

Session 6

August 20, 2023

SET APART FOR THE JOURNEY

Philippians 3:12-21

I recently asked a class of young people to describe what they might encounter driving across our state. They mentioned the obvious things, like road signs, rest areas, and construction. But they also came up with things I hadn't thought of...toll booths, highway patrolmen, litter, and rumble strips! What they all overlooked was the most obvious: every journey has both a starting point and a destination.

Life is a journey. As believers, our starting point is the cross and our destination is heaven. But getting there safely requires us to navigate carefully the road that lies before us. Regardless of the litter and construction zones we all encounter, the idea is to make progress. And in the Christian life, progress is measured as conforming to the image of Christ. In Paul's love letter to the church at Philippi, he reminded them that this conformity (or *sanctification*) is both a process and the destination. Three helpful directions are offered.

Look ahead (vv. 12-14). Philippians is Paul's most personal letter (see Phil. 1:3ff). As much as he addresses the desires he has for the church, he shares with them the desires he has for himself. His admission of inadequacy in verses 12 and 13 follows the profound yearning of verse 10: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..." Yet the immensity of this goal doesn't discourage him; rather it excites him! Notice his goal is *personal*. It begins with an honest inventory. Essentially, "I have not reached the goal of spiritual maturity" (v. 12) and "I do not consider myself successful in it" (v. 13). Second, the goal is *a priority*: "This *one* thing I do" (v. 13). Third, his goal is *pointed*: "Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward..." (v. 13). Finally, his goal is *passionate*. He calls it his *prize* (v. 14). For reflection: *Do you think goals for spiritual maturity should be the same for everybody? Or should there be personal, individual goals along the way? Why?*

Look around (vv. 15-19). As usual, Paul points his readers to appropriate examples of godly examples of godliness in practice. If you look closely, four influences are shown. The first is *God Himself*. Those who do not *think* like mature Christians will never *be* mature Christians. And God will reveal those inconsistencies to them (v. 15). The second influence is *truth*. Whatever stage of spiritual maturity a believer is in, he is responsible to "live up to it" as taught in God's word (v. 16). The third influence is Paul himself. Usually, the apostle encourages believers to be imitators of him as *he seeks to imitate Christ* (see 1 Cor. 11:1, for example). Here, that condition is assumed. Everyone knew that Paul could tell them to imitate him *only* because they knew he imitated Christ! And finally, Paul pointed to the influence of other mature believers, telling the congregation to "observe those who live according to the [proper] example" (v. 17). He finishes the passage by reminding them who not to follow, calling the evil-doers "enemies of the cross of Christ" (v. 18). For reflection: *What spiritual role models has God placed in your life? How do you see their influence in your church? Are you doing the same for others coming along?*

Look above (vv. 20-21). Ultimately, our greatest *motivation* for spiritual maturity is our *destination*. As opposed to focusing on earthly things (v. 19), Christ-followers are to focus on heaven. From this spiritual viewpoint of spiritual *citizenship*, believers on earth are waiting for Christ's *revelation* (v. 20), followed by our *resurrection, transformation, and glorification*. How is this accomplished? By the lordship of Christ, who by Himself, subjects everything to Himself (v 21). Hence, the journey of sanctification on earth ends with glorification in heaven. For reflection: *One might ask, "If our salvation means we will be glorified in heaven anyway, why do we need to worry with sanctification at all? What's the benefit?" How would you answer such a question?*