

LESSON 7: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:1

That Which Marks Us As God's People

1. Can you see verse 3:1 as a command? Why should you rejoice in the Lord? How does this joy this safeguard us from the world – from everyone and everything that the world constantly throws at us?
2. How sure is Paul that he is right (v. 2a, 4a) and that his opponents are wrong? How sure is he? Would you call your opponents “dogs”? Should they be called that? And... who are these “dogs”?
3. Who are the covenant, the circumcised, people of God? What are the characteristics of these people (v. 3)? What does it mean to you to “worship by the Spirit of God”? What does it mean to you to “glory in Christ Jesus”? What does it mean to you to “put no confidence in the flesh”?
4. What had been to Paul's profit (vv. 4b-6)? How much is this a description of one who lacks any relationship with Jesus Christ? How much loss is found here? Can this be a universal definition?
5. Paul “glories in Christ Jesus” and “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” is everything to him (v. 8). What does it mean to you to know Christ? Is this a static situation that came full and mature when you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or is there more? (See John 16:13.)
6. What does it mean to you to be “found in him,” and in nothing more (v. 9)? For Paul, Jesus Christ is such an attractive dwelling that he cannot bear to be away from home. Do you wish to be “found in him in the same way? Do you wish that whoever looks on you will see Christ?”
7. What does it mean to you to have a “righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (v. 9)? Where does the righteousness that meets the requirements of God come from? How else can you stand under divine scrutiny and be right with God?
8. What does it mean to you “to be like” Christ (v. 10)? If you have been given the gift of God's righteousness, which implies consequent right living on your part, what should that salvation elicit from you (v. 10)? If you are satisfied with him for your salvation, is it possible for you to rest until you are “like” him? What goal is now given that should encourage you to persevere throughout your life until the end (v. 11)?

Pressing On!

1. We saw that Paul sees his life and ministry as running a race (2:12b-14); not yet having won, he must keep running until he does. Consider this metaphor of our life as a race. What does it mean when Paul writes “not that I’ve already obtained this” (v. 12)? What is “this”? And what does he mean when he adds “but I press on”?
2. What does it mean, practically speaking, when he writes “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (v. 13)? How does dwelling in the past hinder your present effort and your future progress? Has a bereavement, or despair over past sins, or the aggregate weight of disappointments, or the harboring of a persistent bitterness about past wrongs locked you in the past?
3. As a Christian athlete, what in addition to “straining” is involved in living the life that is in the likeness of Christ (v. 14)? How focused must your attention be, how absorbing your desire, to reach the “goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14)? What does this mean? (See Luke 19:17; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:17.)
4. What do you think Paul is saying in verse 15? And why his added exhortation in verse 16: “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” Why is it necessary for Paul to have added that. What is Christian maturity, anyway?
5. We have seen in verses 12-14 how Christ-centered ambition, rather than a list of acceptable behaviors, should characterize the mature believer. But, can you live a Christ-centered life apart from like-minded believers? What do we contribute to each other (vv. 15-16)? What would you say to the person who tells you they have no need of attending church?
6. In verse 17, Paul calls for us to follow his example, and to keep our eyes on those who walk according to that example. In your Christian life have you been associated with mature believers who have set an example of which you have taken note? Could it be that you are one of those in the fellowship whose Christ-centered life sets the pattern which serves as the example of the “mature Christian?”
7. Who are the “enemies of the cross of Christ” to whom Paul refers in verse 18? What is their destiny? Who (or what) is their god (v. 19)? What does this mean, and how does it have any bearing on our lives today?
8. In order to live a successful life for Christ, then, we need to take account of the lessons and blessings of the past, as well as of the demands and prospects of the future. What demands and prospects of the future are yours as a mature Christian (vv. 3:20-4:1)? Specifically, what does the eager expectation of his return have to do with how you as a Christian should live? What does it mean that our “citizenship is in heaven”? What is the “power” of which Paul speaks? In what way are the Philippians his “joy and crown”? And how are they (and we) to “stand firm in the Lord”?