

The Final Things

Philippians 3:1a, 3b, 8, 9, 10a, 15 and 20

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord ... worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. ...I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any other thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

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(the individual and the collective)

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In order to set the stage for the ideas that I hope to share with you in this study I believe that an examination of the text is important. I have taken the ideas from these verses, and not the verses in their entire context; I don't believe this harms their intent.

In chapter 3 of the letter Paul wrote to the Philippians there are some things that we all should understand. First, we should look at the ideas within these verses and then answer some questions concerning them, in order to properly understand what Paul is discussing. I have combined the ideas brought out in these verses and I would like to look at them in this way, by listing them in order.

'Finally, worship God in the spirit; have no confidence in the flesh'. As a believer, I have the righteousness of Christ; by grace I am declared perfect. My life is not on this earth but in heaven, where I look and live in my spirit, where my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ dwells.

When we consider this letter of Paul, we can look at the surrounding earthly circumstances, but must also look for the deeper things that are found by considering its teachings, with respect to the other letters written within this time period of Paul's ministry.

A. When was it written

A look at the writings of Paul in a progressive manner will tell us that this letter was written during the last years of his life. I personally believe it was the third letter written in the post-Acts period of his life. It follows the letters of Ephesians and Colossians. Because of this, the teachings of Ephesians and Colossians should be taken into account when considering Philippians.

At this point in Paul's ministry the nation of Israel has been set aside by God (Acts 28:28); the period covered in the book of Acts has come to a close. Paul had received the knowledge of the mystery of God, revealed to us in Ephesians and Colossians, for the first time within the scripture. This mystery was that God had now recreated man in the perfect image of God that had been lost by the fall of Adam. Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:27-28, Philippians 3:15a.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man in all wisdom; that we may present him perfect in Christ Jesus: Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

It is crucial when considering the writings of Paul that they are always kept within their context of time. Always remember the order in which they were written, especially which ones are inner-Acts and post-Acts. By remembering their order you will be able to look at God's truth as it progressively developed to Paul. You will also have a good way to keep the truth in its context. For example, after Paul came to understand the perfect and complete man, he never returned to the bondage of seeking to please God through a

system of do's and don'ts! Paul thoroughly grasped, by God-given faith, that he was indeed made perfect and complete in Christ Jesus!

B. to whom was this letter written?

It was in Acts chapter 16 that we first read of the coming of Paul to the city of Philippi. It was during his second missionary journey, after he received a vision from God concerning the need of the people of Macedonia that he first came to Philippi in verse 12 of this chapter. These believers held a special place in the heart of Paul because of the love and concern they had for his well being. Philippians 4:15-16:

“Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”

These believers were made up of some Jews that believed and many believers were former pagan Gentiles that previously worshipped the many gods of the Romans. These two verses in Philippians leave me with an interesting thought that I'd like to share with you.

In verse 15, Paul says that in the beginning of the gospel they helped him with his needs. Thessalonica was the next major place that Paul arrived in after leaving the city of Philippi, and these believers in Philippi maintained an active interest in their support of him.

What intrigues me the most in this verse are the words 'in the beginning of the gospel'. Before Paul came to Philippi, we know that he had been bringing the message of the gospel to many other people before he ever arrived in Philippi. So the beginning he speaks of, is it in reference to his first coming there?

In Acts chapter 20, we read of Paul coming again to this city. It is in Acts chapter 20 that we first read of the gospel of the grace of God being presented by Paul. It is also in Acts chapter 20 that Paul sends to Ephesus for the elders of that assembly to meet him on the isle of Miletus. There he explains to them more fully the full counsel of God. Remember it was to the assembly at Ephesus that the mystery of the complete man created in Christ Jesus is first explained, following the close of the Acts period.

I believe that the letter of the Philippians is the third letter written by Paul after Ephesians and Colossians. The complete man in Christ Jesus is first explained in these letters (Ephesians and Colossians) and is based upon the complete understanding of the gospel of the grace of God.

When Paul refers to the beginning of the gospel in this letter to the Philippians is he referring to his first encounter (remember he had been preaching the gospel to many others before he first came there), or is he speaking in reference to his second journey there when he no doubt spoke to them concerning the gospel of the grace of God? (Remember it is also in Acts 20 where this gospel is first mentioned)

I believe that it may be that Paul is speaking to them in regards to both events.

He may be telling them that: ‘as you supported me with love and understanding at the first meeting as evidenced by your support of me when I left you to go to Thessalonica, so also believe me now at the beginning of my understanding of the gospel of the grace of God’. Not that he is looking for money or support; rather he is seeking fruit from them, that they may come to the fullness of the grace of God, in the form of the complete man created perfect in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:17)

“Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account”

Paul may be telling them that his desire for them is not worldly, as in gifts or money, but spiritual, in the shape of the fruits of the new man. If indeed Paul did write this letter after the close of the Acts period, why would he only speak to them of his first visit? (The first visit would have been several years prior to his second visit to that city, mentioned in Acts chapter 20). Because I believe that Paul received his revelation in a progressive manner, culminating in his receiving knowledge of the Grace of God which resulted in his understanding of God’s complete man. He must have been using a comparison of their previous support in order that they might come to grasp the final revelation of God’s complete man who stands wholly and completely created in the grace of God.

C. The position of these believers

It is important to remember what Paul understood concerning the relationship that could be had by a believer at the time he wrote this letter. He had been brought to the pinnacle of God’s revelation to mankind. He understood, as he taught in Ephesians & Colossians, that the secret intent of the eternal God was to create man anew in Christ Jesus, created by an act of grace alone, through faith alone. A perfect and completed man, spiritually made perfect through personal identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that the believers here in Philippi had access to what Paul had been teaching concerning these events, and that what he tells them is built upon what he understood in Ephesians and Colossians.

Paul is addressing these believers from this position; he desires that they understand this and bear spiritual fruit and display the very perfect nature of their Saviour. I believe that as we look at this letter in this way, we as believers can now begin to understand the deeper things of God that belong to us as members of that new and perfect being.

D. The final things spoken

Paul begins this chapter with the word ‘finally’. This word is used in reference to the ultimate or last things, the things that are the most important. In the verses chosen in this chapter, I believe we may learn some things that are vital to us as believers.

First, the last thing we learn as believers, and the hardest thing to do, is to rejoice in the Lord. This is easy when things are going well; it is when things look very bleak that this is the hardest to do! Yet in the darker hours, we as believers often forget that when we are

weak, He is strong! When we have come to the end of things we must still rejoice in the Lord. After all we are not in charge!

In Philippians 3 verse 3, we are told the reason we are to rejoice, we have been set apart (circumcision was a sign to Israel that they were set apart unto God). We do not have a physical sign given to us, but one that is spiritual; we are to not have any confidence in the flesh. (Ephesians 4:23-24) “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

We are told in these verses in Philippians that we are to worship God in spirit, which I believe is reflected in the display of the character of Christ himself.

In Philippians 3: 8 & 9 we are told that all things physical, by which we think we may reach perfection with God, are of no value whatsoever. The keeping of the law given to Israel could not bring man into declared spiritual perfection. I believe that spiritual perfection can never be obtained by physical means! The believer has attained perfection by grace, and by faith he has the righteousness of Christ himself.

In verses 15 and 20 we are told that by understanding that we attain perfection by faith and despair of all acts of flesh that we are perfect in Christ. Therefore we are to conduct ourselves as the heavenly people we are declared to be, constantly looking for our heavenly Lord and Saviour.

The basis for all of these things, and the reason we are to rejoice in the Lord is the result of the unmerited favor of God upon our spirit (notice in verse 3 the word spirit is a small ‘s’ meaning it is man’s spirit that has benefited from the higher work of God’s Spirit upon him)

II. What are these final things?

A. The task before the Complete Man

As believers traveling through the experience of life, there are three main ways our lives are measured. 1) our relationship to God, 2) our relationship to the world, 3) our relationship to other believers.

1) The first, concerning our relationship to God, is the foundation to the performing of the other two. As believers we have been given a position that is unknown to those who don’t know Christ and His redeeming work. What happens to us as believers is that we fail to pursue our relationship with God, and so we never seem able to attain a correct relationship with the world and with our fellow believers. As believers, our main goal is to pursue a correct relationship with God! I believe that if we actively do this, our relationship to the world and with our fellow believers will eventually become what it should be.

2) Our relationships with the things of the world are always a constant enemy and trial to us as heavenly people locked in an earthly realm. Even if we were to physically separate ourselves from the world we would still find our resident enemy. A once popular saying reflects this very well “we have met the enemy, and he is us!”

3) Our relationship with other believers often reflects the condition of the other two relationships that we have in this life. As believers, we should be constantly aware that what we say or do should be uplifting to those of like faith. I am well aware of my own failure in this area, and if you are honest with yourself you will agree that we often fall short of edifying one another. We are always an influence, either for good or evil, upon anyone that we meet!

In this letter to the believers in Philippi, Paul is referring to things that he had written to the churches in Ephesus and Colossi regarding the final things that the believer is to pursue. He gives these believers in Philippi the final sum of the pursuit of these things with his admonition ‘to rejoice in the Lord’ in verses 1 and 3 of this passage in Philippians chapter 3. As I said earlier, I believe Paul’s revelation was progressive (that is each truth built upon another), and therefore it is in the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians that we find these final things we are to pursue.

This will not be an exhaustive list of the things found within these letters, but perhaps it will whet your appetite to find them all and strive after them in your life. I will give you four items in each of the three categories.

B. Our relationship before God

Ephesians 4:30 & 32, Colossians 3:1, and Philippians 3:9

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

Oftentimes we forget that we are indeed forgiven of our faults because of the completed work of Christ, and that in God’s sight, we are already risen with Christ, and that above all else we have been given the righteousness of the very Son of God. These facts concerning our relationship with the God of the universe should indeed cause us to rejoice in the Lord! Because we have the very Spirit of God we cannot cease to forever be his. The believer who has come to a firm standing by faith that he is complete and perfect in Christ must now seek the very character of Christ himself!

C. Our relationship to the world

Ephesians 4:21 & 22, Colossians 1:21 & 22, Philippians 3:3

“If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught the by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.”

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable in his sight.”

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Through the finished work of Jesus (God in the flesh) we have been given the power to lay down our old nature and have been presented before God (our Father) as holy and as unblameable as is His Son. Because of this we are no longer enslaved by our old man and can now truly worship God in our renewed spirit, having no confidence in the flesh.

As believers, the hardest thing we face is the growing acknowledgement of the death of our old nature. By this I don't mean only the deeds of our fleshly nature (that is the sins that so easily beset us); I mean the flaws of our old character that are seen in the ways we conduct ourselves in life. Often a believer may seem to be free of the corruption of evident sins, yet still not reflect the true character of the new nature. This is due to either ignorance or unwillingness to conform to the reflection of his Lord within his spirit. I am not pointing fingers here, for I see myself lacking in this area far more than any of you!

It is interesting that as we consider church history we will see how in the Middle Ages many sought a holier life by withdrawal from the world. Martin Luther, for example, sought to withdraw from the world and purify himself by self denial. His conclusion was that no matter what he did he still had his struggle with his old worldly nature.

Paul, in Romans chapter 7, goes through this same struggle. He finally realizes that his strength to deal with his wicked nature lies with his Lord. He concludes in Romans 8 verse 1 that he indeed has no condemnation through Christ Jesus. What a far higher calling to be a witness for the miracle of a gracious God in a wicked world, rather than one shut off from contact with others. The testimony of Paul was that we as believers who understand his revelation should be as he was, a light in a dark world!

D. Our relationships with other believers

Ephesians 4: 20-25, Colossians 3: 8-10,12-14, Philippians 3:20

“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and

true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak everyman truth with his neighbor: for we are members of one another.”

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In these verses we see the basis for our behavior toward other believers. When we were identified by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord we became as one already dead. We became dead (crucified) in the body of his flesh through death (Colossians 1:22) this is the truth that we have in Jesus. We are dead in Jesus (the earthly title of Christ); we are raised in Christ (the heavenly title of Jesus). Our old man is dead in Jesus, our new man is alive in Christ, and so we have passed from death into life. As members of the heavenly Christ we must enact his very nature in our conduct towards others; not only with others in the world, but hardest of all, with our fellow believers! It is easier for us to find fault with a brother than it is to overlook his faults through the eyes of our Saviour. I must tell you all that I am lacking in many areas in my Christian walk. I am not perfect, yet I understand that I must press on towards perfection!

In Colossians chapter 3 verses 23-25 there are some things that I've often wondered about. In these verses Paul gives us, as members of the new and perfect man who has been created in Christ Jesus, these instructions: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.”

As members of the perfect man that we are in Christ, we have heard him and been taught by him, the truth that is in Jesus). Because of the secure position that we now have in Christ (we are forgiven), we no longer have any fear of eternal judgment (he cannot deny himself). Brethren, since these things are so, could it be that what we ought to fear most is our failure to embed the principles of the nature of Christ into our character?

God is no respecter of persons in this regard. We have been told by His Apostle that we are to put on these things. It could be that we will be held to account for our failure to strive to put on these things that belong to the new man. I believe that these final things that we all lack so much of are the remaining things for us to put into practice, as those who have been created in Christ Jesus. We will be accountable for these things that are laid out so clearly for us in the letters to the churches of Ephesus and Colossi. Ignorance will be no excuse.

Charity, or love, is the bond of perfection and is displayed to its fullest in these final things. Remember our way of life is now in heaven, where we are to look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ!

III. Conclusion

A. What we need to understand

In conclusion, I hope that you understand that because of the progressiveness of the truth of God, what Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians is built upon what he had taught in his previous letters, Ephesians and Colossians. When he speaks to the brethren in chapter 3 of Philippians he has in mind the final things of the new and perfect man that he presented in Ephesians and Colossians. The summation of these things is given to us briefly in this chapter in Philippians. (chapter 3)

B. The unique spirituality of Christianity

The things which deal with our relationship to God are concluded for us in verses 3, 8 and 9. Our relationship is not based on any work of the flesh; we now have the righteousness of Christ and can now worship God within our spirit, which is now made alive.

Because we have heard him, and have been taught by him the truth which is in Jesus, our old man is dead and we must now put on the qualities of the new man.

In verses 15 and 20 of the third chapter of Philippians we see that we are required to put on these things because we are perfect and that we are now a heavenly people who have been created in Christ Jesus.

C. Things that bind us

All of these final things that we are to put on remain very difficult for us to do, for at least two reasons:

- 1) Many believers remain ignorant of the position that they could have as a new man.
- 2) Those believers who have come to understand their new position before God don't actively seek and desire God to enact these things within their lives. They seem quite content with the lack of the deeds of the flesh, yet sorely lacking in the true spiritual gifts of the complete man.

I would be less than honest to say that I seek these things as hard as I should, yet I understand that I must press on towards them!

D. What we should be

As believers we have to understand that we are to be a spiritual people. We have to seek the correct spirit in all that we do. If we fail, and we will, we must get up, dust ourselves off and strive on towards the state of perfection that God has declared us to have.

Philippians 2:13 "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

As believers we are far more than merely being delivered from the weakness of the flesh. We are to be a spiritual people, delivered from the frailties of the human spirit. To be honest, we would have to admit that we often battle in the conflict with the flesh, and at the same time neglect our conflict in the spirit.

It is my opinion that much of the divisions that are present among those who know the Lord are due to their failure to pursue a mature Christ-like spirit in all things. A true spirit within us that is similar to the Spirit of Christ takes years to develop within the believer.

I believe that if the Corinthian assembly had exhibited more of a true Christian spirit there would not have been such divisions among them. The true Spirit of Christ is one of charity or love. I believe the spirit of charity is the true spirit of the complete man and is shown in the final things we are to pursue within our character. Individual spiritual maturity will eliminate most of the divisions and strife in a collective group of Christians.

I believe Paul came to a progressive understanding of these final things. It can first be seen by what he said to the Corinthian assembly in I Corinthians chapter 13.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, now we see through a glass darkly, now abideth faith, hope charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.” (I Corinthians 13: 11a, 12a and 13).

As Paul learned the importance of love towards others as he progressed through life, he finally reached the conclusion in the revelation of the spirit of the new man.

Philippians 1:10-11

“That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

The final things of the spirit of the complete man are the things that reflect a sincere spirit that is without offence; they are part of the spirit of righteousness which we must strive for! These are the final things of true Christian character. They may be summed up in these words “Finally, my brethren, **rejoice in the Lord!**”