

Citizens of Heaven
Philippians 3:12-21

Matthew 6: 25-34

Matthew 7: 13-23

Congregation: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Today we are going to be focusing on the last half of chapter 3. In the first half, we see Paul do 2 things. 1, he warns and instructs his readers to be wary of false teachers, of the false circumcision, so that we do not become deceived and lead astray. Then in the last half, he talks about sanctification, about how one can be considered right before God. This is what the last half of this chapter is about, it is about our standing before our God, and our responsibility as his children.

So I want to start this morning by reading all of chapter 3. So turn with me, to Philippians chapter 3, and we are going to read all 21 verses.

Paul does something interesting here, he sets up a parallel, that I think is rather cool. In the first half of the chapter he is talking about the false circumcision, the circumcision made with hands, in the flesh and he calls them the mutilation. In chapter 3, he says that “we are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” So we know this already, that there is nothing that mankind can do to be justified before God. We are born in sin, and we die in sin unless Christ comes and atones for that sin. Taking it upon himself at the cross, and dying for us. Each of us, individually.

Salvation is not a corporate thing, it is a personal thing. Christ did not die so that all of mankind might be saved, Christ died so that individuals of all mankind will be saved. And without this sacrifice, without his death being laid to our account paying not for the sins of the world, but for the sins of his children he has drawn out of the world, if it was not for this death, if it was not for his sacrifice, for his love, for his grace toward us we would all be lost in darkness, entangled and trapped in the sins of our flesh.

So many people try to earn their way, they try to make themselves righteous, fooling themselves that they even can come to a point of righteousness enough that would satisfy the most Holy God. These are those that Paul calls dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation. These are anyone whose confidence of their right standing before God is in their works, in their flesh. The bible is clear that there is nothing one can do to insure salvation for themselves. Paul destroys this idea in the first half of this chapter when he lays out his own testimony. If there ever was a person who could have earned God's favor, if there is anyone who could be justified by his works it would have been Paul.

But we see in verse 7, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted as loss for Christ.” All of his works, all of the things he did which he thought merited favor before God he says he counts them as rubbish, as trash because it is impossible for the flesh to please God, We are to worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in our works, all of our hope, all of our trust, any chance of salvation, any chance we have of sanctification of having a right standing before God is in Christ alone. John said that because of Christ, we can stand before the judgment of God in confidence.

Turn with me to 1st John, chapter 2 verse 24. And as we read this, notice he isn't talking about works of the flesh, he isn't talking about trying to earn favor or right standing before God but he is talking about spiritual worship, about being sanctified not because we are working to earn Christ, but because we already have Christ.

Starting in verse 24, John here had just finished warning us about the spirit of anti-christ, about those who deny that Christ is the son of God. The messiah, the savior of the world and he says

“Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” John is talking about faith here, about the word of life, about Christ. The very Christ that he was an eye witness to, Christ, the eternal life that was manifested before him. If Christ abides in you, if you are Christs then you are an heir to the promises, verse 25. “ And this is the promise that he has promised us- eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you.”

The holy spirit, is the anointing from God which abides in us, and it is because of this Holy Spirit abiding in us, that we have been given as a helper, and a guide that John goes on to say here, “and you do not need anyone to teach you but the same anointing, the holy spirit teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” Because of God's work, because of Christ, and because of the holy spirit abiding in us John can say what he says here in verse 28. “ And now, little children abide in Him, that when he appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

Notice, our confidence is not in the flesh, it is now in our works, in our actions, in our we live our lives, our we conduct ourselves but our confidence is found only in Christ, in Christs work in us, which we are to abide in, which we are to hope in, which we are to trust so when death comes, when our time on this earth is over we can face God with confidence not because of what we have done but because of Christ, and Christ alone. It is by abiding in the spirit, worshiping in the spirit, by faith and trust in Christ that we can have this hope.

Paul says back in Philippians he counts all of the works he had done seeking to gain favor with God as rubbish so that he may gain Christ and be found in him. Verse 9. “not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

What we see here is Paul doubling down on this, verse 3 he says that true worship, true faith is in Christ, by the spirit so that we have no confidence in ourselves, and verse 9 he says the same thing not having his own righteousness, not having his own work, but having faith in Christ, having a righteousness from God, by faith. This is such an important doctrine and one that I think is lost even among confessing Christians today. There is so much focus on our works, what we do to appear righteous. Church leaders lay undo burdens upon their congregation to guilt and control them into doing the right things. It is a gross misunderstanding of the faith and I think is born out of the rampant response to the Arminian gospel.

I think that because the gospel has been presented in such a way that it rests upon man's choice, and man's decision. That anyone can make a claim to believe, and they are seen as those who are true believers but yet there has not actually been the working of the spirit, the new birth, there is no holy spirit abiding in them to will and to do, therefor the church, the pastors and the elders have to act as the holy spirit and guide, and direct, and control to keep these people on the straight and narrow path. So what becomes the outcome of this? Is this not much different then what the Jews were doing under the law? We have traded the mosaic law, and have created a sort of Christian law.

The Jews believed if they followed the law, they would be found justified before God, and our pastors, and leaders are telling us that if we do these certain things that we will be found justified before God. But Paul says not so, these are evil workers, those who focus on works of the flesh, those who seek the outward appearance of faith while inside is darkness.

And this is where the teaching of James becomes so important. Faith produces works, works do not produce faith. The churches in our western culture have this backward, they seek works, just speak it and God will grant it, if you don't have what you want, its because you do not believe enough. Have you fallen away into a life of sin, and rejected the fellowship, rejected the word and teachings of God, that is ok because you made a confession of Christ and once saved always saved. We even have a term for those who have rejected the fellowship, who have gone back to their life of sin, but who at one time made a confession. We call them carnal Christians. But here is a thought, maybe instead of trying to cover over their sin and rebellion we call them what they truly are, and always have been..unbelievers, people who have been deceived and have a false faith.

It is the most dangerous place to be, to be lost, and yet deceived into believing that you are right with God. Sadly I believe this is the kind of faith that is running rampant in our churches today, why is the youth leaving in droves, why does it appear that the church is dying, it is because the teaching of a man centered gospel has produced a man centered works based faith which is proving to be what it is, false. John tells us why these so called carnal Christians leave, 1st John 2:19. "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

And that brings us to our passage today, Paul talking about perseverance, sanctification, the faith that produces true works of righteousness. The purpose of these works of righteousness is not to attain glory, but because we have attained through faith in Christ. So this is where we see this parallel I mentioned earlier. The first half of this chapter Paul says that all of these works of the flesh are rubbish, and it is by the spirit that one worships and through Christ that one has confidence. Then, starting in verse 12 here he parallels with doing the works of such a faith. I think the NIV is much clearer here, it says in verse 12. "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus."

What we see is a balance here, there is a way that we can say that we have attained sanctification through Christ, yet there is also a way were we are yet striving to attain. Because of Christ, and the new birth we can claim to be sanctified, because our sanctification is not our own but is rather given to us by Christ, and his obedience and sacrifice on the cross. Yet we all know full well that we in this body are not yet sanctified and that it is an ongoing process of growing in grace and knowledge and a constant combat against the flesh. That is what Paul means by saying that he has not yet reached that goal, or have yet become fully mature.

This faith that we hold takes work, we are to be striving ever forward not satisfied where we are at, but pressing onward toward the goal, pressing forward toward Christ, striving to be more like him, and less like the world. We need to be careful that we do not become complacent in our faith, or arrogant thinking that we have reached a level of maturity that is satisfactory. Look at Paul, even he says that he has not yet attained such a faith or level of maturity that is satisfactory. Going back to chapter 2, Verse 12-13 "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

This is our reason and purpose for good works, our reason and purpose for ever striving forward to grow in maturity, and in faith. It is because God works in us to do so, and he works this in us for his own good pleasure and will.

Dallas Willard put it this way. “Grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning. This difference is vital. How much effort do you put into your Christian walk? Do you know those folks whose holiness is so above yours that it is embarrassing? Well that didn't just wake up one day like that, they worked hard. In a growing Christian life, there is no sitting still, no easy and quick microwave holiness, no cruise control”

This is not the only place that Paul has instructed his readers to strive in the faith, to continue growing in grace and knowledge, 1 Corinthians 24-27 that we read this morning. We are in a race, striving toward the goal of being more like Christ. This is hard work that requires years of training and conditioning. So what is it that we are to do to prepare ourselves for this race? How do we train and condition ourselves? It is simply by reading and studying Gods word and prayer that we can grow in knowledge of Him, and by that we will grow to be more like him as the Holy spirit teaches and guides us in our daily life. Yes it is hard work, yes it takes commitment, but it is the very thing that God works in us for his own good pleasure.

That is what Paul is saying here, verse 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. 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. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 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. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”

Paul's focus is on the forward momentum of the faith, or striving forward and not looking back. I think it is important to note this, for it seems that many people like to park themselves in the past and seem to be unable to move past certain events, or certain things that has happened to them in their life. Paul says we are to forget such things, put them aside and continue striving for that which is ahead.

Another way we see this looking to the past, is peoples reliance of their confession of faith. We have all heard it before, and some of us even said this ourselves, when confronted with conviction as to whether our faith is real, we convince ourselves resting on the action that we committed asking Jesus into our heart. But the real question is not what was the date and time you walked down to the front of the church and said the sinners prayer, but it is how are you living now? Are you making progress in your Christian life? Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? IF there is no forward progress, and you are resting in something you had done years ago, yet your life does not show it, there is serious reason to doubt that you are a true believer. John Calvin said “ God has given ever believer a race a race of repentance to run one's whole life. The goal is eternal fellowship with Christ Jesus in the resurrection.”

Faith and repentance are 2 sides of the same coin, you can not have one without the other. If there is no repentance, there is no faith. Where faith is present there will be a turning away from Sin and a striving toward God and a holy life. This is another way that we are to leave the past behind us, and to be looking to what is ahead. We need to not dwell upon our past sins, if we have been forgiven then why should we be constantly bringing back to our minds our past sins and dwelling upon them. They are forgiven, they are gone, God has removed them as far as the east is to the west.

Move on, press forward, leave the past, leave those sins, those struggles and temptations and press toward the finish line, as Paul says in verse 14, “Press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

And again in 16” Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.” Paul continues on here in verse 17 and following talking about this christian walk and to be careful who we emulate. “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk as you have us for a pattern.” Remember his personal note at the end of chapter 2? He put forth Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples who are worthy to be followed. Faithful, men which he says in verse 29 of chapter 2, “we are to hold such men in high esteem” We are to identify these people in our lives who are mature Christians, they are the ones that we seek advice and instruction from. That is why it is so devastating when we see one fall, when we see pastors, elders, and leaders in the faith fall into sin, and temptations.

Looking here at verse 18 Paul issues another warning, “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; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things.” The first thing that struck me here, is that Paul is talking about the very same people he spent time earlier in this chapter calling out as enemies of Christ calling them evil workers, dogs, and the mutilation. And here he says, he weeps, he cries for them. While he understood the danger they pose to the gospel, and to the people of Christ, he also understood they there were lost, deceived people themselves needing the very Christ that they were seeking to destroy. Remember he himself was one of these, so I am sure this caused a welling up of mixed emotions within Paul.

Paul says that we should imitate him as he imitates Christ, and even in this he sets forth the proper biblical example. There may be times when we need to be harsh in the defense of the gospel, but never without compassion, never without hope that one day God may still yet draw those who are currently our enemy. Paul goes on to classify these people, he says that their god is their belly. These people who walk as enemies of Christ live to please themselves, they live to satisfy their fleshly appetites. If we look at the example of Epaphroditus, he became sick, and according to verse 30, of chapter 2. “because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.” This is an example of love and compassion outside of self, this is the exact opposite of one whose god is their own belly.

The exact opposite of one who seeks their own comfort, or their own interest over others, or even things of the faith. Paul says that their end is destruction, and their glory is their shame. The very thing that they take pride in, is the very thing that condemns them. These are those who set their sites, and their goals and find fulfillment in earthly things. Those who trust in themselves, in their own knowledge, those who are prideful, puffed up and arrogant trusting their own strength, or their own ability to be a good person. We to be wary of such people, and just as Paul instructed his readers earlier to beware of evil workers and dogs, the same applies here and we need to be wary that we identify those of a type of self pleasing, self centered faith and it is not those who we follow. I think of those who teach a prosperity type gospel, focusing on the gain and glory that the world has to offer. Instructing us that we too can have all the earthly things our hearts desire if we just have enough faith in God.

It kind of sounds like those who seek to fill their bellies, whose desires are those of the world, and not those of God doesn't it. Yet they have people who follow them by the millions, who have been deceived, who have been duped into following this false faith, whose end is destruction. The thought of all these people being deceived is the very thing that brought tears to Paul's eyes.

Notice in verse 20 here. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.”

We are citizens in heaven, we are here on this earth as travelers, walking through this life toward the goal which Paul said is the resurrection. We are to live as though this life is just temporary, we are to live as though our citizenship lies in heaven and we are just visitors here. I think this is a very important distinction to make especially in the current political environment that we find ourselves in. So many people seem to have got this backward, and it appears that their American citizenship has become blurred with their heavenly citizenship. It is as though politics have become their religion, seeking to make a christian state here on earth and they spend their life, and their focus on pursuing such. But Paul reminds us, he instructs us that our citizenship is not of this world and we should not be largely concerned of such things but rather be concerned of things of the faith.

Instead of putting so much effort into the politics of the earthly nation, we should be putting our efforts into the growing and spreading of the gospel adding new citizens to the nation of God. We are to be seeking the resurrection, and to be united with our savior, that is our hope, that is our goal, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Live as one whose citizenship is in heaven.