

Pressing Saints or Belly Worshipers

Are you a saint pressing after Jesus Christ or a belly worshiper who is
the enemy of Jesus Christ?

“Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly
things.”

Philippians 3:19

“For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair
speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Romans 16:19

Introduction

Philippians 3:8-21 may be the single most descriptive passage in the Bible detailing the Christian life for mature saints.

There is at several points in this passage reference to a running race, which is also used by Paul elsewhere to describe our Christian life (I Cor 9:24-27; Gal 5:7; II Tim 4:7-8; Heb 12:1-4).

While we may think of our beloved brother Paul as the most spiritual man in the New Testament, he shows plain discontentment for his condition and fervent desire for growth.

He also defines the enemies of Jesus Christ within the church in bold but simple terms that we cannot avoid.

He tells us how to follow him with human examples.

And He gives us perspective and direction for living, by pointing us to our Lord's return and our glorification by His wonderful power.

It is hard to imagine a sermon more important than this subject.

I fear we have several belly worshippers in our midst.

Pressing Saints or Belly Worshipers

PAUL'S AMBITION (Philippians 3:8-11).

“Yea doubtless” is equivalent to our “without a doubt.” It is a strong affirmation of conviction and willingness. Paul had no reluctance or resentment toward giving up things for Jesus Christ.

Paul counted the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ – a relationship with Him – as something “excellent.” Do you count or value it this way? Would you sell all for it (Matt 13:44-46)?

A theme of Paul's prayers was knowing Christ better (Eph 1:17-18; 3:8-9,18-19; I Pet 2:7).

We must count and pay the full cost, or we cannot be His disciples (Luke 14:25-33).

And if we do not count Him an excellent object, then we are damned (I Cor 16:22).

We were saved to know God and His Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3; I John 1:1-4; 5:20).

Paul sacrificed “all things” for this spiritual goal. Do you read “all things”? There was nothing too dear to give up to better pursue Christ. What is distracting you? No person, no profession, no hobby, or anything else should compete with his ambition.

There may be “suffering” in giving things up for Christ, yet the exchange is good (Matt 10:39; 18:8-9), for the reward far outweighs the cost (Rom 8:18).

Paul's ambition to know Christ was so fervent and intense that he counted any distraction, no matter how noble or pleasant, to be but “dung.” Whether this language is politically correct or pulpit correct is irrelevant. It is the Spirit's language of Paul's heart – our example.

He wanted to “win Christ.” What does it mean to win Christ? Is it to beat Him in some endeavor? Is it to receive Him as a prize? Is it to obtain a close walk of fellowship, affection, and approval with Him, as we might seek to win a lover? Indeed it is the last. Consider the importance of this ambition (Jer 9:23-24; Matt 11:27; 16:16-17; I Cor 2:2; II Cor 4:6; Eph 1:17-18; 3:17-19; II Pet 3:18; I John 1:1-4; Rev 3:20). Compare 3:9,11,12,14,20-21.

Paul also wanted to confirm his standing in Christ's righteousness alone, which is our only hope of eternal life and salvation from everlasting torment. And it is the diligent pursuit of Christ and godliness that proves our righteousness (James 2:14-26; II Pet 1:1-11; Matt 7:21-23; 22:11-14).

There is no righteousness to be had by the law (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:1-14,22-24; Acts 13:38-39).

The “faith of Jesus Christ” – that is, His faith and obedience to God – is the legal, meritorious, essential, conditional, and procuring means of justification and obtaining God's righteousness (Rom 5:19; I Peter 1:2; II Peter 1:1; I Cor 1:30; II Cor 5:21).

Our faith in Him, to which we must add works to give it any validity, is only our personal evidence, perception, and confidence of righteousness (James 2:14-26; II Pet 1:1).

Our Lord Jesus had the greatest faith, and He used it in fulfilling all righteousness for us and taking our sins to the cross and death. Jesus had faith (Ps 22:1-5,8-11,19-21; Is 53:12; Matt 26:39; 27:43; Luke 22:42-44; 23:46; Heb 2:13; 3:1-2; 5:7-9; 11:6; 12:1-3; I Pet 1:2). And it is His faith by which we are justified before God (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16).

God has faith in Himself and Christ (Rom 3:24-26; Ps 89:30-33; II Tim 2:13; I Thes 5:23-24).

Paul wanted to “know Christ.” He had met Him, heard Him, knew more about Him than any man, and preached Him; but he yet wanted to know Him. What did Paul seek? This must refer to an intimate, personal, experimental relationship.

And he wanted to “know the power of His resurrection,” which is the mighty Spirit power of a resurrected life from death in sins to life in righteousness (Eph 1:19-20; II Cor 5:17; Rom 6:3-6). If a man has been resurrected once, he shall be resurrected again (John 5:25-29; Rev 20:6).

And he wanted to “know the fellowship of His sufferings,” which is to suffer for Him as He suffered for us (John 15:18-25; Rom 8:17-18; Heb 12:1-4; I Pet 2:21-25; 4:1-2,13-14).

And he wanted to be “conformed unto His death,” which is to crucify self and have that ultimate willingness for obedience our Lord had in Gethsemane (Acts 20:24; Col 3:1-8).

Though Paul knew Whom he had believed and was confident of his salvation (II Tim 1:12), he yet sought for greater assurance and confidence and evidence of being in the resurrection of the just (II Pet 1:5-11; Acts 24:15). There is only one resurrection (Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29).

Though Paul knew there are no means to redeem himself or others from the grave (Ps 49:7), yet he did know he could assure his own heart of the matter (I John 3:18-24).

Though Paul knew Whom he had believed and was confident of his salvation (II Tim 1:12), he still knew the danger of his flesh to cause him to be a castaway (I Cor 9:27; I Thess 3:5).

PAUL’S FRUSTRATION (Philippians 3:12-14).

Our brother Paul, though we esteem him highly and rightfully so as the greatest saint of the New Testament, did not relax in his ambition to win Christ, please God, and prove his salvation. He did not consider himself to have attained the prize or a satisfactory level of spiritual success yet.

He plainly denies his perfection or absolute confidence in himself, as he still felt great conviction and intensity to drive for yet further conformity to his Lord.

Apprehend. I. Physical. 1. To lay hold upon, seize, with hands, teeth, etc. 2. To seize (a person) in name of law, to arrest.

Jesus Christ had apprehended Paul in the full sense of the word on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:9-23; I Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:11-24; I Timothy 1:12-17).

And now Paul sought with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength to apprehend that prize Christ had set before him.

No man has ever sought Christ, but that Christ first sought him (Gal 4:9; I John 4:19).

But in this life we can never reach the place of restful complacency, for the warfare continues.

A man cannot look back (Luke 9:62). Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32).

We have a clear picture of running a race in this text.

We must forget . . . the self-pitying and discouraging thoughts of past failures, the complacency-creating and slothful thoughts of past successes, and the resent-producing and envious thoughts of past sacrifices.

The kingdom of heaven is taken by violent pressing into it (Luke 16:16; Matt 11:12) – we have a spiritual race and struggle to truly please and win Jesus Christ and guarantee our eventual crown.

I press . . . can you see the runner straining for the finish line . . . every nerve taut with focused energy to allow no finish but a victory.

Is there one ambition in your life that exceeds all others (Psalm 27:4; Luke 11:34-36)?

PAUL'S SUGGESTION (Philippians 3:15-17).

Paul now tells us to have his same ambition and frustration – discontentment with our spiritual condition and intense drive for much greater success.

Here is our goal; here is our plan; here is our objective. Those who are spiritually mature should have Paul's mindset regarding their Christian lives.

For those who set the Lord as the goal and prize in their lives, He will reveal to them whatever things are hindering their pursuit and obtaining of the goal. What comfort!

Remember . . . the path of the just is as the shining light (Prov 4:18).

We strive diligently and ask God to reveal our errors (Ps 139:23-24; Lu 11:13; Jn 7:17; Ja 1:5).

In spite of our great frustration and desire for greater spiritual success, let us make sure we are following the rules of Christ contained in the Scriptures with one accord with those of our brethren.

This pursuit of Christ should not be by our rules (II Tim 2:5) or without joint teamwork (Rom 15:1-7).

It is not wrong to have a human example to follow. Paul exhorts the Philippians to follow him and/or any of the brethren that walked accordingly, in order to have an example (Phil 4:9; I Cor 4:16; 11:1; Ps 37:37).

There are still allusions to a race, for a pacesetter or rabbit is clearly essential to maximizing performance as modern runners and world records prove.

PAUL'S WARNING (Philippians 3:18-19).

Here we have a parenthesis pointing out the alternative character of some. His main thought continues on from 3:17 to 3:20, as the word “for” indicates beginning 3:20.

There were other “examples” in the church at Philippi, as in all churches of saints, of how not to walk, for they were the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul moves from his great love and passion for Jesus Christ and exhortation for us to follow him to a sober and horrible warning of false brethren. Notice that he had given this warning frequently and passionately and about many. The crime was great, its possibility high, and many criminals.

Can such men be the elect of God? Barely. But we must allow for fruitless and carnal saints (I Cor 9:27; 11:30; I Thess 3:5; II Peter 1:9; 2:7-9; Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:16; I Kings 11:1-12). If they include the elect of God, then “whose end is destruction” must refer to temporal judgment, as at Corinth (I Cor 11:30; James 5:19-20).

Can we say Lot was destroyed? Staring out of the mouth of a cave with his two daughters carrying his children after suffering the loss of everything does not seem to be a successful life.

Whose God is their belly! These are not polite words, but there is no time or reason for politeness when we are dealing with the carnal choices of blood-bought saints. He uses this same language in Romans 16:18 also.

Whose glory is in their shame! They value the very things for which they should be ashamed. It is a shame to see them glorying in vanity.

Who mind earthly things! O Christian, beware, for here is the principal cause of their ruin, they have too high an estimate of the things of this life. They have not set their affection on things above, but rather they are enamored with things here.

What are they? House? Education? Profession? Wealth? Family? Landscaping? Vehicles? Clothes? Appearance? Athletics? Hobbies? What are they?

The big three – education, wealth, and physique – have been around forever (Jer 9:23-24). Yet the Greeks still seek them. You cannot take them with you, and they are worthless for helping in the heavenly race.

How do we mind earthly things? We think about them. We pursue them. We admire and desire them. We pay for them. We talk about them. We require them. We measure by them.

It is a fact of our deceitful hearts that we exalt our earthly things as noble and despise the earthly things of others as carnal, base, and senseless. There is no difference. There is no earthly thing that has any virtue in the spiritual race.

Our brother Paul warns us in Colossians 3:2 to set our affection on things above. We may observe three facts here. First, SET means you have a choice, it is your direction, and it is a decision. Second, YOUR AFFECTION is your interest, time, conversation, measure, money, priority, and so forth. Third, THINGS ABOVE esteem that in heaven, godliness, heaven, Christ.

Where are your treasures? Are they on earth or in heaven (Mat 6:19)? Don't avoid the question.

No man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). Things of life and eternity are opposites.

Saints are different than Gentiles, who seek things of this life – food, drink, clothing (Matt 6:32).

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness above all else (Matt 6:33).

Remember the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom 14:17).

If you can see it, then it is something of the earth (II Cor 4:18). Look for invisible things.

Is a demotion or a negative change in job or career a good or bad thing (Heb 11:24-27).

Are you glad when you have a business success? Read Psalm 4:6-7. Knowing the Lord can put greater gladness in your heart than any such vain thing as business success.

The wicked of this world have their portion in this life (Psalm 17:14). It should not move us.

Men after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; men after the Spirit the Spirit (Rom 8:5-9).

We are debtors to live after the Spirit (Romans 8:12-14).

Worldlings will think you strange for Spirit living, but hopefully not brethren (I Peter 4:1-5).

A man dedicated to God will be accused of being beside himself (Mark 3:21).

PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE (Philippians 3:20-21).

Leaving the parenthesis and returning to his exhortation for them to follow himself and other noble saints, Paul gives the perspective necessary to win the prize.

Our manner of life is in heaven . . . the spiritual . . . the holy . . . the eternal . . . the unseen.

II Cor 4:18 teaches us to look at the unseen things, for they are eternal.

A sincere saint is looking for something, or rather Someone; he is looking for the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

The hope of the resurrection is a principal goal and thought of the sincere child of God. It is the most important matter of our lives. Will we attain to the resurrection of the dead?

Conclusion

There are two minds here – the spiritual mind of Paul and the earthly mind of belly worshippers.

If you are not passionately consumed to know Christ experimentally, you worship your belly.

In this passage we have summarized the spiritual perspective we ought to have for our lives.