

Paul's Letter to the Philippians - Lesson 12

Philippians 3:17-21

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Bruce: Gracious heavenly Father, we thank You that we can bring things to You in prayer and know that You hear us. We sit at Your feet through Your Spirit. You are pleased to take those requests that we have, laying them at the Father's feet, and You act according to Your sovereign grace. Father, we know that everything You permit in our lives is for Your glory and our good. May we trust that for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Men, we have about four more lessons in the book of Philippians when we come to the conclusion. I'd just be curious. What are you learning from the book of Philippians? The design is that we would get to know God more clearly through the study of this particular book. I'd just be curious. What are you learning? Are you learning anything? *(Laughter)*

Transcriber's Note: Long pause.

Bruce: Now that's a question, men.

Participant: I've got one.

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: I think I really like the part where Paul keeps pressing on, and I think that's something we all need to learn, just to forget the past and to keep pressing on. Even as holy—well, I don't know about holy, but as gifted as Paul was in his ministry, here is somebody like him saying that we need to keep pressing on and that he needs to keep pressing on. That's encouraging for me.

Bruce: Thank you very much. Good insight, good application. Yes, sir?

Participant: So Bruce, last time you talked about replacement therapy, and that was very meaningful to me. One of the things that I have thought a lot about is that I think I've had grace. As a parent, as a husband, I think we can understand grace. What I don't get is the fact that God remembers my sin no more.

Bruce: Mm! Amen.

Participant: That just escapes me. But the replacement therapy notion or principle has given me a means by which to say, okay. I may not get that, but I can replace that with what can be.

Bruce: Amen. Good application. Thank you. Brian in the back.

Brian: Something you had in the first week when you talked about single-mindedness and submissive-mindedness. And the thing that really stood out to me was that the transformed mind doesn't seek ease of obedience, but rather that you strive to fight for obedience, and that you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are looking at the example of Christ and how He gave up everything. And we mustn't proceed before Him, but He still shows you God's power to do so. *(Unclear)*

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Bruce: Thank you, Brian. Well thank you, men. Let's turn in your Bibles, please, to Philippians chapter 3. We'll be looking at verses 17-21, as outlined in your lesson plan for the day. Chapter 3 of Philippians, beginning at verse 17.

"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself." This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Last week Paul took us on a journey of a pathway to maturity or a pathway to perfection. He described the means by which we take the road to becoming more mature. And he encouraged all of his brothers and sisters to pursue the same ambition that he had. Now it's a lot for a man to say, "Here's the pathway of how you get to maturity." And then he says, "Follow me and have the same ambition that I have."

What was his aim and ambition? It's found in Philippians chapter 3 verse 14. This is how he encouraged the believers at Philippi to follow him. *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

Now he not only instructs them to pursue his ambition, which is Philippians chapter 3 verse 14, but now he instructs them to pursue his lifestyle—a critical ingredient. "Not only pursue my ambition—the same one that I have,—but take a look at my lifestyle and see if my lifestyle is consistent with the ambition that I have."

So in verse 17 he teaches us to imitate certain kinds of people. Now Paul speaks of his own example as one to be followed.

Now one might say that this is rather presumptuous. But we need to realize that before there was the New Testament for the Christians to use, it was vital that there would be somebody to be a role model. In other words, before there was the Scripture, what was their example going to be? They didn't have the New Testament. They didn't have the things to read to study like we are doing. What do they follow? Paul is saying, "Follow us."

Now men, I think there's a tremendous example here. And we'll see that in a moment. People need to see our lives before they hear our words. They need to see our lives before they hear our words. So often it's so easy just to give our Christianese words and think we've done some ministry. We've given them something to think about. That may or may not be true. But oftentimes they need to see our lives before they hear our words.

Now that's true in the marketplace. If we're going to be salt and light, they need to see a lifestyle that is salt-oriented and light-oriented before they hear our words. Oftentimes the lifestyle is going to prompt them to ask questions. Why are you doing that? How come that is your response? Why don't you respond like this? Somebody else does this, but you don't do that. Why are you doing this? See, then the words have some meaning.

And so it's very important that we understand that sometimes in our world, especially in the business world, they need to see our lifestyle before they hear our words.

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And Paul is a perfect example of that today. It was as much necessary for Paul to live the life of Christ that others could follow as it was for him to preach a pure gospel for them to believe. Why is it that somebody is going to believe what you teach them? It may be because of how they follow you. They see your lifestyle. And so it's very important that Paul gave them an example to follow before they had some words to believe.

Now we might think it strange that he would encourage imitating himself when he had just told them previously of his multiplicity of failures. Notice what he says in 3:12 of Philippians. *"Not that I have already obtained this,"*—this maturity, this perfection—*"or am already perfect. But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own."*

Now there's a phrase that we need to examine for a moment. *"Christ Jesus has made me His own."* Now Paul is not suggesting that he has done anything in his own strength that is worthy of following or worthy of imitating. Rather, he is calling attention to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his life when Christ got hold of him.

Now men, when Christ got hold of you by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and leads you to Christian maturity, what kind of an example are we? Can you honestly say with Paul, "It's not about me. It's not anything I've done. It's the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that I want you to follow, because that's the evidence in my lifestyle." Paul says that it's not anything that he did in himself. Rather, it is what God has done in him that is worth following.

Is what God has done in your life worth following? You see, when they follow that and you put words to it, people might believe what we are and who we are in Christ.

But our situation is somewhat different today. As we have the completed New Testament to give us a basic guide to Christian living, it's still the case that the Christian is called to be a letter from Christ, known and read by everybody, including many who would not even turn to the Scripture.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 3:1-3. We need to realize, men, that we are a walking basic guide to Christianity because people see us as a letter from Christ. Do you view yourself as a letter from Christ that the world can read? Do they understand the Author behind it?

Listen to these words from Paul in 2 Corinthians 3. *"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation from you?"*

Now the context of this was that the Judaizers were saying that they would go into the location of where Paul was preaching. And they would have all these letters of recommendation describing how good they were. And Paul is saying, "Do we need letters? Do I need letters of recommendation when I come in to preach and teach around the Asia Minor region? Do I need letters of recommendation?"

He says this in verse 2. *"You yourselves are our letter of recommendation."* "I don't need somebody else to tell me how good you are. *"You are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts."*

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Men, the letter of your life reveals who is the author of your life. Paul says, "My life changed when Christ got hold of me. That's what I want you to follow. I want you to understand what it means to have Christ get hold of you, and that's what I want you to follow. Don't follow me in what I do because it's not of my own efforts. It's the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit when it got hold of me. But I want you to understand that it's changing my lifestyle."

Now here and in other places Paul says the same thing about the importance of our being visible letters that can be read. How about 1 Corinthians 4:16? "*I urge you, then, to be imitators of me.*" Now again, not imitators of me and what I've done, but imitators of me because of what Christ has done in me when He got hold of me.

How about 1 Corinthians 11:1? "*Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.*"

How about another cross reference? 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7. "*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*"

Now when Paul told the Philippian people, the brothers and sisters to imitate him, he was not thinking of himself alone, but thinking of himself in the company of other men. You'll see that in Philippians 2—his brother Timothy, his brother Epaphroditus. He's saying, "Follow us."

Notice the pronoun *we* instead of *I* in verse 17. "*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*" He's saying that there's an *us* involved. People need to see us in fellowship with each other and how we treat one another.

There's a wonderful study that we did several years ago. I called it *The One Another Commands*. The word *aleon* is used over a hundred times in the Scripture. It's defined as the words *one another*. 58 of those *one another* commands are instructions about how people are to get along inside the church. It's how Christians should treat each other. 58 of those 100 commands are to teach us as believers how we should treat each other.

And it follows in this sequence: *our reception of one another*. Our relationship to one another starts with that. We all have the same heavenly Father. When you see another brother or sister who professes and confesses Christ, you need to understand this. He or she has the same heavenly Father I do. That determines how I'm going to respond to them. So the first group of *one another* commands would be our relationship to one another.

The second grouping would be *our response to one another*, then *our reception of one another*, and then *our restoration of one another*. Those 58 *one another* commands are designed for us to practice these on each other so that the world is going to see how we treat each other, and see how differently the world treats us than how we treat the world. In other words, we're to practice our *one another* commands on each other and then take that into the world, to practice these things on each other and then take them into the world. That's what Paul is saying. "Imitate us and how we get along with each other." That's very important. He doesn't use the word *I*. He uses the word *us*, the word *we* in verse 17.

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“Watch closely those who are walking according to the example that we have set before you.” Paul says that, instead of focusing your attention on individuals who confuse Christian liberty with license, focus upon those who are steady guides for Christian conduct. Let them be your example. Find your example in those who are safe guides for Christian conduct.

Now a good teacher will often use contrast to further support what he wants to do. In fact, he's going to do that right now. He wants us to understand the difference between the example that we have and the example of other people that you should avoid. So first of all he says, “This is who you should follow,” and then he says, “This is who you should avoid.”

Now there are six literary forms that form all prose and poetry. And Paul uses one of these literary forms now in the form of a contrast. You have *contrasts, comparisons, causes and effects, repetitions, progressions* and *summary statements*. Those are the six literary forms that form all prose and all poetry. Whenever you see one of those six literary forms, you've got an application in your life. Paul now has an application using a contrast.

First of all he says this is who you should follow. Follow those who give good clear evidence that Christ has gotten hold of them. And here are the ones you need to avoid. That's where we pick up in verses 18 and 19.

Now from the thought of his own great ambition of following Christ, followed by his deep love for Christ, and the thought of those who had the guided conduct of perfection, Paul turns to think about others within the community of the Christian church whose lives he could only contemplate with pain and grief. In other words, he says, “I want to contrast those who you should follow with those you need to avoid.” And notice that he does it with great pain, because these are people inside the church that he's concerned about. These are people inside the church that we need to avoid. This isn't about the world. He refers to them as *“enemies of the cross.”*

Now in two ways we need to understand that the cross is the very center of Christianity, an essential because we believe that through the death of Christ on the cross we have the way of acceptance and forgiveness with God, and thus of eternal life. But the cross is also central to our understanding of discipleship—not only of our salvation, but of our discipleship, because Jesus calls us to take up the cross and follow Him.

Look at Mark 8:24 and Luke 9:23.

Transcriber's Note: Luke 9:23, NKJV. *“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny Himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’”*

Bruce: Three characteristics of discipleship—*self-denial, self-sacrifice* and *self-submission*. Jesus said, “If you want to follow after Me, take up your cross, sacrifice and follow Me.” The three characteristics of a disciple Jesus defines as these: self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission.

You know, we take discipleship so lightly. We think it's something you can get in a 12-week course. Here's the latest book on discipleship. Follow this sequence and you'll be okay. If somebody comes to you and he says, “Would you disciple me?”, our response should be this. I'm going to teach you three character qualities. I'm going to teach you

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how to deny yourself. Do you want to learn how to do that? How about self-sacrifice? I'm going to teach you how to sacrifice yourself. Are you willing to do that? And thirdly, self-submission. Would you be willing to submit to Christ? Are you willing to do that?

You see, that's a disciple. That's who Jesus says a disciple is. That's what we need to teach men. We need to teach our families self-denial. It's not about you. Self-sacrifice—it may cause pain and suffering. That may be God's will for us. And thirdly, self-submission. Can you submit to the authority of Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture? Can you do that? That's what a disciple is.

So the cross is central for two things. It's the way to salvation, but it's also the description of discipleship.

And so speaking about those enemies of the cross as Paul defines them, Paul continues because he says this. First of all, *"their end is destruction."* This is their appointed destiny, for God has ordained that, that *"their end shall be according to their works."* 2 Corinthians 11:15.

Now this end that Paul is describing, their destruction, is the fruit of their wicked lives. In other words, the fruit of their lives indicates that they are going to have total destruction in their lives. It's the wages earned by their sin—Romans 6:23.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 6:23a, NKJV. *"For the wages of sin is death."*

Bruce: Now *destruction* does not mean that they will cease to exist. It does not mean that. So people will teach that it means that you cease to exist. That is not what Paul is suggesting or teaching. On the contrary, it means everlasting punishment.

Look at Matthew 25:46. This is not destruction; it's punishment, for this destruction is everlasting, an irreversible destruction. Look at Matthew 25:46. *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

This is not ceasing to exist. They have an eternal life. It's eternal punishment. Do you realize, men, that everybody has an eternal life? It's just which one you have. Which one do you have, eternal glory or eternal punishment? Paul is saying, Look. These people need to be avoided because their end is total destruction. It's total punishment.

How about 2 Thessalonians 1:9? *"They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might."*

Now Paul teaches us this. This destruction begins in the present life, but it is climaxed after death—eternal punishment.

Secondly, he says this. Not only do they have eternal punishment, which is ordained because of their works, but secondly he says this. *"Their god is their belly."* Now this refers to their sexual appetites.

Notice Romans 16 verse 18. *"For such persons do not serve our Lord Jesus, but their own appetites. By their smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve."* Instead of trying to keep their physical appetites under control,--Romans 8:13,--

Transcriber's Note: Romans 8:13, NKJV. *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

Bruce: Realizing that their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit in which God should be glorified, these people surrender themselves to their gluttony and licentiousness and their own appetites.

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Romans 8:13. *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Transcriber's Note: ESV.

Bruce: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

You see, these people were inside the church. Their destruction is eternal damnation because of their deeds. And secondly, they worship their sensual nature.

Now I believe there are many things in the Scripture that might indicate what would cause somebody to have such actions. Here is a list of certain things that might cause somebody to pursue their sexual appetites of their sexual nature. First of all, *an immoral background*. An immoral background is going to influence a person's ability to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit or not respond to it, and to pursue their sensual desires and their sensual nature. An immoral background may be something somebody might need to overcome. You can find that in 1 Peter 1:18. **Transcriber's Note:** 1 Peter 1:17-19, NKJV. *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”*

Bruce: I think *wicked pagan surroundings* are an influence. Licentious living—1 Timothy 4:3.

Transcriber's Note: 1 Timothy 4:2-3, NKJV. *“Speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”*

Bruce: And probably the greatest in my opinion would be this: *perversion of the doctrine of grace*—Romans 6:1.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 6:1, NKJV. *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”*

Bruce: Perversion of the doctrine of grace. And last but not least, evil lusts within their own hearts—James 1:14.

Transcriber's Note: James 1:14, NKJV. *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”*

Bruce: Take a look at Romans 3:8. *“And why not do evil that good may come, as some people slanderously charge us with saying? Their condemnation is just.”*

Bruce: And James 1:14. *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.”* **Transcriber's Note:** ESV.

You see, men, the main things that we need to fight are in our culture that come through our senses. Where is it that we pick up the things of this world? It's through our senses. It's what we see, it's what we hear, it's what we touch, it's what we feel. Those are the things by which the world enters into us, and we have to fight that. That's why you've heard me say that many times a day I have to say, “Lord, remove those thoughts

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from my mind, because if I pursue those it's going to be disastrous. Remove those thoughts from my mind, because I know in my senses that I'm seeing something, I'm hearing something. I'm thinking something that's going to be detrimental to my maturity in Christ. And I don't have the strength to ward that off myself. I have to trust the Holy Spirit to do that. So Lord, remove those thoughts. Remove those thoughts from my mind, because if I pursue that it's going to be disastrous. And may it be so for Jesus' sake that you remove those things from me." See men, that's part of our spiritual warfare. And we need to avoid those things in our church life and our cultural life that impose and heighten the senses so that we follow our belly and our senses.

Not only are they doomed in their destruction and their god is their belly, but now *they glory in their shame*. The third thing he says about these people is that "*they glory in their shame*."

Now what does he mean by that? It means they took pride in things which they should be ashamed of. They took pride in those things of which they should be ashamed. Not only did they carry out their wicked designs, but they boasted about them. The things of which these Christian people inside the church—at least they say they were Christians—that they should avoid they're boasting about because of the things of this world. So they glory in their shame. Instead of accepting a self-denying way of discipleship, they made their own physical desires their god, boasting in what was in fact shameful. They set their minds on earthly things. They gloried in their shame.

And next Paul says this. Not only are they doomed to destruction, their god is their belly, they glory in their shame. And *their minds are set on earthly things*. They ponder the things of the flesh. Romans 8:5.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 8:5, NKJV. "*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*"

Bruce: "*Now the mind of the flesh is at enmity with God.*" Romans 8:7. And these people were the enemies of the cross of Christ. If you're going to be an enemy of God, you're going to be an enemy of the cross, aren't you? And if you're an enemy of the cross, you're going to be an enemy of God. Paul says to avoid these people. They're inside the church. Be careful! Be careful!

How about Romans 8:5? "*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*" **Transcriber's Note:** ESV.

Do you see the contrast? They set their minds on the things of the flesh; they set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Men, where do we need to set our minds?

Participant: On the things of the Spirit.

Bruce: On things of the Spirit. And where is that going to come from? Where are you going to get that? It comes from self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. It comes from being a disciple of Christ and understanding those three characteristics. It's a fight, it's a battle. It's Christian warfare. We have to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, not the things of the flesh.

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Sometimes, men, the greatest prayer we can have is in Romans 8, where Paul just says, "Uhhh!" (*Laughter*) That may be the greatest prayer. Paul says that He takes your groans and He understands them. He can interpret your groans.

Men, did you ever get into the position where you just don't know what to pray? Do you feel like you're overcome with something? There are times in my life when I'm overcome with the things of the flesh, the senses of this world. And my only prayer is this. Uhhh! (*Laughter*) I'm saying, "Lord, take that. You know what I mean. I don't even know what I mean. I just know that I need Your help through the Holy Spirit. Remove those thoughts from my mind."

Men, it's a fight. If we're going to be disciples, it's going to be a fight. It's not finishing a 12-week study on discipleship. It's self-denial. It's self-sacrifice. It's self-submission. Paul says that those are the people you want to follow.

Romans 8:7. "*For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*" It cannot submit to God's law because the mind is set on the flesh.

Now in parallel passages Paul reminds us of the same thing about these earthly enticements that infiltrate our thinking. Look at Colossians 3:2, a contrast. "*Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on this earth.*" Men, it's a fight if we're going to be disciples. It's going to be a fight.

So Paul reminds us to be spiritually minded. It simply means to look at earth from heaven's point of view. Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the pleasing things of this earth.

Paul is teaching us this. Practice occupying your minds with things above, not with the things on earth.

How do you practice this in your mind? How do you do that? What are some of the disciplines that are necessary to be practicing to occupy your minds with things above? What are you going to do about that?

Participant: Read God's word.

Bruce: Study the Scripture. Amen., Absolutely. That's why we meet on Fridays. That's one of the things that can be helpful.

Participant: Get together with other men who think the same way.

Bruce: Get together with other men who think the same way? Yes. Remember what we talked about last week? Take a sane estimate of your own self. I think it starts with that. I have to take a sane estimate of my own status. Where am I in my relationship to Christ? Is it something that somebody would want to follow? Am I learning the character qualities of self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission? Where am I in that process? Where am I in that pathway to maturity? It starts with a self-estimate of your own understanding of where you are. And then you begin to fill in those pieces. God will fill you with His mercy through Scripture study, prayer, fellowship, whatever it may be. The necessity is that we need to get involved in all of that. These are some of the disciplines that we exercise. We need to practice occupying our minds with heavenly things, not things of this earth.

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Notice what Paul says in Colossians 3:5 about the contrast between being spiritually minded and earthly-minded. There's the contrast again. Colossians 3:5: *"Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you."* And he lists these things. *"Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires and covetousness, which is idolatry."* We need to get rid of those things.

What is idolatry? Idolatry can be defined as trusting someone or something to give you only what God can give you. We often think that if we have a right relationship with somebody in this world that we're going to have peace. Peace is described in the Person and the work of Christ, not somebody in this world. It's not the relationships we have in this world that bring us peace. It's our relationship to Christ that brings us peace. So we need to be careful that we give up those things that are idols.

There was a huge idol in my life that I mentioned to you before. Years ago I began to realize that my desire to be a dad was a great, great thought that I had in my mind. I just wanted to be a dad like my dad was a dad. The Lord has seen fit not to give me children. I have two wonderful step-children. But I don't have my own natural children by birth. I always thought, *if I could just be a dad, my life would be fulfilled.*

Then I began to realize that was an idol. As good a thought as that was, that was an idol, because I kept thinking, *if only I could do this. If only I could do that. If only I had this. If only I had that, I would be fulfilled.*

I began to realize that I had to take a sane estimate of my own status before Christ to realize that I was worshiping fatherhood as an idol. I was trusting in it in the future to give me something that only God could give me. And that was the peace from the relationship that I had with the Lord Jesus. Men, you've got to have a sane estimate of yourselves and ask yourself the question. What are the idols of my life? I need to become more spiritually-minded. But I need to identify those idols. Lord, would you identify those idols in my life? What are they? Am I trusting my reputation? Am I trusting my position at work? Am I trusting my status in the church? Am I trusting my finances? An idol is trusting someone or something to give you only what God can give you.

Paul says, *"Put to death that which is earthly."* Colossians 3:8. *"But now you must put them all away."* Here's a list of sins of the spirit. Do you realize that sins of the spirit are more heinous in God's eyes than sins of the flesh? Sins of the spirit are more heinous than sins of the flesh. Here's a list of them. And Paul says, "Put these away!"

Anger. Anger is the cause of murder. If you get rid of anger, you might not murder somebody. Sins of the spirit are more heinous than sins of the flesh.

"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth." You need to get rid of those things, men. That's part of our self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission.

And Paul says there's a contrast between who you follow in your church. Follow those who can identify by their lifestyle that Christ has gotten hold of them. And avoid those whose end is destruction, those whose god is their belly, who concentrate on the things of the sinful nature, those who glory in their feasts and things they should be ashamed of. They glory in their activities. And lastly, we need to put away those things that are of this world in our thought life. It's part of our battle, men.

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Then he concludes with this. *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* He goes from the contrast of those we should follow to those we should avoid. Then he reminds us of this. Thinking of those people he describes as having their minds on earthly things, he reminds us once again as followers of Christ that our citizenship is in heaven.

Last week we talked about this. Instead of living in the past, the present and the future, we talked about taking the future into our present and our present into our past. Let's turn that around. We need to be more future-oriented. We take our future glory, put that into your present life where you are now, and that wipes out your past because of God's gracious sea of forgiveness.

And so now Paul does the same thing by reminding us of our citizenship in heaven. Ephesians 2:6. *“And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*

Colossians 3:1-4 is worth noting. *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.”*

See, this is what he is talking about. Think about your future. Take your future and put that into your present. And take your present into your past. *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with Him in glory.”*

Men, we need to take that future and impose it on your present activities where you are. That's going to help us think not on worldly things but on heavenly things. As much as we value our American citizenship, we have to value above all else the gift of heavenly life and heavenly citizenship. And we live in the hope of our future inheritance that we receive in its fullness in the future. So this we eagerly await—the reappearing from heaven of our Lord and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now what does that mean for us, practically speaking? Well, there's a lot. We could spend time on this. Christ's coming will mean the transformation of our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 16-chapter 5 verse 4 is a good reference.

Transcriber's Note: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:4, NKJV. *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

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Bruce: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:4. By the power of God who is working, there can be ultimately no limitation or hindrance in our bodies.

Now notice this in 1 John 3:2. *“Beloved, we are God’s children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.”*

Men, what a future we have! Don’t get bogged down in the consternations and frustrations of this world. Take your future and impose it upon your present. And take the present and impose it upon your past, because when Christ returns in all of His glory, you and I will look just like Him, whatever that means. We will be just like Him.

Men, we have a future. Don’t be discouraged. God is in control; God is sovereign. He rules the world—not governments, not political parties. God rules the world.

The body that we have now is not despised, but is the sign of our lowliness, our low condition. Now our bodies, which are subject to pain and suffering and weakness, will be raised with Him to immortal life and an imperishable existence. See 1 Corinthians 15.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Corinthians 15:53, NKJV. *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”*

Bruce: Our bodies which are subject to pain and suffering and weakness will be raised to be immortal and imperishable. That’s our future.

So Paul contrasts and he says this. Here are the ones you need to follow, those who understand what discipleship means. And here are the ones you need to avoid. Remember this. When the Lord Jesus returns in all of His glory, you will look just like Him. You will be just like Him. We have a future, men. We need to impose that on our present and take our present into our past.

So Paul summarizes this chapter now. He comes to the end of this chapter. He goes from conversion, from his repudiation of all human merit—verse 7—to justification and sanctification, with the goal of perfection and maturity always in view. That’s the main part of what we looked at in verses 6-19. He goes from conversion to justification and sanctification, and then glorification.

And then he reaches the final point of this particular chapter of this book, which is this: *the great consummation*, when the soul and body, the entire person, together with all the saints, will glorify God in heaven in the new heaven and the new earth forever and ever. And Paul reminds us of this. All this comes through God’s sovereign grace and power, and for His everlasting glory. May it be so, men, that you and I are an example for somebody to follow in our church, that we understand what it means to be a disciple, that we help people understand this—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. And look at our future! Our future is to glory with Christ in heaven. Take that and put that upon your present, and take your present into your past. And be freed of your guilt for glory’s sake. Yes, Jim?

Jim: The last month I’ve been doing a lot of studying on the new Jerusalem in the last chapters of Revelation. And it’s been tremendously encouraging to me, just thinking more specifically about what God says in that vision.

Bruce: We need to be future-oriented.

Jim: Yes.

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Bruce: Amen. Thank you. Any other comments, men? Yes, Ted?

Ted: I'm sorry. I'm going to drag us down with this question. I've always found this passage challenging to apply.

Bruce: Excuse me?

Ted: Challenging to apply.

Bruce: Okay, good.

Ted: I'm talking about the enemies of the cross. I can apply it. I have family members who are very active in what I would call liberal churches. In fact, two of my frank conversations with them they have denied the cross.

Bruce: Right.

Ted: So that's not a hard thing to get to. But you've taken that these are enemies of the cross, and these are people that you've said are in the church. Let's apply that same criteria, these same checkpoints, to, say, Christ Church, Allison Park Assembly, Memorial Park Presbyterian. I mean, I kind of expect to come out of these liberal churches those who are enemies of the cross. And now we're in the good fellowship, where these things that Paul mentions here are now found. But that's not what you're saying. These are found in the church. So I don't know if any of us really wrestle with whether those things are actually in our midst of our Bible-believing, born-again, Spirit-filled churches as well.

Bruce: That's exactly what Paul is saying. Those people you need to avoid. We need to give people examples to follow. Let's take a positive approach to this. That is occurring in our churches. That is a reality. What is my personal responsibility? What am I going to do about that?

Participant: How is that occurring in our churches? I think that's what Ted is saying. How is that occurring?

Second Participant: There's evidence.

First Participant: Okay. And how is that evidenced in our Bible-believing churches where the Word is being preached?

Bruce: Well, I would start off by saying that it's the perversion of the gospel.

Participant: But how is that happening? How is that happening in churches where we don't have the issues of the liberal churches. I guess that's what Ted and I don't understand.

Bruce: Well I could give you a whole list of things. Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: I've found a seminary. And one of my successors was actually in that seminary. He heard the gospel and they threw out repentance and new life in Christ. But this is just overdoing—not overdoing grace, but misunderstanding that grace actually sets you free to live a new life in Christ.

Bruce: Right. Very quickly, I think that in my judgment that it starts with what you hear from the pulpit. What do you hear from the pulpit? I think that's where it begins. Yes?

Participant: It think it also falls on us. If we truly have the belief and the doctrine, and we're extending this, then how are we coming alongside those who are maybe not as sound in their doctrine, whether pastors or whoever the case may be, the leadership in the church, are we coming alongside the pastors in our relationship with them and having

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these conversations with them? We can't force them. But we can share with them and allow the Lord to do His work in us. We are not bold, because we think that the eleventh commandment is "Thou shalt be nice." But that's not the case. Sometimes that model is being bold and proclaiming truth in a respectful, kind and caring way. And I think we as men, who should be leaders in the church, should be stepping up and doing that, no matter the cost.

Bruce: In summary, as we wrap this up, men, let's do what Paul said we should be doing in this particular study. Be examples to follow! That's why I was emphasizing discipleship. This is not about them inside the church. It's about who?

Participant: You.

Bruce: It's about me! It's about you! What am I doing to be a disciple of Christ? When we figure that out and assume our responsibility personally, we can then impact those who don't have that responsibility mindset. This is not about them. We need to avoid them in whatever Paul is teaching us. But for me the onus is what am I doing? Who am I? I need to take a self-estimate of myself. Am I an example that somebody would want to follow? What do I need to do to become an example that they would want to follow? If we have people who give us a right example to follow, perhaps we can overturn some things. It's not going to be an easy battle, men. But it starts with us. What am I doing about what I just learned about my being an example? Am I worthy of being followed? Can I be followed? Let's start with that.

Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your word. We thank You for our ability to understand it completely, to the point of application. Father, we know that wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge. This is not just about our gaining facts about a chapter in the Bible. It's about our applying that chapter in the Bible to our lives so we become wise. So Father, we pray that through Your Holy Spirit You would give us the wisdom to apply these truths for Your glory. And may the cross of Christ be uplifted for His glory. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen! (*Applause*)