

The Mark of the High Calling

"This one thing I do—forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"
—Phil. 3:13.

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER THREE

IN OPENING the 3rd chapter to the Philippians Paul reminds us to—

"REJOICE IN THE LORD!"

This means to feel joy or great delight. We can all understand the feeling of joy or delight, for in many human things people enjoy many human delights, some good and some evil.

Many illustrations of human joy could be written about, such as a new-born baby in the household, a promotion at work, increase in salary, graduation from school, honours, and many other interests that the human capacity can joy in.

However, Paul is not speaking of the capacity for joy in human experiences related to the flesh, but he is talking about joys that can be experienced "in the Lord."

We need to make ourselves better acquainted with what can be called "joys in the Lord."

These joys are related to spiritual things and have to do with God's Word and His Household. Can we include anything else in "rejoicing in the Lord?" No, we cannot. David declares:

"The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, Thou hast founded them.

Thy "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of countenance.

"In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted"
(Psa. 89:11-16).

Paul says to us (v. 1) that for him to write such things is for us safe. Certainly this is so, but we must read these things and understand them, so that we can be edified in the Faith.

When we arrive at the spot where we think we no longer need exhortation or building up, then that should be a danger signal, we are never too young, neither are we ever too old, too rich or too poor, to think we have arrived at a standard that we do not need admonishment.

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PAUL then warns us (v. 2)—

"Beware of the dogs."

Dogs in scriptural days belonged outside of the wall of the city. Actually all that are outside of the covenants of promise are "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), therefore they are "without the city," or are aliens from the polity of Israel. These are not concerned about the fact that we who are Israel should rejoice only in the Lord. Therefore unless we beware of them they can well cause us to err. Not always is it their intention that we should err, for they know not the Scripture, but we should know the Scripture, and should be able to discern between right and wrong.

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"Beware of evil workers."

Evil workers can be found any place, within and without. Each of us should be very careful that his motives are good and not evil.

An evil worker can do much harm to the flock. But if we beware of them, we will not allow them to harm us. Strength in spiritual things will cause us to rightly assess the works of others.

We always need to keep our eyes on the way of Truth, the pathway to Zion. If we do, then the workers of evil will be recognized, as contrary to that path and will not cause us to lose sight of the goal set before us. The Truth faithfully pursued is a great separator. One solution to all problems involving our lives in the Truth is to recognize as Jesus said—

"The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22).

That is, we must have a single eye to the glory of God. If we suffer because of evil doers happy are we if we suffer for righteousness sake. Let us never be deterred from doing the will of God, no matter what experiences we may pass through, even if we are falsely accused.

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WE ARE then reminded (v. 3) that we are the circumcision—not of course made with hands—but we are "in the spirit and rejoice in Jesus Christ and HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH."

I believe one of the hardest lessons for us to learn, is this placing: no assurance or reliance in the flesh. After all, we are made of flesh and bones, and the life we have within us, gives life to this flesh.

Therefore, it is natural for us to grow up in this world having confidence in the flesh and fleshly things. We are taught in schools to be self-reliant and to insist on self-rights and to assert our self.

We must place our confidence in God and His Word. In these things only can we find true assurance and the answers to any of our problems.

When we are faced with a problem we worry and fuss and try to find the answer in our own selves. Yet God has given us the Word of righteousness. Therein we can solve our problems, and sometimes we need to pray and ask for help, then by trust in spiritual things and values, we may have the answers.

If no answer seems to be forthcoming then maybe it is intended that we should suffer, like the worthies of old did. Look at the sufferings of Paul himself, even to a thorn in his flesh, all so that he might win Christ.

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PAUL continues (v. 4) in showing how that if anyone could have had confidence in the flesh, he himself could have more so, prior to his baptism and calling in Christ Jesus. He, Paul, had all of the advantages any man could wish for, in his day, to become powerful and successful in fleshly things.

Educated at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, Hebrew, having much zeal, he successfully persecuted the Christians as far as his instigators were concerned.

No doubt he was in high repute both among the Jews and also among the Romans, or Gentiles. His prospects for gain in worldly things would have been great, and there was no reason why if he continued in this fleshly course, he could not have become rich and a man of renown.

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WE NOW come (v. 7) to the main point of Paul's message in this chapter—

"What things were gain to me . . ."

—that is, what seemed to the fleshly man to be gained and to be sought after—

" . . . those I counted loss for Christ."

Now we have the real heart of the issue, don't we—the fleshly gains, power, positions, riches, so-called respectability, popularity, education, worldly honor, and worldly pleasures. All these things

that **appear** to be so important to the man himself or the woman, and **appear** to be something to gain—we should lose them all so that we may win Christ.

As Paul said, let us be willing to lose all of these fleshly gains, for the EXCELLENCY of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word we need here, is that we should **deny** worldly gain. The word "excellency" means something that is superior, or extremely good, select, exquisite, and actually means excelling that which we compare it with. Paul is comparing the things that appear to be gain to the fleshly man, to what can be realized or attained to in Christ Jesus.

Actually there is no need to make a comparison, because the things in Christ Jesus are eternal, while the things in regard to the earthly man are mortal and pass away. Yet because we are human, then the spirit in Paul seeks to reason with us, so that we can recognize the surpassing excellency of the Truth contained in God's Word, and His promises to those who have ears to hear. We read frequently of the **excellency**—the great **superiority**—of the things of God—

"Ascribe ye strength unto God; His **excellency** is over Israel and His strength is in the clouds" (Psa. 68:34).

"I will make thee an eternal **excellency**, a joy of many generations" (Isa. 60:15).

"For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the **excellency** of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:6-8).

"O Lord our Lord, how **excellent** is Thy Name in all the earth! Who hast set Thy glory above the Heavens."

Paul continues in verse 8 with a very powerful emphasis. We often find Paul emphasizing the lesson he is trying to make with a comparison to something we are all acquainted with. In this verse the emphasis is made with the use of a strong and striking word. The Diaglot has "vile refuse," the A.V. has "DUNG."

In either case we cannot misunderstand the powerful emphasis Paul is making. In other words, Paul is telling us that all of the things this present life may offer us—and we would like to dwell on this a little, because it is here we need the great lesson Paul is seeking to teach us.

So let us repeat some of the so-called benefits this present life beckons us to: riches, honor, education to qualify us for such so called benefits, positions, professions, enticements to marriage bliss and so-called advancements, community respectability and popularity, sports and the achievements in the arts and sciences, and many other things we have no need to dwell on, because the point is made.

These are the things this present life has to offer, and Paul was offered these things. He then desires to pinpoint his lesson by stating clearly that, ALL of the things mentioned that the flesh seeks after and is enticed with, he, Paul, considered "VILE REFUSE" so that he could win Christ.

Do WE want to win Christ? Why, we certainly do! Then the only way we can do so is to follow the pattern set by certain ones who we know will be amongst the class spoken of as "winning Christ." Paul was one of these and it is stated of him—

"Henceforth there is laid up for me (Paul) a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Looking at the previous chapter in Philippians (2:7), we are told that even Christ—

"Made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant."

"What is a "servant"? One who SERVES. But the fleshly instinct is to try to become someone of distinction so that others serve us. Yet Christ, the future King of the earth, became a servant. He washed his disciples' feet and humbled himself to the cross. Paul in this same chapter (2:5) said—

"Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

THIS is "winning Christ," to lose all the attainments of this present life and to humble ourselves so that we can be crucified with our Lord. Note Romans 6:6—

"Knowing this, that our old man (the body of the flesh) is crucified with him."

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NOW Paul issues a word of warning—

"Not having mine own righteousness."

Under the Law there is a so-called "righteousness of the Law," which those who were under it boasted of. We who are in Christ Jesus, like all of the worthies of old mentioned in Heb. 11, must have—

"The righteousness which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Understanding the power of his resurrection, and having fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, we may be made conformable—be made like to, submitting unto—his death.

Only in this way, Paul reasons in v. 11, can we attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not, he says, that we have already attained or that we have been made perfect, but we need to "follow after."

Follow after what? Those things Paul had been speaking about—following after Christ, winning Christ, by submitting in obedience to God and not following after the inclinations of the fleshly man.

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"That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (v. 12).

This word "apprehend" is interesting. It means "to seize, to become aware of, or perceive." Therefore we can be "seized hold of" in Christ Jesus. Or we who are in captivity to the flesh may be **captivated by Christ Jesus** and in the resurrection finally be captivated of the spirit. Then we shall attain, not of ourselves, though, as Paul reminds us in v. 13—

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended."

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NOW Paul tells us there is something we CAN do. We need to do something definite; being in the Truth is not something passive, wherein there is no effort needed. Actually there is a great deal of effort needed, we need to be about the "Lord's business," we need to manifest our faith by our works. Paul said (v. 13)—

"Forgetting those things which are behind . . ."

The "things which are behind" are all those things we are supposed to have been willing to lose for Christ, to deny ourselves of so that we can belong to spiritual things—

" . . . and reaching forth unto those things which are before . . ."

To reach is to extend, to stretch out, or to thrust out. This is the use of Paul's lesson, we need to **STRETCH FORWARD** to those things that we can attain in Jesus Christ, even to reach for our prize of attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

This attaining to the resurrection from the dead means more than just rising from the death state. The true meaning is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, where we read of the resurrection from this mortal to the immortal, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruptibility. Those are the things which are before, and Paul exhorts us to thrust forward to this.

To reach requires effort, and that introduces us to v. 14—

"... *I PRESS* ..."

Let us then consider this word "press." We find it means "to act upon by **steady pushing**: or thrusting while in contact." We have another lesson given to us here, it is not a sudden reaching forth or pressing, it is a continuous pushing forward until we have attained to a certain mark.

We know this, that when we come to a closed door, we cannot open it just by standing there or looking at it, we must press or push to open it. A door is a good example of the lesson here. Jesus said—

"I AM THE DOOR."

We have a truly wonderful passage in this connection found in Rev. 3:20—

"Behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

We have some of the wonderful "things that are before" revealed to us in that passage. Let us push forward then to the—

"Mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (v.14).

Two points we want to consider from the last statement by Paul. First, the MARK. A mark is a thing aimed at. Most men try to set a mark, and it goes under the guise called ambition, that is, attainments. What then is our mark, or ambition, or attainment?

We know what it **should** be. It should be to attain to, become a part of, the measure of the multitudinous man Christ Jesus. To become a part of this measure of the man, is to attain to the resurrection to immortality, or to become captivated of the spirit.

Let us then press forward to this great attainment of becoming a part of the future Body of Christ, that we can become an integral part of the eternal.

One passage is very much to the point in this connection—

"Till we all attain to the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure (mark) of the full stature of the Anointed One—Christ" (Diag.).

Second point, the HIGH CALLING of God in Christ Jesus. That the Calling is high goes without question; it is lofty and is worthy of the attainments we have been considering. We do want to think deeply upon the calling. It IS a "calling," for—

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

And in 1 John 3:1—

"Called to be Sons of God."

And in 1 Pet. 5:10—

"But the God of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you."

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THE REST of this 3rd chapter of Paul's letter to Philippians exhorts us to be followers together of the pattern set by Christ, Paul and others, and to mark them which walk so. Also to beware of those who are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and whose end will be destruction.

Paul then concludes by reminding us that (v. 20. Diag.)—

"Our polity begins in heaven, from whence we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

It is then we will be transformed, this body of humiliation is to be changed and fashioned like unto his glorious body, this body is to conform to, or be made like, the glorified body of our Saviour.

It will then be said that we reached, have steadily pushed, thrust, or pressed to, the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus. Yes, then it will be said that we have attained to a resurrection—a resurrection to the Multitudinous man Christ Jesus.

—J.R. March 1963 Berean