

PHILIPPIANS – 5th CD

V. A CALL TO CHRIST-CENTRED MATURITY (3:1-4:3)

A. THE WARNING AGAINST CIRCUMCISION (3:1-4)

Not actually "finally" - rather "as for the rest"

Rejoice in the Lord - i.e. his person and full salvation.

Celebrate his complete provision for your need before God, making any other religious "additions" unnecessary.

- Hawthorne "The exaltation of Spirit that flows from the free gift of God's grace is the best protection of all against (opponents)".

No trouble to repeat what follows ("same things" - plural - not "rejoice")

v2 Paul very hostile to Jewish Christians urging circumcision.
Strong use of rhetoric - 3 phrases full of hostility.

(i) Beware of dogs.

- Fee "This metaphor is full of 'bite', since dogs were zoological 'low life', scavengers that were generally detested by Greco-Roman society and considered unclean by Jews, who sometimes used 'dog' to designate Gentiles."

- Fee "Dogs get considerably bad press in the Bible."

(ii) Beware of evil doers - the 'circumcision party' thought that they were leading gentile Christians into fuller righteousness. Paul sees them as undermining the Gospel - i.e. doing evil.

(iii) Beware of false circumcision - literally "the mutilation" - two contrasting Greek words - circumcision - peritome (to cut around), katatome (to cut to pieces).
(Compares with Gal 5:12 where he urges them to castrate themselves.)

- Circumcision would add a plus factor to grace, thereby actually undermining grace and giving people a basis for boasting in their flesh.

- **We** are the circumcision - emphatic "**we**" (not they!)

We (former Jews or Gentiles) are the new covenant people of God.
The people of God are now freshly constituted in Christ, and who:-

- (a) Worship by the Spirit of God - actually 'serve' - a life of service empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- (b) Boast in Christ Jesus - not law observance.
- (c) Put no confidence in the flesh. (Living by the Spirit has replaced fleshly law keeping.)

B. PAUL'S PERSONAL EXAMPLE (3:4-14)

Paul uses his own testimony to help clarify issues.

(1) THERE IS NO FUTURE IN THE PAST (3:4-6)

Paul's personal credentials were formidable.

- (a) circumcised on the eighth day
- (b) of the people of Israel (already an Israelite)
- (c) of the tribe of Benjamin (with Judah - elitist tribe)
- (d) a Hebrew of Hebrews
- (e) as to the law, a Pharisee (cf Gal 1:14 - extremely zealous)
- (f) as for zeal - persecuting the church
- (g) as to righteousness in the law, blameless (i.e. regarding observable outward conduct in torah keeping - not to be compared with the inward reflection referred in Rom 7:7-25)

(2) THE FUTURE AND THE PRESENT - KNOWING CHRIST (3:7-11)

v7 Paul's former profits are now a collective loss as grounds for boasting, because of Christ.

v8 All things are loss, but now not only 'for the sake of Christ' but for 'the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'
- i.e. not mere information, but in personal relationship and intimate experience.

- Fee "This is not simply coming to know the deity - it is that, of course - but even more so, it is to know the one whose love for Paul, expressed in the cross and in his arrest on the Damascus road, has transformed the former persecutor of the church into Christ's 'love slave', whose lifelong ambition is to 'know him' in return, and to love him by loving his people. There is something unfortunate about a cerebral Christianity that 'knows' but does not 'know' in this way."

Former qualifications are now dismissed as 'rubbish'.

- Fee "A translation like 'filth' (NJB) perhaps captures both the ambiguity and vulgarity. In either case, it is hard to imagine a

more pejorative epithet than this one now hurled at what the Judaizers would promote as advantages. Paul sees them strictly as disadvantages, as total loss, indeed as 'foul-smelling street garbage' fit only for 'dogs'."

The gaining of Christ requires the loss of former things, because to be rich in Christ means to be rich in him alone, not in him plus other gains. Grace plus anything cancels out grace.

v9 May be found in him

- Fee "When does Paul expect this 'gaining' and 'being found' to take place? The answer lies with Paul's 'already but not yet' eschatological perspective (cf vv 10-11 that follow), which determines his existence in Christ and serves as the basic framework for all of this theological thinking. On the one hand, the first point of reference is almost certainly future, looking to the 'day of Christ' mentioned in 1:6, 10, and 2:16. Such an understanding fits the future orientation both of the immediate context (vv 11-14) and of the letter as a whole (see on 1:6). On the other hand, the modifying participial clause ('having righteousness') is oriented toward the present, as is the final purpose clause (vv 10-11), which is grammatically dependent on the present clause."
- Fee "He expects to 'gain Christ and be found in him' on the day of Christ, precisely because this is *already* his experience of Christ."

How does he gain Christ?

- (a) finish with his own righteousness
 - (b) based on law (ek nomou - from law)
 - (c) receive a new righteousness
 - (d) which comes from God (ek theou - from God)
 - (e) based on faith
- Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones "If we are not clear about Paul's teaching on righteousness, we shall not understand any of his teaching; it is the first, it is the centre, it is the doctrine out of which, and from which, he derives every other doctrine in his teaching; it is indeed pivotal, it is God's righteousness in the sense that it is God's way of dealing with the problem of righteousness; it is not the righteousness that God demands or requires, it is that which he provides."

v10 The ultimate goal of being in right relationship with God is 'knowing Christ'.

It is sad to celebrate in the gift of righteousness if we don't celebrate it as our 'launch pad' for pressing on into knowledge of Him.

(a) To know Christ means to know the power of his resurrection. (Only time Paul uses the phrase - usually the power of God or the Holy Spirit.)

The power that comes to believers on the basis of his resurrection.

- Fee "Along with the gift of the eschatological Spirit, it was the resurrection of Christ that radically altered Paul's (and the early church's) understanding of present existence - as both 'already' and 'not yet'. In Jewish eschatological expectations these two events, above all, would mark the beginning of God's final wrap up. Very early on the church recognised that *the* Resurrection (Christ's) had already set the future in motion. Paul in particular saw the implications of this reality, which are spelled out in some detail in 1 Cor 15. The resurrection of Jesus, he argues there, makes our future resurrection both necessary and inevitable: necessary, because even though death has been defanged as it were, it still remains as God's and our final enemy, but it will cease to be with our resurrection; and inevitable, because Christ's resurrection set something in motion as 'first-fruits' that guarantees the final harvest."

We are a people whose understanding of life both personally and globally is totally transformed by Christ's resurrection.

We can also experience the inherent power of his resurrection in our lives in a world of hostility and opposition.

- Fee "The power of Christ's resurrection is neither the only way of knowing Christ in the present nor a way of knowing him independently from participation in his sufferings. In Paul's sentence the two go together hand-in-glove. Thus, there is not a moment of triumphalism in this first phrase; but neither does Paul emphasise suffering in such a way as to diminish the power of Christ's resurrection as genuinely present for us. Paul knows nothing of the rather gloomy stoicism that is so often exhibited in historic Christianity, where the lot of the believer is basically that of 'slugging it out in the trenches', with little or no sense of Christ's presence and power. On the contrary, the power of Christ's resurrection was the greater reality for him. So certain was Paul that it had happened - after all, he had been accosted and claimed by the Risen Lord on the Damascus Road - and that Christ's resurrection guaranteed his own, that he could throw himself into the present with a kind of holy abandon, full of rejoicing and thanksgiving; and that not because he enjoyed suffering, but because Christ's resurrection had given him a unique perspective on present suffering (spelled out in the next two

lines) as well as an empowering presence whereby the suffering was transformed into intimate fellowship with Christ himself."

(b) Participation in his sufferings.

Paul often refers to sufferings as the norm for Christians.

Although Christians' sufferings have no atoning significance they are intimately related to Christ's sufferings and the reason why he suffered in a fallen world.

- Fee "Hence, 'knowing Christ' for Paul involves 'participation in his sufferings' - and is a cause for constant joy, not because suffering is enjoyable, but because it is certain evidence of his intimate relationship with his Lord."

(c) Becoming like him in his death. (NASB conformed)

"conformed" - (summorphizomenos) and "death" remind of Christ's taking the form (morphe) of a slave and humbling himself to death.

Now Paul sees suffering as a way of "conforming" us to the likeness of Christ.

Christ's sufferings were specifically for us, so these sufferings of ours are not "general" sufferings, but those associated with following him and his gospel.

(d) v11 - that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Paul moves from "knowing Christ" in the present to its full realisation in the future. Conformity to Christ's death in the present (in which Paul is already strengthened by Christ's resurrection power) will be ultimately followed by his own ultimate "resurrection from the dead".

- Fee "In whatever way the future is realised - through resurrection or transformation at the Parousia (as in vv 20-21) - the present involves knowing the power of his resurrection as key to participating in Christ's sufferings. But the final, complete knowing of Christ is 'not yet'; neither he nor they have attained to it. Nonetheless, such a future prize is the one certain reality of present existence and is thus worth bending every effort in order to realise."
- Fee "For him Christian life is not simply a matter of 'salvation' and 'ethics'; it is ultimately a matter of knowing Christ. So too with resurrection; Paul's focus is not on 'everlasting life' or anything else such. The goal of the resurrection, the 'prize' for which Paul strains every effort in the present, is Christ himself."

(3) THE FUTURE - ATTAINING CHRIST (3:12-14)

The goal is not "perfection" for itself, but the prize is a full knowing of "Christ".

v12 "not that" - Paul is clarifying something previously stated, rather than introducing a new theme.

He wants to make clear that some aspects of our salvation are future and wrapped up with Christ's return.

There is a knowing of Christ that will only happen at the culmination of time.

I press on. He wants to lay hold of the very thing for which Christ first laid hold of him.

Christ's work came first.
Paul's work is a response.

His goal is Christ himself and all his fullness (not, as I have personally thought in the past, the task or ministry that God ordained for Paul).

v13-14 Paul uses the analogy of a runner who:-

- (a) Doesn't look back - don't look back at Torah observance.
- (b) Straining forward - for the goal.
- (c) The prize of the upward call. - Everything started in the call of God. - The prize of final culmination in knowing Christ awaits.

This is in contrast to those in v19 who set their minds on earthly things.

C. APPLICATION AND FINAL APPEAL (3:15-4:3)

Paul now uses his testimony as the basis for appealing to them.

(1) HAVE A MATURE MINDSET (3:15-16)

Paul appeals, "Let us therefore who are mature.... (Paul includes himself - "us")...have this attitude."

(2) CHALLENGE AND APPEAL (3:17-19)

v17 Once again Paul invites imitation of his life (1:30, 2:18)

v18 Sadly, many walk as enemies of the cross.

- Motyer "Paul was a great weeper!"

Whose end is destruction.
Whose god is their stomach.
Whose glory is in their shame.
Who set their minds on earthly things.

(3) BASIS FOR HIS APPEAL - HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP NOW AND TO COME.

A classic example of Paul's "already/not yet" perspectives.

He starts with the already - "our citizenship" - but the emphasis comes to the not yet, our ultimate transfer to the glorious state.

- Fee "Here is vintage Paul, whose thoroughly eschatological outlook and christological focus repeatedly merge in climactic moments like this."
 - (i) We await for a Saviour. Paul rarely uses "Saviour" for Christ. It combines one of the O.T. titles for God and also challenges a common name for Caesar, especially in this Roman city.
 - (ii) Who will transform "our lowly bodies" NIV
- Fee "The 'our' and 'his' in both cases go with 'humiliation' and 'glory' respectively, not with 'body'. Thus it is not 'our lowly bodies', but 'the body that belongs to our humiliation', or that 'belongs to his glory'. Thus, the body itself is not 'lowly' but is the locus of present suffering and weakness, hence 'the body of our present humiliation' in contrast to the body that shall be ours 'in glory'. Paul is not expressing contempt for the body, neither in the form found in the KJB ('our vile bodies'), which sounds far more dualistic than Paul could ever be."

We will not float around as disembodied spirits.

Our bodies represent the point of continuity for the future, but their form will be different. We look forward to a body appropriate to "glory".

- (iii) By the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.

Here Paul uses language about Christ that elsewhere is used only of the Father.

All authority belongs to Christ. He is in control, so we not merely await the end, but eagerly press towards the goal.

(4) FINAL APPEALS TO STEADFASTNESS AND UNITY. (4:1-3)

Paul demonstrates his deep affection.

- v1 My brothers, my beloved, my longed for, my joy and crown. Stand firm in the Lord.
- v2 Paul appeals to his long-time friends Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony.
- to have the same mindset. (same phrase as 2:2)
- v3 Paul calls upon a "true comrade" to help these two women.

So Paul's call to unity throughout the letter finds expression in two particular people whom he addresses with affection and respect. Their names are in the "book of life" (only reference in Paul's writings) and they need the help of the body. Love and tenderness are very evident, but urgency for the sake of the gospel must lead to harmony for the future.

APPLICATION