

"The Journey Onward and Upward"- Philippians 3:12-4:1

Scripture Reflection: Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Introduction

- a. C. Lewis' phrase about "onward and upward" from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
- b. Review of Paul's intent in writing to the Church at Philippi
- c. Review of Philippians 3:1-11 ("Gaining Christ, Losing Everything")
- d. **Christ as Gain, Christ-likeness as the Goal- {*Emphasis on this theme for the entire sermon!*}**

Illustration: After I graduated from WTS, I asked one of my professors and friends to sign a book for me so that I might remember some sound advice during my ministry. At first glance, I did not know why he did not give me more *practical* advice, but realized that his advice was most *practical* as well as would become more so as I practiced and focused and pressed forward to attain such advice. He wrote:

For Charles,
Whose race is not finished, until he has fought the good fight and his Lord triumphs.
Regards,
Daryl Hart

I. Perfection and Pressing On (3:12)

- a. Not *perfection*, but continual *progress*-
Philippians 1:6 "...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ..."
- b. Progress in the Christian Life- Theologically called *Sanctification*.
Philippians 2:12, 13: 12 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; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.
- c. Paul does not focus on the perfection in Christ, but the goal of Christ-likeness which was the reason why the Lord on the Damascus Road originally *took hold of him* - to glorify himself in Paul's life.
- d. This teaches that we as Christians are not concerned primarily with the *saving of souls* but with persons being renewed in Christ's image.

II. Leaving Behind the Past and Pressing Forward (3:13-14)

- a. Paul's present concern is for the *future!*

- b. Paul leaves both his attainments *pre-* Christ, as well as *post-* Christ to continue stretching forward (or *straining*) forward in order to what is ahead: the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!
- c. The imagery of the Race:
 1 Cor. 9:24-27: 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. 25 And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown*. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified
- (1) For Paul, the Christian *being* (who the Christian is and the maturity of a Christian) is defined by one's *becoming* (or continue to progress in the race).
 - (2) *The Prize of the high calling of God in Christ-* Agonothete- proclaimed the winner of a Greek race with a declaration of their completion of the race and gave to the successful athlete a crown and olive branches.
 - (3) A race takes a lot of determination and focus that is mandatory for maturity in the Christian life. Keeping one's focus on the goal: Christ-likeness and ultimately (as we will see in a moment) being like Christ in our glorified bodies.

III. True Maturity and Apostolic Imitation (3:15-17)

- a. Paul speaks of perfection (same word as in v. 12, translated here as 'maturity'). *Perfection* for Paul sometimes is used in the sense of wholeness or complete, like in 1 Cor. 13:10. More often than not it means *true maturity* that comes because we are *in Christ* or united with Christ and thus have been *made perfect* in this way (cf. Mt. 5:48; Col. 4:12; James 1:4). But for Paul, true perfection will never manifest itself in saying so, or boasting in this way, but will continue to *forget these things* and press forward to the mark!
- b. Apostolic imitation is much like Christ-imitation- Phil. 2:5: "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus..." The Apostle Paul was called to emulate the Living Christ in his living.

IV. Earthly Mindedness and Heavenly Mindedness (3:18-4:1)

- a. Jewish focus on *earthly things* (vv.18-19)- dietary laws (concerned with the belly) and mere external circumcision (glory in shame, or nakedness). These "earthly things" pointed (as *types*) to a greater, a higher spiritual reality in heaven- - they did not understand this truth!
- ◆ Enemies of the cross (it's a *skandalon*, or stumbling block to Jews as Paul wrote to the Corinthians).
 - ◆ Their end is destruction.

b. Heavenly mindedness- *If you are heavenly minded, you can't help but be a world of good.*

Ultimately, the focus of Christians is on the heavenly reality of whatever typological, or earthly truth.

- (1) Citizenship is in Heaven- cf. With Philippi as a colony of Rome. *We are* a colony of heaven *HERE and NOW* with all of the rights and privileges of heaven (it's authority, benefits, etc.).
- (2) With this you see the clearest overlap of the present age (dominated by the fall and "sin and misery") and the reality that the Church has received the Spirit of the Age to Come in the *first-fruits of the Spirit* and the resurrection *NOW*. We wait however (v.20), for a Savior from Heaven. Here you see how we are citizens of heaven and of the city of Man (e.g., Maryland license plate and driver's license, U. S. Social Security Card). Cf. Col. 3:1-4- *Setting your minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*. We are waiting presently for the full manifestation of the New Creation of which we are already a part (2 Cor. 5:17).
- (3) Resurrection (v.21)- Our Lord Jesus himself will change (*transform*) our lowly, corruptible bodies to be like his glorious body. Lit. Our "body of humiliation" will be changed to be like his "body of glory".
- (4) Paul's finishing of the race!

2 Timothy 4:6-8- 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

- (5) Our finishing the race and our hope to come!

1 Cor. 15:42-58- 42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. 48 As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are heavenly*. 49 And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For

this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?" 56 The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. 57 But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.