Worship Guide 7.12.20

Philippians 3:12-21

3:12-14 – The Goal

***12****Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.****13****Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead,****14****I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus.*

**Being Humble**

We see again that the gospel has completely changed Paul. Before salvation, Paul was arrogant enough to say he was blameless (3:6). Since his salvation experience with Christ, he now humbly admits that he has “not arrived”. The gospel humbled Paul. He previously thought of himself as having arrived, but the gospel has a humbling effect. In telling the Philippians that he wasn’t perfect, Paul not only corrects any misunderstandings that they might have had regarding legalism or perfectionism, but his words surely brought hope to them as well.

Paul is identifying with them as a fellow Christian. He doesn’t want them to think that he is somehow superhuman and superior. He’s made some remarkable statements about his life in the book Philippians, but he’s admitting that he hasn’t arrived. So, you and I shouldn’t despair. Keep running with Paul.

“…*reaching forward to what is ahead*…” This section in verse 13 reminds us that we are on a journey together. We are all walking with Jesus to become more like Him. This is a lifestyle and lifetime commitment. But before you can reach for what is ahead, we must “…*forget what is behind*…”. We are called to leave our old ways of life and embrace the new life found in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17:

***17****Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!*

The gospel sets us free from the bondage of sin, so that, we can freely glorify God with every aspect of our lives. On our journey with Christ, we must humbly admit that we need Him and we need to mature, change and grow.

**Passionately Pursue Christ**

Paul doesn’t use his lack of perfection as an excuse not to pursue holiness. Many Christians are willing to give up on holiness by giving the excuse: “oh well, no one’s perfect. So, it’s ok.” That’s not the case for Paul. Even though he knows he isn’t perfect, that doesn’t mean he isn’t exerting passion to grow in Christ. Notice the passion in verse 12: “…*I make every effort to take hold of it*…” and in verse 13 “…*reaching forward to what is ahead*…” and again in verse 14 “…*I pursue as my goal*…”.

What’s the prize that Paul is pursing with such passion? Based on the previous passage and the running context in Philippians, it’s a fuller knowledge of Christ. It involves gaining Christ. That’s what Paul wants – to know Christ more and more; and in knowing Him more, he will become more like Him. This pursuit is a lifetime journey.

Passionately pursing Christ is essential to the Christian. Think about all the things we are passionate about in our current culture. For example: football. Thousands show up at every game. Some are decked out from head to toe and there is no shame, it’s celebrated! Thousands of people going crazy, cheering, yelling…all for the sake of a football team. It makes me wonder…why is there such passion on Saturdays and the same people are so passionless on Sundays? Why are we not ashamed to be “crazy” for our favorite teams but we are shy and reluctant to be “crazy” for God?

How do we live with such passion? I believe Paul gives us insight into that in verse 13 “…*forgetting what is behind*…”. Let’s go to Hebrews 12:1-2 for further understanding as well:

*Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,****2****keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus prayed that we would be in the world but not of the world (John 17:9-19). Laying aside the desires of this world and turning from sin is vital to growing our passion for Christ. You cannot have a passion for this world and a passion for Christ. The world is at odds with God because of the sin curse. Stop caring for the world and start caring for the Kingdom of God. We do this by “…*keeping our eyes on Jesus*…”.

**Singularly Focused**

Paul didn’t have “15 irons in the fire” so to speak. He had ONE focus, to glorify God through Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit. We see this in the statement “*But one thing I do*…” found in verse 13.

**Discussion Questions:**

* How does the gospel humble you?
* What is the prize that Paul pursues in verse 14?
* Why do we need passion to grow in spiritual maturity?
* Paul was a “one-thing” guy (v. 13). What would people who know you well say is your “one-thing”?
* What one change could you make in order to pursue the one thing that matters the most?

3:15-21 – Living in the Truth

***15****Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.****16****In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained.****17****Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us.****18****For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.****19****Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and they are focused on earthly things.****20****Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.****21****He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.*

**Think this Way**

Being humble and pursing the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus is a sign of Christian maturity. Paul relates these two things to maturity and tells us we should think this way. “…*think this way*…” is speaking of both thoughts and values.

Paul then encourages us to “…*live up to whatever truth you have attained*…”. As you gain more knowledge of God, you apply it to your daily lives. We all have our own “walk with the Lord”. While we are all walking the same direction, it doesn’t mean that we are all going at the same pace. As we gain truth, we embrace it and apply it so that we can deepen our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Paul also encourages the Philippians to look to faithful examples that imitate Christ. Those that imitate Christ are those that know the truth and apply the truth. And as your knowledge of the truth grows, so does your maturity in the faith.

**Enemies of the Cross of Christ**

Paul tells the Philippians they need to walk in truth and follow an example of a mature believer and then warns them about enemies of the cross. Who are the enemies of the cross? Simply, anyone who is a non-believer is an enemy of the cross. But not all enemies are the same. Some enemies are passive and others are aggressive. I believe that Paul gives us a brief description of the aggressive enemies of the cross in verse 19: “…*their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and they are focused on earthly things*…”.

This is the only recorded instance that the apostle Paul cried. Why was there such emotional involvement with these deceptive teachers? Paul described them and then explained their characteristics. He was sad, first of all, because he had to make repeated warnings about them. They apparently followed him around, seeking to entice people away from the truth. Secondly, he called them enemies of the cross. The statement must mean more than that they refused to accept the cross as God’s way of reconciliation. It means that they actively opposed the message of the cross and hindered those who would take advantage of its work. Paul cherished the cross.

Paul exposed these teachers by revealing their character. Four statements explain their theology and practice:

1. Their end was destruction.
   1. Heaven did not await them. Hell was their destination. This reminds us that eternity is a reality and not everyone will experience the same eternity.
2. Their god is their stomach.
   1. There are two possible ways we could take this. (1) Their lives revolved around food. Either they over indulged or they tried to force dietary restrictions upon everyone. (2) They followed their guts. They allowed their emotions to guide them. As we would say today, “follow your heart.” They always sought to fulfill their lustful appetites.
   2. Either way the result is the same: instead of living in grateful worship to God, they live as lazy gluttons, pleasing self.
3. Their glory is their shame.
   1. They glory or show off things they should be ashamed of. They enjoy and celebrate what offends God and should be avoided.
   2. For example, they glory in things like sexual sin, greed, disrespect and laziness – as we often see in our culture.
4. They are focused on earthly things.
   1. They just get excited about worldly things. They aren’t captured by Christ, His cross and His resurrection. They are the type who prefer the Xbox and social media to thorough Bible study and courageous mission.

Again, Paul didn’t hate these people, he loved them, he shed tears over them. Paul desperately wanted them to be redeemed. We should desire our enemies to be redeemed as well.

**He will Transform**

Paul concludes by reminding the church of the heavenly mind-set they should possess. People walking and growing in maturity realize that this world is not their home. He reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven. Paul reminds us of this to contrast our desires with the desires of the “enemy”. Non-believers are focused on this world and Believers are focused on the Kingdom of God.

How does this difference express itself? When you see people taking care of the vulnerable, caring for orphans, doing all that is good and right and true, giving to the poor, speaking edifying words to one another, outdoing one another in showing honor, showing no partiality or racism, putting the needs of others ahead of their own, glorifying God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength…we are giving the world a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. People should look at the words and deeds of believers and know we are different.

C. S. Lewis said in Mere Christianity:

*If you read history you will find that Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next…it is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.*

What gives us so much hope that we can endure this world and long for the world to come? “…*He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body*.” God will transform our frail bodies and give us glorious bodies. This hope should motivate us, assure us, purify us, and center us on what’s most important. The believer has the most encouraging news in the world. This is as bad as it will ever be. Soon we will see Him. Soon we will receive a new body, fitted for the new heaven and new earth.

**Discussion Questions**

* Why is it important to be humble?
* What are you building your life upon? Truth found in God’s Word or personal desires found in the world?
* Who are some good examples (imitators of Christ) you can follow? Are others able to follow you and become more like Christ?
* What are some of the characteristics of the “enemies of the cross” in verse 18?
* Why is it easy to “fall into” some of these characteristics as believers?
* How can we love our enemies well?
* Which do you love more, this world or the world to come? To rephrase: do your actions show that you love this world or the world to come more?
* How does the reality that you will be transformed by Christ bring you hope?

**Conclusion:**

Let us make every effort to know Christ, and in knowing Him more intimately, become more like Him. Let us make every effort by heeding these five challenges for growing in maturity:

1. Humbly acknowledge that you haven’t arrived.
2. Passionately pursue greater knowledge of Christ.
3. Never lose the wonder of the gospel.
4. Follow cross-centered, heavenly minded examples.
5. Live in light of your true citizenship.