

**Message #20****Philippians 3:15-21**

Back in the 70's, after I left radio, I went to work in a paper mill for about a year. The mill was a good education about industry and the life of the blue collar worker. The employees went to work every day and I came to understand the pressures, the problems and the frustrations of those who do that for a living.

There was one man in the plant, I'll call him Tom (because that was his name), who was a very interesting character. From the moment he came into the plant, his entire focus was getting out of the plant. If he came in at 7AM, he was thinking 3PM. If he came in at 3PM, he was thinking of 11PM. If he came in at 11PM, he was thinking of 7AM. Whenever you talked with him, he could tell you to the very minute how much longer until the shift ended. In fact, one time he actually tried to sneak out early and the foreman caught him and brought him back. When the buzzer rang, he was gone.

From a company standpoint, Tom is not what I would call a model employee. He did his work okay, but his great goal and focus was to get out of there and go home. That was his whole focus. Apparently that focus helped him survive the day.

When Paul first visited Macedonia and founded the church at Philippi, times were exciting. The grace Gospel was beginning to impact the world; new people were being saved and brought into the church and new truth was being learned. But as time went by and the church aged, some of the people apparently were losing sight of the fact that someday the trumpet would sound and they would get out of this life and their shift would be over. Paul knew that someday, it would be quitting time. It would be time to go home and he wanted the Philippians to think like old Tom. He wanted them focused on the fact they would be going home.

**BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH NEED TO CONTINUALLY KEEP THEIR FOCUS ON GOING TO HEAVEN AND WINNING HEAVENLY PRIZES BY REFLECTING THEIR HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP WHILE LIVING ON EARTH.**

Paul wanted God's people to be clock watchers. God wants His people to keep their focus on the fact that time is running out and soon they will go home. In view of that reality, He wanted them to keep their focus on winning their heavenly prizes.

Notice carefully the use of the plural pronouns "us" (v. 15, 16), "you" (v. 15, 17, 18), "we" (v. 16, 20), "our" (20, 21). This is for every believer, individually, and every church, collectively. This is for all of us. Paul even includes himself. He wanted every believer, every church, including himself, to stay focused on the fact that one day we are going to leave this world and go home to be with the Lord.

In analyzing this series of verses; there are five marks of a prize winning individual and prize winning church:

**MARK #1** – A prize-winning church/believer has proper thinking. **3:15**

One thing is very clear from this verse and that is Paul wanted the Philippians to think the same way he thought. In fact, Paul says any who are mature or complete in their spirituality will have the same attitude that he has about pursuing a prize winning Christlikeness, not thinking they have arrived. The word “perfect” refers to those who are complete and mature. This is not speaking of sinless perfection. Paul saw himself as the “chief of sinners.”

When we think of the word “perfect,” we think of being sinlessly flawless because that is the way many ministers have taught it. But Paul never used the word that way. His idea was reaching full growth (Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28). Not only did Paul not think he was close to perfection, but he didn’t think he had reached full growth yet, but this was his pursuit and any who would reach this level needed to think the same way. They needed to pursue full growth.

Now the last part of **verse 15** is an intriguing first class conditional “if” clause. Now the first class conditional clause assumes reality and assumes something is true for the sake of argument. Dan Wallace said, “The normal idea, then, is if–and let us assume that this is true for the sake of argument–then” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 690).

Now before we interpret the last clause, we want to make three grammatical observations that will help us determine what Paul means:

**(Observation #1)** - The pronoun “anything” may also refer to “any one” (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 447).

**(Observation #2)** - The word “different” means another attitude of a different kind.

**(Observation #3)** - The pronoun “you” is plural, meaning this would be revealed to more than one person.

Based on these observations, plus the contextual point of **verse 17**, we conclude that what Paul means here is this: For the sake of argument, (and this probably will be reality) let’s assume that someone comes into the church who does have an attitude that believes we need to keep our focus on Jesus Christ by forgetting the things behind and pressing on for the prize of our high calling. Let’s suppose that someone comes into the church who already thinks they have arrived. What Paul says is God will reveal that person. God will uncover it. God will disclose this arrogance to the whole church.

When a church is focused on a humble Christ-like mindset, God will do a special work of revealing spiritual frauds. God will reveal the legalist, the perfectionist and the one licentious. That person will stick out like a sore thumb.

God will reveal who is thinking right and is spiritually right and who isn’t. Paul said basically the same thing to the Corinthian church (I Cor. 11:19).

When a church is really zeroed on the will of God, God will reveal those who think otherwise.

**MARK #2** – A prize-winning church/believer has proper living. **3:16**

Paul says no matter where we are at, we need to keep living by the same standard that has brought us to our present development. The word “attained” is a military word that refers to walking as a unit in a very organized way (*Ibid.*, p. 418). This word described men marching in a row into battle.

The prize winning church will be found marching as a unit living life in anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

**MARK #3** – A prize-winning church/believer has proper following. **3:17a**

The word “follow” is only used here in the New Testament. It is a word that speaks of intensely mimicking or imitating something. It is not just mimicking, but an intense effort to think like, look like and act like another.

When Paul says “follow” my example, this is not egotism or self-confidence in him; **it is a complete confidence in the prize winning path he is on.**

What Paul is saying here is this—prize winning churches/individuals will mimic him in the sense of forgetting things behind (both accomplishments and sins) and pursuing Jesus Christ and His righteousness. They will not consider themselves as having arrived and they will press on with a heavenly focus that is aimed at winning the prize.

Paul was not only the type of man who would say do what I say; but he could also say do what I do. But that is not what this text is teaching. What this text is teaching is that prize winning believers will follow his example in his focus on Jesus Christ by forgetting things behind and pressing on for the prize.

**MARK #4** – A prize-winning church/believer has proper observing. **3:17b-19**

There are some people who say you should never judge others. Let me say **if you don’t judge others, you will not win the prizes of God.**

That word “observe” is a word that means to watch, look at with careful contemplation and consideration. The word carries with it the idea of fixing one’s eyes and mind upon someone.

Now Paul brings out two types of people prize winning believers will watch:

**Type #1** - The godly Pauline type. **3:17b**

The Pauline types are people who have the same thinking as Paul regarding righteousness, growth, pursuit and glory. By Paul's teaching and life, he was an example of what people ought to believe and how people ought to live. He was a pattern for others in doctrine and life.

**Type #2** - The godless enemy type. **3:18-19**

There are some very earthly, sensual people who regularly go to church who are actually enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ. These are people who profess to be Christians. These were people who said they were believers but their life pursued sin and self-indulgence.

It broke Paul's heart to know that there were people who came to the church who were actually "enemies of the cross of Christ." That word "enemy" speaks of one who is hostile and even hateful to the grace message of Christ on that cross.

It broke Paul's heart that there were enemies of the cross. Paul has already said that God will reveal this, but Paul was troubled emotionally by this. There are four facts Paul brings out about an enemy of the cross:

**(Fact #1)** - An enemy of the cross will end in destruction. **3:19a**

Some people don't like to hear about hell. They don't want to know about eternal condemnation. But unless one comes to terms with what Jesus Christ did on that cross that is where he is headed.

**(Fact #2)** - An enemy of the cross has a god which is their own appetites. **3:19b**

Enemies of the cross make their god their own appetites—self, passions, lusts.

**(Fact #3)** - An enemy of the cross glories in things shameful. **3:19c**

Enemies of the cross not only flaunt their sin, they are proud of it. Those who have been to the cross are ashamed of their sin.

Not long ago someone on the news said they supported same sex marriages and abortions and said they were a Christian. It is shameful and disgraceful and they are enemies of the cross because the Holy Spirit would never agree to that.

**(Fact #4)** - An enemy of the cross has a mind that is earthly. **3:19d**

Enemies of the cross are focused on earthly things, not heavenly things. They are focused on works, not grace. They are focused on religious rituals, not the cross.

Paul says you be on the lookout for people like that. Observe them. God will let you see them.

**MARK #5** – A prize-winning church/believer has proper waiting. **3:20-21**

From a physical standpoint we are citizens of this earth and we have to do things in regard to this earth. We have to have food and shelter. We have to pay bills. We have to do things people in this world do.

However, we must always remember that our citizenship is in heaven. Our citizenship causes us to live in this world with a different focus and different tone of life. We don't just seek things here in this life, we seek things above.

Now the Philippians had Roman citizenship and Paul says keep in mind you have a much better citizenship than that. You have a heavenly citizenship.

The prize winning believer will be focused on heavenly things and will "eagerly" be looking for and waiting for the return of Jesus Christ.

Notice the names given to Jesus Christ. He is Jesus, who is the Savior, and who is the only one who can save one from sin. He is the Lord, which means He is God. He is Jesus, which again means He is the only one who saves. He is Christ, which means He is the Messiah.

Award winners are focused on Jesus Christ and cannot wait for Him to come back and get them. They are looking for that blessed moment.

**Verse 21** clearly is a pretribulation passage because we are looking for Jesus Christ to return and transform our body and catch us up into the air to be raptured.

He will use the same power to Rapture us that He will use when He subjects all things to Himself. These are two different eschatological moments.

Prize winning believers never forget where they are heading. They are heading to heaven and they do not want to be ashamed. Sooner or later the trumpet will sound and our shift will be over and it will be time to go home. We have a job to do and we have work to do; but our shift will end and prize winners never forget that.