

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

I have been blessed mightily by God at work, I have been able to travel to different places across the United States but also to places that I thought I would never go to like China.

I have learned quite a few lessons from my trips to China.

First of all, if you are a male and are going to be in China in the middle of winter, don't plan on packing a brightly colored jacket or shorts – 99% of the males there wear black coats and no one wears shorts. No one.

You will stick out like a sore thumb. I did – I made both of those mistakes.

People wanted to take pictures with me because it was so out of the ordinary to see a 6' American guy walking around Shanghai in shorts in the middle of February.

I have a friend in China who I usually have dinner every time I go and I still haven't seen him wear anything other than a black coat.

Every time I have gone, the excitement of the big city wears out and after the jetlag has worn off – I can't wait to come home and be with those that I love.

The reason I am telling you this is not because I want you to go to China – yes the food is great and there are so many fascinating places to visit.

I am telling you this because Apostle Paul in our text today will remind us that our time here on earth is only temporary.

You see, this isn't our permanent home, I know many of us love Arizona but, we are all here on temporary visas and sooner or later, we are all called to return to the place that our passport states that we are citizens of.

And for the believer, we must remember that our true citizenship is in heaven.

Let's pray...

[Phi 3:12-21 NKJV] 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to [the degree] that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

In our study last Sunday morning, as we studied the first half of this chapter, Paul was writing about the dangers of legalism to the church in Philippi.

If you remember, I had mentioned that there were these Judaizes that were infiltrating the early church and telling the believers that they were not really saved because they were not adhering to the law.

They were promoting grace + works, and one of the works that they focused on was circumcision.

The main problem with legalism is that it robs us of our joy in Christ.

It turns a deep personal relationship with the Lord into a list of do's and don'ts.

That is what legalism does.

And Apostle Paul would know a thing or two about legalism because before his conversion, he was the ultimate legalist.

He was a Pharisee – not only was he making sure that he kept all 600+ laws that the Jews had to follow. He was making sure that everyone else was following them as well.

To make matters worse, in his zeal for the law, he was persecuting Christians.

But, on that road to Damascus, everything changed for Paul. This is where Paul encountered grace.

Now, legalism is at one extreme, the other extreme is also a problem.

This is one of complacency or contentment.

This is the believer who says that “I made a profession of faith – I responded to the alter call - that is good enough for me”

The problem with both of these extremes is that they both rob us of our joy in Christ. They both prevent us from knowing Him in a deeper way.

This is the warning that Paul gives to the church in our text.

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Despite his multiple missionary trips throughout the region, the beatings, the imprisonments and the suffering, Paul lets the church know that he is still pressing on.

Why is Paul continuing to press on???

Because he has not already attained, he is not perfected yet.

When Paul experienced the glorious, transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, it wasn't the end of the road for him. It wasn't mission accomplished.

The mission, in fact, the journey had just begun.

You see, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, by the grace of God, we are plucked out of the wrong path that we were on and placed on a new journey.

This new journey is filled with trials and tribulations.

There are many forks on the road that we can take.

But as long as we stay on the straight and narrow path, through perseverance, we will finish the journey that has been set for us.

Apostle Paul's journey was not complete yet.

Turn with me to Acts 9,

We get a glimpse into the journey that Paul was going to make as the Lord reveals it to Ananias.

[Act 9:10-16 NKJV] 10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 So the Lord [said] to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for [one] called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting [his] hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." 13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a **chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 "For I will show him how many things **he must suffer for My name's sake."****

As believers, we are a chosen vessel of the Almighty God. And there is a purpose behind it.

Part of our journey is trying to grasp that purpose.

And I believe that the biggest problem for us is that we want to pick that purpose instead of allowing God to pick it for us.

We want to be able to dictate to God what we are going to do and when we are going to do it. However, that's not what we are commanded to do.

This is all part of surrendering to His will.

So, how do we know what our purpose is?

This is when we walk by faith.

What if we chose the wrong path?

God will guide us if we seek Him in every decision we make. If we take the wrong path, He will simply nudge us back on the right direction.

However, it is still up to us to respond to His correction.

Always remember that we will never find our purpose sitting in our spiritual couches.

[Eph 2:10 NKJV] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Now, let's return to our text in Philippians

[Phi 3:13 NKJV] 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

So, one of the biggest obstacles of continuing in our journey is to look back.

This is one of the things that we as believers struggle with the most.

Because looking back for some of us brings back bitterness that we have allowed to remain in our heart.

Maybe someone wronged us in the past and we can't let it go.

We replay in our mind the events of what happened and we become consumed by it.

Apostle Paul refused to look back at those who wronged him in ministry. Those who falsely accused him.

Looking back also leads us to complacency in our walk.

We think about the day we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior or that time we served in the ministry some 15 years ago.

The problem is that we stop bearing fruit because we keep looking back.

We live in the past, reflecting on the spiritual achievements that we encountered many years ago.

And because of this we stop to grow.

Last week we saw Paul detail his pedigree – yet he deemed them as worthless when comparing them to relationship that He had with the Lord as he continued to draw closer to Him and know Him more intimately.

Looking back also reminds us of our past defeats.

Many times our walk in Christ hits a road block because we are fixated on our past failures.

It could be a simple hiccup in our faith that triggers past disappointments.

Maybe it is a sin that we struggle with.

Episodes of great disappointments in our lives – we all have them.

This too will prevent us from continuing in our walk.

Looking back also opens doors to sin.

We remember that old boyfriend or girlfriend or the times that we spent with our buddies drinking and partying.

We saw the example this past Wednesday night of Lot's wife as she looked back toward Sodom and immediately became a pillar of salt.

She refused to forsake the lifestyle that she had in Sodom and was yearning to return to the lifestyle that she enjoyed.

[Pro 26:11 NKJV] 11 As a dog returns to his own vomit, [So] a fool repeats his folly.

Peter quotes this proverb in 2 Peter when he is writing about a believer who returns to their sin.

Unfortunately for some of us, we aren't going to change our behavior until we step back and realize just how disgusting our sin really is.

The word the Paul uses here for forgetting is to “disregard” or to put out of one’s mind.

Paul isn’t talking about forgetting people in our pasts or vital life lessons or edifying experiences or positive things Christ has done.

In this specific context, Paul’s talking about the “rubbish” that was in his life prior to his conversion—all his self-righteous striving, and the harm he had done in his pride.

Paul commands us to look at ahead and not the past.

[Phi 3:14 NKJV] 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The word that Paul uses here for press is one that is reserved for an athlete that gives everything he or she has in an athletic event.

To hold nothing back, to lay it all on the line – that is what Paul is saying here as he presses toward the ultimate prize.

Pay attention to the prize: it is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

The legalist – they will argue that they do what they do because they also seek that upward call of God.

There is no argument there.

However, they seek that upward call of God by their own works – not in Christ Jesus.

Our walk, is a response to what Jesus Christ did for us already. We press toward the goal as a response to what He already did for us.

That is the difference.

[Phi 3:15-16 NKJV] 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even

this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to [the degree] that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Did you notice that Paul shifted the focus from himself as the example in 3:12-14 to include all believers in the journey in 3:15-16 by saying “let us”?

Living the Christian life is a team effort, not a solo mission.

One of things that we must remember is that as each of us maintains our own level of spiritual maturity, we also must encourage others to do the same.

We are to lock arms with our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

If we see one of our brothers or sisters slowing down in the race, we need to take him or her by the arm and encourage them to press on.

When we see a brother or a sister out of breath from the exasperating challenges of life, we need to remind him or her to look up and to look forward, to press on toward maturity.

That is the role that we all have in the church.

The main issue with the church in Philippi was not a sin issue but an issue with the pressure from people that were coming into the church and discouraging believers and robbing them of their joy in Christ.

Paul wants to make sure that this pressure is actually bringing them closer together instead of tearing them apart.

[Phi 3:17 NKJV] 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

Starting in verse 17, Paul provides the church with marching orders.

He tells the church to follow his example.

To the church in Corinth, Paul tells them something similar.

[1Corinthians 11:1 NKJV] 1 Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.

Why didn't Paul simply say – imitate Christ???

Because God has intentionally given to us contemporary models to follow. They, like us, are fallen, frail human beings indwelled by the same Spirit. They, like us, are striving to be Christ like. They, like us, are seeking to live God-honoring lives in the midst of a twisted, corrupt, sinful world.

When we look at Christ, we see the perfection we will one day reflect; but when we look to imperfect men and women growing more like Christ, we see what we are.

We need these examples in our lives. Not so that we can put them up in a pedestal.

Paul doesn't say that he was the only example for those in Philippi to follow – he says...

and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

[Phi 3:18-19 NKJV] 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.

In verse 18,19 Paul provides the characteristics of those that are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

These are the people that we don't want to follow.

As he is listing their negative characteristics, it is making Paul weep.

Let's take a look at some of their characteristics.

- Enemies of the cross: this means that these were people were preaching a gospel other than Jesus.
They celebrated their supposed liberty in Christ to the indulgence of their flesh. They simply did what they wanted.
[Mat 16:24-25 NKJV] 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
- Whose end is destruction?
Meaning that their lives are going to be a “waste” as they failed to be obedient to the walk that God had designed for them choosing a life that pursued self.
- Whose god is their belly? This speaks to the effect that these people are only after satisfying the desires of their flesh. They live for the pleasures of their body, mind and soul. Their god is their belly.
- Whose glory is their shame: Not only were they living perverted lives, they were flaunting it as well instead of being shameful of it.
We live in a time where we have denominations that have opened up the pulpit to the LGBT movement.
Reality shows that promote fornication.
- Who set their mind on earthly things: This describes the focus of their life. It was not to please and worship God, but to simply get everything they can out of this world.
It describes the same mindset that the rich young ruler had in the gospel of Luke.
[Luk 12:16-21 NKJV] 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat,

drink, [and] be merry." ' 20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So [is] he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Where is our mind this morning, on earthly things or on heavenly things?

As we take inventory of the things that motivate us on a daily basis, we can come to the conclusion of what type of mindset we have.

[Phi 3:20-21 NKJV] 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Even though most of our passports may have U.S. citizen stamped on the front, we must remember that our citizenship is in heaven.

To the church in Philippi, this was of importance because they were a Roman colony and there were many advantages of being a Roman citizen.

You see, Philippi was a small colony in Greece far from Rome, yet the Roman influence was apparent. The culture, the worship of many gods – Paul wants to make sure that they don't forget their true citizenship.

For homework, I want you to read Judges 12 – we are not going to read it right now because we are almost out of time.

In Judges 12, there is civil war between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites, Jephthah who is the leader of the Gileadites, he orders his men to seal the passes so that Ephraimites will not get away when they retreat.

There is a problem though, as the Ephraimites look exactly the way as the Gileadites.

So Jephthah comes up with a test –

As the Ephraimites come to you, ask them if they are Ephraimites, if they say no,

“Tell them to say the word “river,” or “shibboleth,”

Why? Because the men from Ephraim could not pronounce the sound of “sh.” Thus, instead of “shibboleth,” they said “sibboleth”—and were immediately betrayed by their speech.

42,000 Ephraimites died this way.

How we respond to adversity, how we treat are fellow brothers and sisters, how we conduct ourselves at work and at home throughout the week will dictate to the world where our true citizenship is.

We are to stick out like a sore thumb in this world.

We are called to be the salt of the earth.

We cannot allow ourselves to conform to the ways of this world.

We must remember, that one day, we will be home in heaven. And we will be rewarded with a glorious body. No more cancer, no more hurting, no more baldness.

The long, arduous, painful journey—whether it’s a sprint toward the finish line or a limp along the path—will end.

We’ll stand together victorious, clothed in glory, and basking in the brilliance of our Savior.

We will be reunited with those beloved saints who have gone before us, and rejoicing eternally in Christ our King residing in our forever home.

Amen!

Let's pray...