

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes December 13, 2006

Philippians 3:2-17

- 2: Look out for the dogs,
look out for the evil-workers,
look out for those who mutilate the flesh.
- 3: For we are the true circumcision,
who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus,
and put no confidence in the flesh.
- 4: Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,
I have more:
- 5: circumcised on the eighth day,
of the people of Israel,
of the tribe of Benjamin,
a Hebrew born of Hebrews;
as to the law a Pharisee,
- 6: as to zeal a persecutor of the church,
as to righteousness under the law blameless.
- 7: But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8: Indeed I count everything as loss
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things,
and count them as refuse,
in order that I may gain Christ
- 9: and be found in him,
not having a righteousness of my own, based on law,
but that which is through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on faith;
- 10: that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
- 11: that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
- 12: Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect;
but I press on to make it my own,
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.
- 13: Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own;
but one thing I do,
forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,
- 14: I press on toward the goal
for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- 15: Let those of us who are mature be thus minded;
and if in anything you are otherwise minded,
God will reveal that also to you.
- 16: Only let us hold true to what we have attained.
- 17: Brethren, join in imitating me,
and mark those who so live as you have an example in us.

Discussion Notes:

Introduction:

- The writer to the Hebrews wrote: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,.."*
- But it can be hard to do this, during this time of Advent, when instead it seems that we are surrounded by a cloud of advertisers, a cloud of materialists, even a cloud of hypocrites, though I'm not pointing fingers!
- How can we prepare ourselves and our families to receive Christ anew this Christmas?
- This is what we will discuss this week on **Deep In Scripture**.

We've chosen a long but very appropriate text this week: Philippians 3:2-17

- Admittedly, we will not examine this text in detail...this was not how it was originally intended or even received...
- Rather, we will listen & reflect on it as St. Paul intended:
 - This section was an interruption in what seemed like the closing of his letter:
3:1: Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.
 - And the reason: Paul was giving an example of self-examination for us to follow:
15: Let those of us who are mature be thus minded;
and if in anything you are otherwise minded,
God will reveal that also to you.
16: Only let us hold true to what we have attained.
17: Brethren, join in imitating me,
and mark those who so live as you have an example in us.
 - Spiritual maturity, therefore, means submitting our wills & conscience to the Apostolic models given to us by Christ.

This portion of Scripture breaks down into essentially Four Sections:

- 1) A Warning against those who are trying to pollute the true faith in Christ (2-3);
- 2) St. Paul's self-examination & testimony of what was behind in his life / his past! (4-6)
- 3) His evaluation of his past & testimony to what lies ahead / his hope for the future (7-11);
- 4) The one thing he & we need to do, in humility as we face the future (12-14).

1) A Warning against those who are trying to pollute the true faith in Christ (2-3);

*2: Look out for the dogs,
look out for the evil-workers,
look out for those who mutilate the flesh.*

*3: For we are the true circumcision,
who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus,
and put no confidence in the flesh.*

- St. Paul referring to Judaizers: Christians who refused to listen to the Church;
 - The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) had clarified what was required for converts;
 - These Jewish Christians questioned the authority of the Church to change long-standing traditions! They were, essentially, pre-conciliar traditionalists!
 - They insisted that salvation came through strict obedience to the ritual laws of circumcision and other external / physical criteria (flesh).

2) St. Paul's self-examination & testimony of what was behind in his life / his past!

- St. Paul admits that he himself was one of these! He ought to know!
 - 4: *Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.*
If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,
I have more:
 - 5: *circumcised on the eighth day,*
of the people of Israel,
of the tribe of Benjamin,
a Hebrew born of Hebrews;
as to the law a Pharisee,
 - 6: *as to zeal a persecutor of the church,*
as to righteousness under the law blameless.
- He had fulfilled all the requirements of these Judaisers; he had championed their cause!
- But through his conversion to Christ he had recognized the flaw in this theology:
 - He wasn't saying that these things in themselves were evil or to be rejected;
 - But these things in themselves don't save one!
 - As he wrote to the Ephesians 2:8-10:
"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

3) His evaluation of his past & testimony to what lies ahead / his hope for the future:

- 7: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*
- 8: *Indeed I count everything as loss*
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things,
and count them as refuse,
in order that I may gain Christ
- 9: *and be found in him,*
not having a righteousness of my own, based on law,
but that which is through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on faith;
- 10: *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,*
and may share his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
- 11: *that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*
- Why did he consider these things a loss? Count them as refuse?
 - Because they had become a distraction / a false hope! Even a bold assurance!
- What has become St. Paul's goals in Christ/ what lies ahead?
 - (8a) *Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.***
 - Reminds us of Jesus' warning in Mt 7:21-23 ["I never KNEW you."]
 - (8b-9a) *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, **in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him,***
 - The oft mentioned call to be IN Christ, ABIDE IN Christ, REMAIN IN Christ.
 - (10-11) ***"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."***
 - For St. Paul this was a HOPE not a BOLD ASSURANCE!
 - He knows where he is RIGHT NOW in Christ by grace through faith;
 - However, he also knows that he has not yet arrived! He must press on in faith!

4) The one thing that he & we need to do, in humility as we face the future (12-14).

12: *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect;
but I press on to make it my own,
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

13: *Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own;
but one thing I do,
forgetting what lies behind and
straining forward to what lies ahead,*

14: *I press on toward the goal
for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

- Reaffirmed the call of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount: (Mt 5:48)
 - "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."
- Began by facing himself with honesty & humility: perfection is a process of grace;
- Yet he recognized that he has a responsible part in attaining this!
- So, the one thing?
 - Forgetting what lies behind: forgiving self as Christ has!
 - Straining forward / pressing onward toward the goal:
 - NOT focusing on "earning salvation" = self centered!
 - RATHER focusing on Him / the upward call! Loving obedience!

How can this, therefore, help us practically prepare for Christmas & New years?

- 1) Beware of the false witnesses around us; of getting caught up in false hope!
- 2) Face up to the false goals / distractions of our past;
- 3) Recommit ourselves to the true future in Christ:
 - a. That we may know Him & be known by Him;
 - b. That we may gain Him & be found in Him;
 - c. That we may know the power of His resurrection;
 - d. That we may share in His sufferings, even unto death;
 - e. That we may attain the resurrection from the dead;
- 4) Forgive & learn from our past;
- 5) Press onward / strain forward: obediently doing the works He has called for you to do, by grace, for His glory, focusing on his upward call to you in Christ Jesus.