

LOOK UP TO HEAVEN

Philippians 3:7-21

Have you noticed how your priorities change as you get older or if you were to have a change in your health or maybe even a change in relationships? You can remember such changes when you got married, when you got your first job, when your first child was born, when the kids left home, when they came back, etc. Some people will downsize their home or move to a new location when they retire. You may have experienced having a role reversal and have your parents move in with you as they have gotten less independent.

It is not very profound, but if you decide to move to a smaller house or from a house to a condo, you will find that a lot of things that were very important several years ago are not really worth holding onto if you have less space to practice your art of being a packrat.

In our Christian walk, we find a similar thing relative to our values: many things that were important to us prior to our coming to know the Lord no longer mean much to us, and things that we used to never even think about are the top priorities in our lives.

Whatever our goals and priorities in life, I think it is important that we realize that each of us has room to grow and mature. The really good golfers are always working to improve, the really good singers still practice, the strongest people still exercise, and Christians must still press on in seeing the likeness of Christ being worked out in their lives on a daily basis. Paul wrote about both of these realities: the changes in priorities that come about when we are born again and the importance of realizing that we do not have it made, that we are not perfect.

One could argue that the general thrust of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi is that we should give priority to advancing the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If that is going to happen, then our other priorities in life should reflect that objective. To be successful in raising our focus to a higher plane we should concentrate on knowing Christ in a deeper way, we should be concerned with our spiritual maturity, and demonstrate that better knowledge and maturity through our commitment to service in the cause of Christ.

To Know Christ Better - 3:7-11

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:7-11 (NASB95)

Many times we have goals in life that are really not worth the effort to accomplish. I remember one of my sons collected the pull tabs from aluminum soft drink cans and was making a chain of them. He was going to make a really long chain. This didn't last very long because that's the way children are. But also, it didn't last very long because the object of his labor didn't have an intrinsic value.

Paul could look back on his life before Christ and see that most of the things that he worked very hard to accomplish were not really worth having. It is a fact of human life that we will value what we have and we will put priority on those things. There are people in some of our larger cities that live in the public shelters and they carry with them all of their earthly possessions in a stolen shopping cart. Most of these possessions are things that they have dug out of trash bins, but they cling to a plastic bottle or to a band-aid box as if it were the best thing in the world. Several years ago I noticed a man driving a step van – like the old bread trucks –

and he had it filled completely with, what appeared to me to be, trash. Apparently, this was all he had and it was obviously counted as valuable by him.

Paul could look on the things that used to be important to him as worthless because he had found and recognized something better. The first “better thing” or more excellent thing that Paul found was the knowledge of Christ. According to John Gill, this knowledge is “objective” knowledge of Christ and would encompass just things as the fact that He is Lord over all, He is Savior and Redeemer, and He is personal in His relationship with those who receive Him. This is knowledge that comes from revelation by the Holy Spirit and is not just something we might learn from hearing or reading about Jesus.

The second thing Paul mentioned as being more excellent than all the religious trappings and everything else was that he might “gain” or win Christ. The word gain or win is the same word used in verse seven where Paul was writing about that those things from the former life that were considered to be valuable and worthy to be acquired. What did Paul do in order to consider Christ to the most valuable and worthy asset to be acquired (or be counted as gain)? He lost (or abandoned) everything that was on the “win” list and changed his view of them (saw them as worthless). In doing so, the only thing left on the “priority” list of what was considered to be “gain” was Christ Himself. This is exactly what is meant by the First of the Ten Commandments that tells us “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

The third point of “surpassing value” that Paul made was that he would be found in Christ. When we find something, then we see it or discover it. Are we seen sitting with Christ, walking with Christ, and standing with Him? Do we have the same attitudes on things and people as He does or do we “find” ourselves on our own or sitting, walking and standing with the world?

The fourth point that seems to be directly related to being found in Christ is that any righteousness we have is not derived from “keeping the law” and “doing things” but is a result of our having believed God and His having declared us to be righteous. We find ourselves in good company in that Abraham believed God and God counted that as righteousness.

It almost seems as if Paul has come full circle in this list of excellent things of surpassing value that are ultimately superior to anything the world can offer. In verse ten we again see the phrase “that I make know Him.” The Greek word used here is from the same root word (gnosis) used in verse eight, but here the meaning is of an intimate relationship that come from having Christ as our priority (or gain), from being found in Him, and from having no righteousness of our own. All this results in our experiencing the transforming power of the resurrection life in us and being exposed to the same persecutions and sufferings that come to those who are identified with Christ.

The proper way to view such persecution and suffering is to realize that these are ways in which we are to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. It is one thing to identify ourselves (by faith) with Christ’s death on the cross, it is another thing to walk out such “dying to self” in our everyday lives. So many of us would like to just skip the Cross and go directly to the Resurrection. There are no short cuts.

Paul had been serious about religion before he came to know Jesus. He had worked at being righteous by the only means that he knew and that involved keeping (being obedient to) the law. He could see that the kind of righteousness that resulted from just following the law was not satisfactory in that no basic change in his nature had occurred. However, in Christ, we are resurrected with Him to a new life having put to death the old nature on the cross of Christ. If we could perfectly keep the law, we would still be lacking in that our very natures would be

wrong. That same power that raised Christ from death is able to give new life to us and, as Paul says in Romans, to even quicken our mortal bodies.

To Be More Mature in Christ - 3:12-16

¹²Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained. Philippians 3:12-16 (NASB95)

Many Christians seem to think that when they made a decision for Christ and joined the church that they have arrived. The truth of the matter is that they have just begun. Such thinking is like a new born baby thinking that he is fully grown. After we are born of the Spirit we need to grow and mature and the only way we can do that is to let go of the past life and the things that were important there and to recognize the value of becoming more and more like Jesus. God is in the process of creating a new race of people, not of the seed of Adam, but of the Spirit. He is making man in His image. This process is sanctification and is what the Christian life is all about – we are becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

Apparently, there were those in the Philippian church who felt so “spiritually superior” they thought they had achieved perfection. Even someone with the maturity and knowledge of the Apostle Paul could not make such a claim. We know there is only one perfect person who lived and that is Christ Jesus. He admonished us to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. This is the goal or the target and is the reason that Christ came so that we could move in that direction. The previous verses are important components that help move us in the direction of becoming what God wants us to be. Paul repeated the advice to let go of the past and the priorities we had and (instead) devote ourselves toward letting God work in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit so that we become more and more like Christ.

In a bit of sarcasm, Paul addressed those who were “already perfect” with advice to have the same attitude about maturity that he did. If they would consider how they came to the point in their Christian walk where they were presently, then they would realize that it happened by trusting in what Christ had done on the cross and what the Holy Spirit was continuing to do by using the word of God to bring about the transformation of their very lives. Paul’s advice was to “stick with the plan” since they still had not arrived at their destination.

Every Christian needs to realize what his purpose is in this life. If we know the goal then we can walk in the direction of the goal. We receive guidance from God that will show us when we start drifting away from the goal. There are people who have been growing in Christ many years and some that have just begun, nevertheless, all need to exercise the same rules along the way. We must keep focused on Jesus and we must respond to God’s direction to avoid drifting off course.

To Serve Christ Well - 3:17-21

¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Philippians 3:17-21 (NASB95)

Many times the younger or less mature Christians need the example of more mature

Christians to show them that it is possible to live for Jesus and have meaningful and fulfilled lives. Many times we find ourselves wondering how to go about serving the Lord and just seeing an example could help us discover a ministry that God has for us.

Paul continued to warn his reader about false teachers and people who practice religion for the wrong reasons. There are many people today that use the name Christian but are without the character of Christ. These people do great damage to the Kingdom of God. They do what they do for personal gain and to fulfill carnal (fleshly) desires. However, walking after the flesh leads to death rather than life.

By contrast, those who are true in their faith see themselves as citizen of heaven and are, therefore, not caught up in concerns about this world. This world and this life are temporary and it is foolish to concentrate on things that are not going to last when we have access to things that are eternal. Our Way into this eternal realm is through Jesus Christ and we must focus on Him. He has already won the victory and we want to participate in that victory to the fullest. One day even our bodies will be changed. Right now we are working on the inner man to be renewed day by day and to see ourselves transformed into the image of Christ. One day even the outward man will participate in the transformation. This is what heaven is about.