (Power), especially a "perfected" knowledge. In these verses, Paul uses a series of statements to make the point that he hasn't arrived; yet he is pressing on in that direction. It is important to note that the direction isn't in legalistic formulas, but a continued desire to know Christ, and receive His righteousness (See **Philippians 3:8-11**).

The **First** statement (**Philippians 3:12**) carries the **what**; that he will "Press" on in order to "*To make it my own.*" We can stop there, and falsely preach the fact that it is us doing this, but Paul gives us the reason that he can press on, "*Because Christ Jesus has made me His own.*" We are enabled by Christ to live the life that he has called us to live; albeit without perfection. The NASB reads, "*I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*" We can, because He did! Jesus lays hold of us, and we respond to Him, and His love in our life. We are motivated to obey Him, because of His incredible love for us.

The **Second** statement (**Philippians 3:13**) helps us understand the **how** of pressing on. Once again Paul reiterates the fact that he isn't complete, but he clearly instructs them by saying "*But one thing I do...*" By **Forgetting** (Leaving behind our self saving mechanisms, and guilty sins in repentance; see **vv. 7-11**), and then "**Straining forward to what lies ahead**" he is able to move toward that goal (Knowing Christ, and understanding His righteousness). The word for "*Strain*" (ἐπεκτείνωμαι, epekteinomai) means to reach or strive forward. It's in the middle voice, which means that while the "Forgetting" has to do with repentance of his religious past, I believe that it also includes forgetting the guilt of past sins caused by legalism, which always ends in guilt. This two-fold exercise includes placing any trust in ourselves in the past, and literally „Straining“ to know Christ. Our faith is not passive. It includes a spiritual agent (The Holy Spirit), which enables us to move toward God (In Christ), but it also includes our actions. It is important to realize that both of these are necessary. If we don't "Forget" we will become too prideful or too guilty. If we do not "Strain forward" we will be stuck in either the past or the present. One brings forth guilt, while the other brings a paralyzing comfort and pride.

We should always have a healthy discontent, because we are in a state of "Already, but not yet." We haven't arrived, as Paul said; there's so much more of Christ to know, and feed on. This takes effort on our part. We don't strive and work for acceptance, but we are called to strive and work to get to know Christ more.

The **Third** statement (**Philippians 3:14**) helps us see the **goal** of pressing on or straining forward; that goal is the upward call of “*God in Christ Jesus.*” Here it is; here’s Paul’s point throughout this book; God (In Christ Jesus) is the prize, not what you can get from God. Paul is using an Olympic metaphor. The winning runners would be called up to receive their prize (A Palm Branch or Wreath). In this passage, Paul envisions that time when we would be called to receive our prize; Jesus Christ. This is similar to the metaphor in **Revelation 19:6-8**, when we see the marriage feast of the lamb symbolic of the church’s marriage to Jesus.

Paul then exhorts the believers to “*Think this way*” (v. 15). What way is that? A spiritually mature person knows he/she hasn’t arrived. To this 4th century theologian **Chrysostom** says, “*It is the mark of a ‘perfect’ man, not to reckon himself perfect.*” Martin Luther adds, “*The nature of a Christian does not lie in what he has become, but in what he is becoming.*” Even though Paul uses the same term “*Perfect/Mature*” (*teleios/teleios*), there is no contradiction since the terms can mean different things in context, especially when they are used together in the same context. The key thing is that we “*Hold true to what we have attained*” (v.16). We should always be straining forward yet be content with where God has you. We are all in different places and knowledge with God, and we shouldn’t use those differences to cause division in the church.

Watch Who You Follow (Philippians 3:17-19)

Paul is confident in asking others to follow Him, because his confidence is in Christ. He realizes his weakness (**1 Corinthians 9:27; Philippians 3:12-14**), but he knows that he is preaching Christ and Christ crucified (**1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2**). Any other pattern is an offense to the cross of Christ, which alone justifies us before a holy and righteous God. These people aren’t evil people. They are the “Spiritual” people, those that are “Holy” before men, yet remain committed to their own “Appetites” (Self-saving mechanisms), and they are enemies of the cross of Jesus, because they mitigate the need for the cross. The problem though is that these people’s lives are often compelling. They appear to be strong, because they are “Abstaining from sin!” Paul exhorts the Philippians to follow his example, which is one of finding his righteousness in Christ, and striving to please him and not glory in our own achievements.

Set Your Sites on Christ, Not on Earthly Measures of Transformation (Philippians 3:20-21)

In contrast to those who “*Glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things,*” Paul reminds the Philippians that their citizenship is in heaven. Not in a separatist sort of way, but a reminder that their salvation comes from those that wait on a savior (Christ Jesus), and do not rely on any earthly transformation, but seek the only one that can transform a person for eternity. Human transformation, at best, is only good for the moment, but only the power of the Holy Spirit can truly save your soul for eternity.

...to the Heart

Too often we settle for relief in this life alone, which in of itself is ok as long as it does not take away ultimate relief we have in Christ. We are too willing to trade eternity for the sake of relief, instead of accepting present turmoil and pain for the sake of eternal glory (See **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**). Is Christ a convenience, or a means to an end, or Christ the end? Is Christ the one you long for, your joy and your crown (**Philippians 4:1**)? Or is there something else you are looking for? Are you willing to strive after Christ, or do you want the things He can give you without effort?

Books for Further Study: *Word Biblical Studies; Philippians, Gerald Hawthorne; The NIV Application Commentary; Philippians, Frank Thielman; The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Philippians, Peter T. O’Brien; Preaching the Word; Philippians, R. Kent Hughes; Paul’s Letter to the Philippians; Gordon D. Fee*

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