

Philippians
“Living above the Clouds”

III. Main Teaching: C. 3:1-21 Joy in spite of things

2-3. 3:12-21 Present and future

3:12-21

“He died Climbing”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 12-16 Five essential of winning your race

III. Vs. 17-21 Heavenly Citizenship

I. Intro.

Last week we saw the benefits of losing one’s religion for a relationship with Jesus. That primarily dealt with the past today Paul concludes this with a look at the present and future benefits. In the final section of the 3rd chapter of Philippians it appears as though Paul sees his life from two other vantage points.

1. You will recall in verses 4-7 Paul looked back in his **past** in an autobiographical account of his life and as such it appears as though it was the “**accountant**” stage of his life as he said “***I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.***”
2. In this section in the **present** he sees himself secondly as an “**athlete**” (verses 12-16) as we are told in verse 14 that he “***pressed towards the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus.***”
3. And 3rd, he sees himself in the **future** as an “**alien**” in verses 17-21 as we are told in verse 20 that his “***citizenship is in heaven.***”

II. Vs. 12-16 Five essential of winning your race

You may **not** think of yourself as competitive but I believe we all have some of this in us and as such ought to all desire to be “*winning Christians*” as we long to fulfill that for which we have been called. What I love about this passage is the detailed process in which Paul speaks about the day to day way to lose your religion. This “*pressing on*” of leaving behind religion has according to verse 14 a “*prize*” attached to it called the “*upward call of God in Christ Jesus*”. Did you notice that **the prize wasn't at the end of the journey, as Paul says that the prize is the journey?** Oh saint's what a great revelation this is to us that **the prize is the call itself and not the benefits that come from the call.** The prize isn't heaven the prize is the journey with Jesus that will never end! That means that we don't have to wait to start enjoying the prize we can start enjoying the prize today and each day after. In verses 12-16 Paul will give us **five essentials of winning our race in the upward call in Christ Jesus:**

- a. Vs. 12-13a **Dissatisfaction:** Paul says “*Not that I've already attained!*” Nothing will inspire a person who is competitive more than not attaining the goal they sought after. Paul's dissatisfaction wasn't with his salvation it was with his sanctification as he was driven to lose more of his religion that he may gain more of Christ. Saint's there is one thing that we can and should always covet more of... JESUS! In my book we could all use a bit more of **sanctified dissatisfaction!** The Christian life is not a race against others it's a race against our self as Paul stated in verse 12 that he “*May lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me.*” The mark of his maturity was that he realized that he hadn't arrived and wasn't about to rest on his laurels.

- b. Vs. 13b **Devotion**: I love the simplicity of this as Paul says, “*One thing I do*” and that one thing was to specialize in devotion to Jesus not to work on religion. One of the differences of religion verses relationship is that religions focus is multidirectional and relationship is single in nature. A river that overflows its banks makes everything a muddy mess. A river that is dammed and controlled powers a city; saints live for what matters the most.
- c. Vs. 13c **Direction**: This is rather obvious if you have ever been involved in a race as you don’t want to look back, you want rather to keep looking forward. If we are going to lay hold of that which Christ has laid hold of us then we will need to be “*forgetting those things which are behind*” and it doesn’t matter if those things were positive or negative as we ought to no longer be influenced or allow those to negatively affect our race to the prize. The sin we’ve committed in the past can place us in paralysis in the present. The good we’ve done in the past can puff us up in the present with pride. That’s why it’s a good practice to forget those things which are behind! We may not be able to change the past but we sure can change the meaning of the past! Running from the regrets of the past as well as running to the distractions of the successes of the past will certainly hinder your race in the present and the future.
- d. Vs. 14 **Determination**: The phrase “*I press*” carries the idea of intense endeavor and the Greeks used the word to describe a hunter pursuing his prey. A person doesn’t become a winning athlete by listening to lectures, watching “*how to videos*” they become a winner by getting into the game and being determined to win. What would Jesus’ church look like if we put as much determination in our

upward call in Christ as we do our hobbies and interests? In this we must avoid both being an activist (*thinking that it is all up to us*) as well as a pacifist (*thinking that it's all up to God and we can just kick back*). The balance is that we must realize that God works in us for His good pleasure. **Some folks I'm afraid have miss understood "dying to self" as they have never come back alive!**

- e. Vs. 15-16 **Discipline**: In the Greek games a runner who was not disciplined and disobeyed the rules was disqualified in the competition and thus forfeited his opportunity for the prize. If you are going to gain the upward call in Christ Jesus then it will be essential that you remain disciplined in training as well as in the race set before you. The Church history is full of folks who began their race well but failed because they didn't remain disciplined. We need to keep looking to the author and finisher of our faith until we are looking at Him face to face!

III. Vs. 17-21 Heavenly Citizenship

Vs. 17 In a letter that has as its theme JOY it is a bit odd to find Paul speak his weeping as his tears were on the behalf of those who had succumbed to abandoning their relationship with Christ. The truth is the Church is God's colony of heaven here on earth. The believer must continually, daily, moment by moment make a choice to walk on with their Master and friend our stay awhile in the valley of religion. As Hebrews chapter 12 said of those Old Testament saints that we are "*surround by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us.*" Paul says that we not only have a "*cloud of witnesses*" cheering us on, we also have fellow runners to run with us to we will continue to run towards the upward call in Christ Jesus. Just is in our homes so too in our churches

people will imitate and pattern themselves after those that lead them both for good and bad! There will always be those who set a pattern contrary to the upward call in Christ and towards religion and the world and it is beneficial to note those who are on a different road than us with Jesus.

Vs. 18-19 Paul is not naïve he realizes that there are those “*enemies of the cross of Christ*” and I believe that he is thinking of two.

- A. There those who use “**liberty as a license**” in Christ to indulge their worldly appetites. And in so doing **deny the cross of self-denial**.
- B. There are those who peruse “**religion as righteousness**” and in so doing **deny the cross and the death of self-righteousness**.

The only agreement these two have is in their mutual hatred for the “*upward call in Christ Jesus*”. Yet in the end if a person chooses the world or religion it will ultimately destroy them. Paul says of them that **they have three characteristics**:

- a. ***Whose god is their belly***: The word “*belly*” here has a broader reference to living for the pleasures of the body, mind and soul. **They live for their fleshly appetites**. The point here is that Paul is showing that both those who have used “**liberty for license**” and those who have chosen “**religion as righteousness**” share in **common idolatry**, albeit different gods.
- b. ***Whose glory is their shame***: **They live to make a name for themselves**. They also both share **misplaced priorities** as they glory about things they should be ashamed of.
- c. ***Who set their minds on earthly things***: **They live for that which is temporal**. Finally they share in common the **wrong focus in life** as neither makes their life about a

relationship with Jesus and the worship of Him but rather to advance in this world and life!

Vs. 20 As you may recall Philippi was a Roman colony that prized its citizenship greatly. So Paul uses this fact that as much as they saw themselves as Romans it would be far more beneficial for them if they saw themselves as citizens of heaven. “*We have our home in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heaven’s citizens.*” They were not to await the emperor’s visit but the Lord’s return. In 48 B.C. Julius Caesar was declared to be “*the universal savior of mankind.*” It then became a common title for the ruling Caesar and idolatry to bestow this title to any other. It wasn’t long after the time of Paul that Christians were martyred for refusing to call Caesar Lord and savior, as they proclaimed that only Jesus is Lord and savior.

Vs. 21 The last superiority that a relationship with Jesus can accomplish that neither the pursuit of “liberty for license” nor “religion as righteousness” can ever do is our complete transformation as we will have the type of body that Jesus Himself had when He was resurrected.

In a small churchyard at a foot of one of the great mountains of the Swiss Alps lies the grave of an English mountain climber. On his tomb stone directly under his name is a three word epitaph that I pray every believer in Christ would ascribe to, “***He Died Climbing***”!