

Philippians 3 Chapter Study

Circumstances and people can rob us of joy, but so can things, and it is this “thief” that Paul deals with in Philippians 3. It is important to see the total message of this chapter before examining it in detail, so perhaps the following outline will be helpful.

- A. Paul’s past—3:1-11 (the accountant— “I count”)
- B. Paul’s present 3:12-16(the athlete - “I press”)
- C. Paul’s future 3: 17-21 (the alien - “I look”)

What Paul was describing is the “spiritual mind.” In Philippians 3:18-19, he described professed believers who “mind earthly things,” but then in Philippians 3:20 he described the believer with the spiritual mind, who “minds heavenly things.” You will recall that the city of Philippi was actually a Roman colony—a “Rome away from Rome.” In the same sense, the people of God are a colony of heaven on earth. “Our citizenship is in heaven” Phil. 3:20, and **we look at earth from heaven’s point of view. This is the spiritual mind.**

It is easy for us to get wrapped up in “things,” not only the tangible things that we can see, but also the intangibles such as reputation, fame, achievement. Paul wrote about **“what things were gain”** to him (Phil. 3:7); he also mentioned **“things which are behind”** and **“things which are before”** (Phil. 3:13). In Paul’s case, some of these “things” were intangible, such as religious achievements (Gal. 1:14), a feeling of self-satisfaction, morality. We today can be snared both by tangibles and intangibles, and as a result lose our joy.

But even the tangible things are not in themselves sinful. God made things, and the Bible declares that these things are good (Gen. 1:31). God knows that we need certain things in order to live (Matt. 6:31-34). In fact, He “giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). But Jesus warned us that our lives do not consist in the abundance of the things that we possess (Luke 12:15). **Quantity is no assurance of quality.**

Many people who have the things money can buy have lost the things that money cannot buy. Discuss....

The key word in Philippians 3:1–11 is **count** (Phil. 3:7–8, 13). In the Greek, two different words are used, but the basic idea is the same: to evaluate, to assess.

“The unexamined life is not worth living,” said Socrates. Yet, few people sit down to weigh seriously the values that control their decisions and directions. Many people today are the slaves of “things,” and as a result do not experience real Christian joy.

In Paul’s case, the “things” he was living for before he knew Christ seemed to be very commendable: a righteous life, obedience to the law, the defense of the religion of his fathers. But none of these things satisfied him or gave him acceptance with God.

Like most “religious” people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus—it was good things! He had to lose his “religion” to find salvation.

One day, Saul of Tarsus, the rabbi, met Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and on that day Saul’s values changed (read Acts 9:1–31). When Saul opened his books to evaluate his wealth, he discovered that apart from Jesus Christ, everything he lived for was only refuse. He explained in this section that there are only two kinds of righteousness (or spiritual wealth)—works righteousness and faith righteousness—and only faith righteousness is acceptable to God.

But it was not settled for long. Paul was sent out by the Holy Spirit to minister especially to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1–3; 22:21). Peter had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles in Acts 10, and Paul followed his example on his first missionary journey (see Acts 14:26–28). It did not take long for the strict Jewish believers to oppose Paul’s ministry and come to Antioch teaching that it was necessary for the Gentiles to submit to Jewish rules before they could be saved (Acts 15:1). This disagreement led to the Conference at Jerusalem that is described in Acts 15. The result of the conference was an approval of Paul’s ministry and a victory for the gospel of the grace of God. Gentiles did not have to become Jewish proselytes in order to become Christians!

But the dissenters were not content. Having failed in their opposition to Paul at Antioch and Jerusalem, they followed him wherever he went and tried to steal his converts and his churches. Bible students call this group of false teachers who try to mix law and grace "Judaizers." The epistle to the Galatians was written primarily to combat this false teaching. It is this group of "Judaizers" that Paul was referring to in Philippians 3:1–2. He used three terms to describe them.

"Dogs." The orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a "dog," but here Paul called orthodox Jews "dogs"! Paul was not just using names; he was comparing these false teachers to the dirty scavengers so contemptible to decent people. Like those dogs, these Judaizers snapped at Paul's heels and followed him from place to place "barking" their false doctrines. They were troublemakers and carriers of dangerous infection.

These men taught that the sinner was saved by faith plus good works, especially the works of the law. But Paul stated that their "good works" are really evil works because they are performed by the flesh (old nature) and not the Spirit, and they glorify the workers and not Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–10 and Titus 3:3–7 make it clear that nobody can be saved by doing good works, even religious works. A Christian's good works are the result of his faith, not the basis for his salvation.

Paul used a pun on the word circumcision. The word translated "circumcision" literally means "a mutilation." The Judaizers taught that circumcision was essential to salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal. 6:12–18), but Paul stated that circumcision of itself is only a mutilation! The true Christian has experienced a spiritual circumcision in Christ (Col. 2:11) and does not need any fleshly operations. Circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper, tithing, or any other religious practice cannot save a person from his sins. Only faith in Jesus Christ can do that.

In contrast to the false Christians, Paul described the true Christians, the "true circumcision" (see Rom. 2:25–29 for a parallel).

He worships God in the Spirit. He does not depend on his own good works, which are only of the flesh (see John 4:19–24).

He boasts in Jesus Christ. People who depend on religion are usually boasting about what they have done. The true Christian has nothing of which to boast (Eph. 2:8–10). His boast is only in Christ! In Luke 18:9–14, Jesus gave a parable that describes these two opposite attitudes. **Discussion.....**

He has no confidence in the flesh. The popular religious philosophy of today is “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” It was also popular in Paul’s day, and it is just as wrong today as it was then. (By “the flesh” Paul meant “the old nature” that we received at birth.) The Bible has nothing good to say about “flesh,” and yet most people today depend entirely on what they themselves can do to please God. Flesh only corrupts God’s way on earth (Gen. 6:12). It profits nothing as far as spiritual life is concerned (John 6:63). It has nothing good in it (Rom. 7:18). No wonder we should put no confidence in the flesh!

Ask questions.....

There is only one “good work” that takes the sinner to heaven: the finished work of Christ on the cross (John 17:1–4; 19:30; Heb. 10:11–14).

The example (vv. 4–6). Paul was not speaking from an ivory tower; he personally knew the futility of trying to attain salvation by means of good works. As a young student, he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the great rabbi (Acts 22:3). His career as a Jewish religious leader was a promising one (Gal. 1:13–14), and yet Paul gave it all up—to become a hated member of the “Christian sect” and a preacher of the gospel! Actually, the Judaizers were compromising in order to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12–13), while Paul was being true to Christ’s message of grace and as a result was suffering persecution.

Paul’s relationship to the law. “As touching the law, a Pharisee ... touching the righteousness, which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6). To the Jews of Paul’s day, a Pharisee had reached the very summit of religious experience, the highest ideal a Jew could ever hope to attain. If anybody was going to heaven, it was the Pharisee! He held to orthodox doctrine (see Acts 23:6–9) and tried to fulfill the religious duties faithfully (Luke 18:10–14). While we today are accustomed to use

the word Pharisee as the equivalent of "hypocrite," this usage was not prevalent in Paul's day. Measured by the righteousness of the law, Paul was blameless. He kept the law and the traditions perfectly. Discuss....

Paul's relationship to Israel's enemies. But it is not enough to believe the truth; a man must also oppose lies. Paul defended his orthodox faith by persecuting the followers of "that pretender," Jesus (Matt. 27:62-66). He assisted at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), and after that he led the attack against the church in general (Acts 8:1-3). Even in later years, Paul admitted his role in persecuting the church (Acts 22:1-5; 26:1-11; see also 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Every Jew could boast of his own blood heritage (though he certainly could not take any credit for it). Some Jews could boast of their faithfulness to the Jewish religion.

But Paul could boast of those things plus his zeal in persecuting the church.

At this point we might ask, "How could a sincere man like Saul of Tarsus be so wrong?" The answer is, he was **using the wrong measuring stick!** Like the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) and the Pharisee in Christ's parable (Luke 18:10-14), Saul of Tarsus was looking at the outside and not the inside. He was comparing him- self with standards set by men, not by God. As far as obeying outwardly the demands of the law, Paul was a success, but he did not stop to consider the inward sins he was committing. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that there are sinful attitudes and appetites as well as sinful actions (Matt. 5:21-48). When he looked at himself or looked at others, Saul of Tarsus considered himself to be righteous. But one day he saw himself as compared with Jesus Christ! It was then that he changed his evaluations and values and abandoned "works righteousness" for the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

When Paul met Jesus Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9), he trusted Him and became a child of God. It was an instantaneous miracle of the grace of God, the kind that still takes place today whenever sinners will admit their need and turn to the Savior by faith. When Paul met Christ, he realized how futile were his good works and how sinful were his claims of righteousness. A wonderful transaction took place. Paul lost some things, but he gained much more than he lost!

Paul's losses (v. 7). To begin with, he lost whatever was gain to him personally apart from God. Certainly, Paul had a great reputation as a scholar (Acts 26:24) and a religious leader. He was proud of his Jewish heritage and his religious achievements. All of these things were valuable to him; he could profit from them. He certainly had many friends who admired his zeal. But he measured these "treasures" against what Jesus Christ had to offer, and he realized that all he held dear was really nothing, but "refuse" compared to what he had in Christ. His own "treasures" brought glory to him personally, but they did not bring glory to God. They were "gain" to him only, and as such, were selfish.

Discussion and ask questions?

This does not mean that Paul repudiated his rich heritage as an orthodox Jew. As you read his letters and follow his ministry in the book of Acts, you see how he valued both his Jewish blood and his Roman citizenship. Becoming a Christian did not make him less a Jew. In fact, it made him a completed Jew, a true child of Abraham both spiritually and physically (Gal. 3:6–9). Nor did he lower his standards of morality because he saw the shallowness of Pharisaical religion. He accepted the higher standard of living—conformity to Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1–2). When a person becomes a Christian, God takes away the bad, but He also takes the good and makes it better.

Paul's gains (vv. 8–11). Again, we are reminded of Jim Elliot's words: **"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep gaining what he cannot lose."** This is what Paul experienced: he lost his religion and his reputation, but he gained far more than he lost.

This means much more than knowledge about Christ, because Paul had that kind of historical information before he was saved. To "know Christ" means to have a personal relationship with Him through faith. It is this experience that Jesus mentioned in John 17:3. You and I know about many people, even people who lived centuries ago, but we know personally very few. "Christianity is Christ." Salvation is knowing Him in a personal way.

Righteousness was the great goal of Paul's life when he was a Pharisee, but it was a self-righteousness, a works righteousness, that he never really could attain. But when Paul trusted Christ, he lost his own self-righteousness and gained the righteousness of Christ. The technical word for this transaction is imputation (read Rom. 4:1–8 carefully). It means "to put to one's account." Paul looked at his own record and discovered that he was spiritually bankrupt. He looked at Christ's record and saw that He was perfect. When Paul trusted Christ, he saw God put Christ's righteousness to his own account! More than that, Paul discovered that his sins had been put on Christ's account on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). And God promised Paul that He would never write his sins against him anymore. What a fantastic experience of God's grace!

Romans 9:30–10:13 is a parallel passage and you ought to read it carefully. What Paul said about the nation Israel was true in his own life before he was saved. And it is true in the lives of many religious people today; they refuse to abandon their own righteousness that they might receive the free gift of the righteousness of Christ. Many religious people will not even admit they need any righteousness. Like Saul of Tarsus, they are measuring themselves by themselves, or by the standards of the Ten Commandments, and they fail to see the inwardness of sin. Paul had to give up his religion to receive righteousness, but he did not consider it a sacrifice. The fellowship of Christ (vv. 10–11). When he became a Christian, it was not the end for Paul, but the beginning. His experience with Christ was so tremendous that it transformed his life. And this experience continued in the years to follow. It was a personal experience ("That I may know him") as Paul walked with Christ, prayed, obeyed His will, and sought to glorify His name. When he was living under law, all Paul had was a set of rules. But now he had a Friend, a Master, a constant Companion! It was also a powerful experience ("and the power of his resurrection"), as the resurrection power of Christ went to work in Paul's life. "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Read Ephesians 1:15–23 and 3:13–21 for Paul's estimate of the resurrection power of Christ and what it can do in your life. It was also a painful experience ("and the fellowship of his sufferings"). Paul knew that it was a privilege to suffer for Christ (Phil. 1:29–30). In fact, suffering had

been a part of his experience from the very beginning (Acts 9:16). As we grow in our knowledge of Christ and our experience of His power, we come under the attack of the enemy. Paul had been a persecutor at one time, but he learned what it means to be persecuted. But it was worth it! For walking with Christ was also a practical experience ("being made conformable unto his death"). Paul lived for Christ because he died to self (Rom. 6 explains this); he took up his cross daily and followed Him. The result of this death was a spiritual resurrection (Phil. 3:11) that caused Paul to walk "in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Paul summarized this whole experience in Galatians 2:20, so take time to read it.

Yes, Paul gained far more than he lost. In fact, the gains were so thrilling that Paul considered all other "things" nothing but garbage in comparison! No wonder he had joy—his life did not depend on the cheap things of the world but on the eternal values found in Christ. Paul had the "spiritual mind" and looked at the things of earth from heaven's point of view. People who live for things are never really happy, because they must constantly protect their treasures and worry lest they lose their value. Not so the believer with the spiritual mind; his treasures in Christ can never be stolen and they never lose their value.

Maybe now is a good time for you to become an accountant and evaluate in your life the "things" that matter most to you.

In Philippians 3, Paul gave us his spiritual biography, his past (Phil. 3:1–11), his present (Phil. 3:12–16), and his future (Phil. 3:17–21). We have already met Paul "the accountant," who discovered new values when he met Jesus Christ. In this section we meet Paul "the athlete" with his spiritual vigor, pressing toward the finish line in the Christian race. In the final section we will see Paul "the alien," having his citizenship in heaven and looking for the coming of Jesus

Christ. In each of these experiences, Paul was exercising the spiritual mind; he was looking at things on earth from God's point of view. As a result, he was not upset by things behind him, around him, or before him— things did not rob him of his joy! In his letters, Paul used many illustrations from the world to communicate truth about the Christian life. Four are prominent: the military ("Put on the whole armor

of God”), architecture (“You are the temple of God”), agriculture (“Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap”), and athletics.

The verb “reaching forth” in Philippians 3:13 literally means “stretching as in a race.” It is important to note that Paul was not telling us how to be saved. If he were, it would be a picture of salvation by works or self-effort, and this would contradict what he wrote in the first eleven verses of Philippians 3.

In order to participate in the Greek games, the athlete had to be a citizen. He did not run the race to gain his citizenship. In Philippians 3:20, Paul reminded us that “our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven.” **Because we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, we have the responsibility of “running the race” and achieving the goals God has set for us.** This is a graphic picture of Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your own salvation ... for it is God which worketh in you.” 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. (Read 1 Cor. 3:11–15 for the same idea, only using architecture as the symbol.)

All of us want to be “winning Christians” and fulfill the purposes for which we have been saved. What are the essentials for winning the race and one day receiving the reward that is promised? Discussion...

“Not as though I had already attained!” This is the statement of a great Christian who never permitted himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments.

Obviously, Paul was satisfied with Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10), but he was not satisfied with his Christian life. **A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in the Christian race.**

Many Christians are self-satisfied because they compare their “running” with that of other Christians, usually those who are not making much progress. Had Paul compared himself with others, he would have been tempted to be proud and perhaps to let up a bit. After all, there were not too many believers in Paul’s day who had experienced all that he had! But Paul did not compare himself with others; he compared himself with himself and with Jesus Christ! The dual use

of the word perfect in Philippians 3:12 and 15 explains his thinking. He has not arrived yet at perfection (Phil. 3:12), but he is "perfect" [mature] (Phil. 3:15), and one mark of this maturity is the knowledge that he is not perfect! **The mature Christian honestly evaluates him- self and strives to do better.**

Often in the Bible we are warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition.

The church at Sardis had "a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). They had reputation without reality. The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich, when in God's sight it was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). In contrast to the Laodicean church, the believers at Smyrna thought they were poor when they were really rich! (Rev. 2:9). Samson thought he still had his old power, but in reality, it had departed from him (Judg. 16:20).

Self-evaluation can be a dangerous thing, because we can err in two directions: (1) making ourselves better than we are, or (2) making ourselves worse than we really are.

Paul had no illusions about himself; he still had to keep "pressing forward" in order to "lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold" of him. A divine dis- satisfaction is essential for spiritual progress. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1-2).

"One thing" is a phrase that is important to the Christian life. "One thing thou lackest," said Jesus to the self-righteous rich young ruler (Mark 10:21). "One thing is needful," He explained to busy Martha when she criticized her sister (Luke 10:42). "One thing I know," exclaimed the man who had received his sight by the power of Christ (John 9:25). "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after," testified the psalmist (Ps. 27:4). **Too many Christians are too involved in "many things," when the secret of progress is to concentrate on "one thing."**

The believer must devote himself to "running the Christian race." No athlete succeeds by doing every- thing; he succeeds by specializing. There are those few athletes who seem proficient in many sports, but they are the exception. The winners are those who concentrate, who keep their eyes on the goal and let nothing distract them. They are devoted entirely to their calling.

“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). **Concentration is the secret of power. It is wholly a matter of values and priorities, living for that which matters most.**

The unsaved person is controlled by the past, but the Christian running the race looks toward the future. Imagine what would happen on the race course if the charioteers (or the runners) started looking behind them! It is bad enough for a plowman to look back (Luke 9:62), but for a charioteer to do so means a possible collision and serious injury.

So, “forgetting those things which are behind” does not suggest an impossible feat of mental and psycho- logical gymnastics by which we try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. It simply means that we break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past. There were things in Paul’s past that could have been weights to hold him back (1 Tim. 1:12–17), but they became inspirations to speed him ahead. The events did not change, but his understanding of them changed.

Too many of us are shackled by regrets of the past. we are trying to run the race by looking back- ward! No wonder they stumble and fall and get in the way of other Christians! Some Christian runners are being distracted by the successes of the past, not the failures, and this is just as bad. “The things which are behind” must be set aside and “the things which are before” must take their place.

“I press.” This same verb is translated “I follow after” in Philippians 3:12, and it carries the idea of intense endeavor. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. A man does not become a winning athlete by listening to lectures, watching movies, reading books, or cheering at the games. He becomes a winning athlete by getting into the game and determining to win! The same zeal that Paul employed when he persecuted the church (Phil. 3:6), he displayed in serving Christ. Come to think of it, wouldn’t it be wonderful if Christians put as much determination into their spiritual life as they do their golfing, fishing, or any other sport?

There are two extremes to avoid here: (1) "I must do it all" and (2) "God must do it all!" The first describes the activist, the second the quietist, and both are heading for failure. "Let go and let God!" is a clever slogan, but it does not fully describe the process of Christian living. What quarterback would say to his team, "OK, men, just let go and let the coach do it all!" On the other hand, no quarterback would say, "Listen to me and forget what the coach says!" Both extremes are wrong.

The Christian runner with the spiritual mind realizes that God must work in him if he is going to win the race (Phil. 2:12-13). "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). God works in us that He might work through us. As we apply ourselves to the things of the spiritual life, God is able to mature us and strengthen us for the race. "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Some Christians are so busy "dying to self" that they never come back to life again to run the race! And others are so sure they can make it on their own that they never stop to read the Word, pray, or ask for the power of the Lord.

Toward what goal is the runner pressing with such spiritual determination? "The prize of the high [upward] calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). When he reaches the goal, he will receive the reward! Again, Paul was not suggesting that we attain to heaven by our own efforts. He was simply saying that just as the athlete is rewarded for his performance, so the faithful believer will be crowned when Jesus Christ returns. (See 1 Cor. 9:24-27)

The important thing is that we reach the goal He has established for us. No matter how successful we may be in the eyes of men, we cannot be rewarded unless we "take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [us]" (Phil. 3:12).

It is not enough to run hard and win the race; the runner must also obey the rules. In Philippians 3:15-16, Paul emphasized the importance of the Christian remembering the "spiritual rules" laid down in the Word.

This was what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. "Any man who enters an athletic contest practices rigid self-control in training" (Phil. 3:25). If the athlete breaks training, he is disqualified; if he breaks the rules of the game, he is

disqualified. "No contestant in the games is crowned, unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5). The issue is not what he thinks or what the spectators think but what the judges say.

Bible history is filled with people who began the race with great success but failed at the end because they disregarded God's rules. They did not lose their salvation, but they did lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). It happened to Lot (Gen. 19), Samson (Judg. 16), Saul (1 Sam. 28; 31), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). And it can happen to us! It is an exciting experience to run the race daily, "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:1-2). It will be even more exciting when we experience that "upward calling" and Jesus returns to take us to heaven! Then we will stand before the bema to receive our rewards! It was this future prospect that motivated Paul, and it can also motivate us.

To be "spiritually minded" simply means to look at earth from heaven's point of view. "Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth" (Col. 3:2). "Practice occupying your minds with the things above, not with the things on earth" (Col. 3:2). Christians have a dual citizenship—on earth and in heaven—and our citizenship in heaven ought to make us better people here on earth. The spiritually minded believer is not attracted by the things of this world. He makes his decisions based on eternal values and not the passing fads of society. Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan because his values were worldly, and ultimately, he lost everything. Moses refused the pleasures and treasures of Egypt because he had something infinitely more wonderful to live for (Heb. 11:24-26). "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Discussion.....

"For our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The Greek word translated "conversation" or "citizenship" is the word from which we get the English word politics. It has to do with one's behavior as a citizen of a nation. Paul was encouraging us to have the spiritual mind, and he did this by pointing out the characteristics of the Christian whose citizenship is in heaven. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome on foreign soil, so the church is a "colony of heaven" on earth.

Our Names Are on Heaven's Record

The citizens of Philippi were privileged to be Roman citizens away from Rome. When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that its name be registered on the legal records. When the lost sinner trusts Christ and becomes a citizen of heaven, his name is written in "the book of life" (Phil. 4:3).

Citizenship is important. When you travel to another country, it is essential that you have a passport that proves your citizenship.

The Christian's name is written in "the book of life," and this is what determines his final entrance into the heavenly country (Rev. 20:15). When you confess Christ on earth, He confesses your name in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33). Your name is written down in heaven (Luke 10:20), and it stands written forever. (The Greek verb "written" in Luke 10:20 is in the perfect tense: "it is once-for-all written and stands written.")

We Speak Heaven's Language

Those who "mind earthly things" talk about earthly things. After all, what comes out of the mouth reveals what is in the heart (Matt. 12:34-37). The unsaved person does not understand the things of God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-16), so how can he talk about them intelligently? The citizens of heaven understand spiritual things and enjoy discussing them and sharing them with one another.

"They are of the world: therefore, speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:5-6).

The spiritually minded Christian doesn't go around quoting Bible verses all day! But he is careful to speak in a manner that glorifies God.

"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). No believer ought ever to say, "Now take this with a grain of salt!" Put the salt into your speech! Salt prevents corruption. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

In Philippians 3:17, Paul warned the Philippian believers against imitating the wrong kind of citizens. "Be followers together of me." Of course, Paul was a follower of Christ, so his admonition is not egotistical! (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul knew himself to be an "alien" in this world, a "pilgrim and a stranger" (see 1 Peter 2:11). His life was governed by heaven's laws, and this is what made him different. He was concerned about others, not himself. He was interested in giving, not getting. His motive was love (2 Cor. 5:14), not hatred. By faith, Paul obeyed the Word of God, knowing that one day he would be rewarded. Men might oppose him and persecute him now, but in that final day of reckoning, he would be the winner.

Sad to say, there are those today, like the Judaizers in Paul's day, who profess to be citizens of heaven, but whose lives do not show it. They may be zealous in their religious activities and even austere in their disciplines, but there is no evidence of the control of the Spirit of God in their lives. All that they do is energized by the flesh, and they get all the glory. It is bad enough that they are going astray, but they also lead other people astray. No wonder Paul wept over them.

Paul discovered new values. As the athlete in Philippians 3:12–16, he displayed new vigor. Now as the alien, he experiences a new vision: "We look for the Saviour." It is this anticipation of the coming of Christ that motivates the believer with the spiritual mind.

There is tremendous energy in the present power of a future hope. Because Abraham looked for a city, he was content to live in a tent (Heb. 11:13–16). Because Moses looked for the rewards of heaven, he was willing to forsake the treasures of earth (Heb. 11:24–26). Because of the "joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2), Jesus was willing to endure the cross. The fact that Jesus Christ is returning is a powerful motive for dedicated living and devoted service today. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (read 1 John 2:28–3:3).

The citizen of heaven, living on earth, is never discouraged because he knows that his Lord is one day going to return. He faithfully keeps on doing his job lest his Lord return and find him disobedient (Luke 12:40–48). The spiritually minded believer

does not live for the things of this world; he anticipates the blessings of the world to come. This does not mean that he ignores or neglects his daily obligations; but it does mean that what he does today is governed by what Christ will do in the future. Amen and Amen

Prayer requests and closing prayer

Pastor John Spurgeon