

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

PASTORAL INSTRUCTIONS ON TRUSTING CHRIST, PHILIPPIANS 3:1-21 (Part 2, 12-21)

A. Goals for trusting Christ (10-11)

1. Paul chose a growing faith tied to experience (10), *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

a. He wanted to know Him, not just know about Him.

b. Several ways are given to experience Christ more intimately.

1) *the power of his resurrection*

a) He wanted to experience in his life the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

b) Romans 6:4, *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

c) Colossians 3:1, *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

2) *share his sufferings*

a) Paul was not saying he could add to the merit of Christ's suffering since that was fully accomplished at the cross.

b) Paul believed he could more fully experience Christ in him as he suffered in his service for the Lord.

c) Suffering drew Paul closer to the reality of Christ, Who He is and What He did for him.

3) *becoming like him in his death*

a) Paul had already experienced death in the spiritual realm because he died to self.

b) He was even willing to die physically for the cause of Christ.

c) Thomas Constable, *He so loved Jesus Christ that he wished to share all aspects of His life, to know Him as intimately as he could. He even was willing to follow Him into the valley of the shadow of death.*

2. Paul looked to the day when faith would become sight (11), *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

a. This statement is understood in numerous ways.

b. The key word is *resurrection*.

1) It is only used here in the New Testament.

2) It is best translated as *out-resurrection*.

c. Paul was not uncertain as to whether he would experience resurrection, 2 Corinthians 5:21, *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

d. His uncertainty was whether he would die before Christ's return or be transformed at the Rapture, Robert Lightner, *Perhaps he was using this word to refer to the Rapture, thus expressing the hope that the Lord would return during his lifetime.*

B. Priority of pursuing Christ (12-17)

1. Paul was not satisfied with where he was in his fellowship with Christ (12-13), *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,*

a. *this*

1) Paul is looking back to verse 10 where he seeks to know Christ in His fullness, Philippians 3:10, *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

2) His conversion was the beginning of a relationship with Christ which must be nurtured.

3) For Paul, all things were loss compared to knowing Christ which is a lifelong pursuit.

4) Warren Wiersbe, *A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress.*

b. *already perfect*

- 1) Paul could be speaking of perfection in relationship to sinlessness once saved which contradicts 1 John 1:8-9, *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- 2) I believe he was referring to perfection in regard to his desire to know Christ fully.

c. *press on*

- 1) It means to *pursue, to press forward, to strive for a purpose.*
- 2) Specifically, Paul is speaking of knowing Christ by means of sanctification.
 - a) Knowing Christ is becoming conformed to the image of Christ, Romans 8:29, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...*
 - b) Sanctification demands our participation with the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The reason Paul could press on was not his super-spiritual abilities but his relationship to Jesus Christ.
 - a) Relationship enables fellowship.
 - b) Sanctification leads to glorification, Philippians 1:6, *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*
 - c) Paul knew he was not where he wanted to be but he was headed there.
 - d) Max Anders, *A fact of the Christian life is that the more you mature the more you realize how much further you have to go to become like Christ.*

d. His life was consumed by one purpose, to know Christ.

- 1) He didn't live in the accomplishments of the past but looked to the future, D. Carson, *It is a shocking thing for Christians to have to admit that they have grown little in their knowledge of Jesus Christ.*
- 2) His life was now consumed by Christ not by his heritage or past attainments.
- 3) Gordon Fee, *Forget...the persecution of the church (v 6), and so on, whose memory could paralyze one with guilt and despair. Forget, too, those attainments so far achieved as a Christian, the recollection of which might cause one to put life into neutral and to say, 'I have arrived.' Forget in such a way that the past, good or bad, will have no negative bearing on one's present spiritual growth or conduct.*

2. Paul continued to pursue a deeper walk with Christ (14), ***I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

a. Paul's goal was to fully know Christ.

- 1) To reach that goal, one must be in the presence of the Savior, 1 John 3:2-3, *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*
- 2) Yet, he wanted to know Christ as well as possible before his death.
- 3) D. A. Carson, *Christians should never be satisfied with yesterday's grace. It is a shocking thing for Christians to have to admit that they have grown little in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. Sadly, not all believers, not even all Christian leaders, adopt the stance that Paul views as normal and normative. So look around carefully, and emulate those who are continuing to grow spiritually, not those who are stagnating. Beware of those who project an image of smug self-satisfaction. Imitate those who keep on imitating Christ.*
- 4) Hebrew 12:1-2, *...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- 5) J. Alec Motyer, *...for every converted person there is an identical goal: to be satisfied with Jesus and to grow into His likeness.*

b. A prize awaits those who complete the race.

- 1) Paul called it *the prize of the upward call.*
- 2) It is probably the reward faithful believers receive at the judgment seat of Christ.
 - a) 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*
 - b) 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, *Each believer is on the track; each has a special lane in which to run; and each has a goal to achieve. If we reach the goal the way God has planned, then we receive a reward. If we fail,*

we lose the reward, but we do not lose our citizenship.

3. Every mature Christian keeps pursuing Christ (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.***

a. The spiritually mature person keeps pursuing Christ.

- 1) Robert Lightner, *One mark of spiritual maturity is a desire to go on with Christ.*
- 2) *mature* is tied to *perfect*. Paul is saying that because one is perfect in position (justification) he can and must pursue perfection in experience (sanctification).

b. Paul was confident that God would turn around those who disagreed.

- 1) Ephesians 4:13, *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*
- 2) Gordon Fee, *The sentence is thus predicated on their mutual friendship and mutual trust, which is so secure that Paul can simply leave it in God's hands to 'reveal' to them what further understanding they may need on matters wherein they might not be ready fully to agree with him.*
- 3) Charles Spurgeon, *If any brother has not reached a full knowledge of the truth, let us not condemn him, or cast him out of our company, but say to him, "God shall reveal even this unto you."*

4. Christians are not to fall back but imitate those who keep pursuing Christ (16-17), ***Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.***

a. *attained*

- 1) It means to *achieve a particular state.*
- 2) Paul did not mean that they became Christians by their own effort but was reminding them that since they were justified by God through Christ, pursue sanctification, live what you believe.
- 3) The *New American Standard Version* translates verse 16, *...let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.*
- 4) Robert Lightner, *Most live far below their exalted position in Christ. Paul's plea to the Philippians was that they live up to what they had already attained, namely a righteous position in Christ.*

b. Paul emphasized that pursuing Christ is a group effort.

- 1) We need encouragement as we pursue Christ.
- 2) We need examples of how to pursue Christ from those who are in the race ahead.
- 3) They had Paul to look up to because he was living what he believed.
 - a) 1 Corinthians 4:16, *I urge you, then, be imitators of me.*
 - b) Philippians 4:9, *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*
 - c) Robert Lightner, *He wanted them to imitate him. Surely he did not mean that they should imitate every single area of his life, for he had just stated that he was not sinlessly perfect. But in the matter of relentlessly pursuing after Christlikeness, he did set himself up as an example.*

4) Paul hoped to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to them so they could imitate them, as well.

a) Timothy

- 1] A concern for others
- 2] A deep devotion to Christ
- 3] The priority of the Gospel
- 4] His subordination of self

b) Epaphroditus

- 1] A team player
- 2] Sensitive to others
- 3] Radical commitment

5) We need each other. That's what the church is to be all about.

C. Distractions in pursuing Christ (18-19)

1. Many who start to follow Christ become enemies of the Gospel (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.*

a. Paul had encouraged the Philippians with positive examples of those who pursued Christ.

- 1) Jesus Christ, Philippians 2:5-11.
- 2) Himself, Philippians 2:17-18.
- 3) Timothy, Philippians 2:19-24.
- 4) Epaphroditus, Philippians 2:25-30.

b. Now, he reminds them that he had noted many who were negative examples.

- 1) He couldn't speak of them without tears of pain.
 - a) The tears were for those who were deceived and led astray by false teaching.
 - b) The tears were for those who deceived others and were headed to destruction.
- 2) He called them *enemies of the cross of Christ.*
 - a) I believe Paul pictured the fundamentals of the faith that are seen in the cross.
 - b) Note Paul's powerful statement in Philippians 3:10, *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*
 - c) Those who reject the person and work of Jesus are enemies.
 - d) Max Anders, *The Christ way is a cross way, a suffering way. The enemies' way is a pride way, a self-achievement way, a way of present perfection. It never leads to suffering.*

2. Destruction results from pursuing the world instead of Christ (19), *Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*

a. Paul declared that their end is *destruction.*

- 1) Some wonder if Paul was speaking of Christians who strayed from the truth.
- 2) I believe it is best understood as unbelievers masquerading as Christians, Philippians 1:27-28, *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.*

b. This verse enables us to know what these *enemies of Christ* believed based on three characteristics.

- 1) *their god is their belly*
 - a) They pursue fleshly desires instead of pursuing Christ.
 - b) Romans 16:18, *For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*
- 2) *they glory in their shame*
 - a) They do things that are shameful but take pride in them.
 - b) Ephesians 5:12, *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.*
 - c) Many believe Paul was referring to *Antinomians* (against the law).
 - 1] They believed that they were not bound by any rules.
 - 2] Pursuing Christ and honoring Him was not their purpose but to do anything they wanted to do.
- 3) *minds set on earthly things*
 - a) Their focus was primarily on the physical.
 - b) Their interest in the spiritual was minimal.

D. Reasons for pursuing Christ (20-21)

1. A Christian's true citizenship is in heaven (20), *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

a. *But*

- 1) A Christian's citizenship is in heaven which is in contrast to those who only pursue the things of the world.
- 2) Hebrews 11:13, *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*
- 3) 1 Peter 2:11, *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

b. *await a Savior*

- 1) *Await* is best translated *eager expectation*.
- 2) What keeps Christians going for the Lord on earth is an eager expectation of His soon return.
- 3) Revelation 22:20, *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*
- 4) James Boice, *The expectation of the Lord's personal and imminent return gave joy and power to the early Christians and to the Christian communities.*

2. Christians have a Savior Who will complete our pursuit of Him (21a), ***who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,***

a. Upon Christ's return, Christians will receive their heavenly bodies.

- 1) We will have bodies like Jesus' resurrection body.
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

b. Paul gave a strong case against giving priority to earthly desires since we have a superior body awaiting us in heaven, Robert Lightner, *No more will they have the limitations they now experience in their "lowly" bodies, which are humbled by disease and sin. Their resurrected bodies will be like Christ's, and their sanctification will be completed.*

3. The Lord Jesus Christ will subject all things to Himself (21b), ***by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.***

a. Christ's power to transform our earthly bodies to heavenly bodies will also subject all things to Himself.

- b. 1 Corinthians 15:28, *When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Don't get distracted by the world, pursue Christ.
- B. Eagerly look for Christ's return.
- C. Remember Christ has the power and will to transform us fully into His image.