

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session Ten May 27, 2020
Philippians 3:12-16

Paul shares with the Philippian church the importance of learning to live in the time “in between” – the time in between his coming to faith in Jesus Christ and his death (or Jesus's return).

Paul also uses irony to talk about spiritual complacency, warning the Philippian believers that we never should feel a sense of false super spirituality, but instead continuing to press forward toward one goal – a Christ-centered life.

Opening Question...

(1) Have you ever shared your baptism story with someone before? What does it mean for your ongoing walk with Jesus? If you were baptized as an infant, how does that story carry through to your adult life?

Last week, Paul continued to stress the importance of maintaining their beliefs if a group of Judaizing Christians arrived at the Philippian Church. Part of Paul's emphasis to the Philippians was to remember that their relationship with Christ was all that mattered – not their adherence to the law. Paul went on to explain to this young church the meaning of being found “in him” – outlining his theological beliefs of justification of faith. He concluded the section by emphasizing the transforming power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how this act redefined who the people of God were – it was not open to everyone.

This week in Philippians 3:12-16, Paul addresses the question of how do we deal with the time between the baptism and the funeral – the “in between”. Paul discusses his constant striving towards the one goal – maturity in Christ (know Christ, be like Christ, follow Christ's plan for me). At the same time, Paul ironically addresses anyone who believes they have arrived at perfection that God may reveal the need to press on to this goal.

3:12 – Press on..

Paul is emphasizing for the Philippians that the Holy Spirit is at work in his life, just as the Spirit is at work in their lives. The goal that Paul is

pressing forward to is a life-long goal – one that will only be obtained at his death or the return of Jesus Christ. This “race” that Paul is on (that we all are on) begins when our faith story begins – at baptism. It does not end there, it is just the beginning. Unfortunately, Western Christology has done a great job of emphasizing “baptism” and “heaven” and has forgotten the “in between”. This “in between”, or “in Christ” which Paul referenced last week, is what Paul encourages the Philippian church to not forget. God is in the process of making us fully human into “His standards” – part of this process is learning to think for ourselves as Messianic people. This is what Paul is emphasizing in these verses.

3:13-14 – Keep those eyes looking forward...

Paul knew the importance of looking forward and not getting caught focusing on the past. His past included holding the coats as Stephen, the first Christian martyr recorded in the New Testament (Acts chapter 7), was killed. His past included persecution of many Christians. We all have pasts. Yet just as Christ does not look at our past, Paul encourages the Philippians to keep their eyes on the present and future. Keep moving forward. For Paul, the steps to moving forward – living a life of virtue - were not an individual act, but a team sport. Love, patience, kindness (just to name a few) were corporate acts of faith. Paul was encouraging the Philippians to keep their eyes on the goal and practice these acts of virtue as steps towards Christian maturity with the ultimate goal of maturity in Christ. This emphasis directly relates to the relationship with Christ that Paul talked about last week and the understanding of who Christ is in the poem from Chapter 2.

3:15 – For those who are perfect...

Paul uses some irony to address those who may be in the church who think they are perfect in verses fifteen and sixteen. Not perfect as in not making any mistakes, but perfect thinking that since they have been baptized they are “good to go”! Unfortunately, this mentality has not been lost even in today’s society. Some Christians see their baptism as their free ticket into heaven. This may be in part of the failure of the Christian

church with emphasis placed on baptism and heaven, and less focus placed on the “in between”. Paul is saying there is still work to be done! This mental and moral work is important and essential. God wants people, not puppets (see 2 Corinthians 6) – working together with Him!

Paul was hoping that if there were individuals in the Philippian church that were thinking differently that hopefully God would reveal the truth to them as well. Both Jewish and non-Jewish individuals in the first century believed in special divine revelation. Many pagan religions had oracles built and followers would travel to these locations in hopes that the gods would reveal truths to them about their lives. In the Jewish faith, prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel experienced special revelations from God that many believed gave them a super spiritual status in the eyes of others. In this passage, Paul was stating that if you believe this idea or concept, and that if you believed that you have arrived at this super spiritual level, which hopefully God would “reveal” the truth – which you have not! Paul was warning against this false super spirituality!

3:16 – Same standard for us all!

Paul reminded the Philippians that the goal for him and for each follower of Christ is the same – maturity in Christ! Let us stop pretending we are someone who we are not, but instead take the proper steps and move forward towards Him. Remember, Paul was writing this while sitting in prison, but still striving forward in faith. The Philippians were young in their journey, but the goal was the same. Paul was encouraging them to keep their eyes on the prize – Him!

Paul encouraged the Philippian church to keep moving forward in their faith, not settling for a false sense of completion with their baptism and a false sense of waiting for their heavenly gain.

Paul reminded the Philippians that every Christian is on the same journey and that the key is to keep their eyes forward always focusing on the ultimate goal – maturity in Christ.

Follow Up Questions...

What is an example from your own life of when transformed thinking led to transformed action?

What are some things we can do as a group to help one another attain to the goal of Christlikeness?

What are some things you personally need to “forget” as you strain towards what is ahead?