

We ended last week by appreciating Paul's enthusiasm for Christ as his chief treasure in Philippians 3:8-11. Christ Jesus the Lord is not only in Heaven, but by His Spirit on earth is in deep, lasting spiritual communion with the Apostle and with all believers. This is why, in fact, that Paul can "count all other things as loss," since Christ enriches every part of Paul's life as his comfort and joy.

Mon/Tues: Read Philippians 3:7-11

Path to Life

It is a slur against the Christian life to say that it is *always a matter of self-denial or of the diminishment of our joys on earth or that God is simply a cosmic kill-joy*. Yes, there is a reckoning along with Paul that *there is nothing and no one* who can compare in value to our Savior. Compared to Him, all is indeed loss. Paul is adamant about this fact as he piles on Greek particles of speech at the beginning of Philippians 3:8:

But, indeed (that is not all), *therefore* (I affirm) *at least even this* – I do count all things to be loss because of the all-surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (Hendriksen translation)

Paul is insistent in this verse about the cost of discipleship for *all of* Christ's followers. Nothing is to compete with the privilege of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.

Meditate and Pray: Why is there this giving away of other tempting obsessions and idols in order to possess Christ alone? How on earth is being "conformed to Christ's death" in Philippians 3:10 something which we, along with Paul, are to desire? Why is the Christian life to be as radical as the desire to go through death with Christ and let nothing hold us back?

Consider the saints of old describe Christ's going to the Cross to die. At the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah describe Christ's going up to Jerusalem to die as literally His "exodus" (Luke 9:31). To these prophets, his death is not a mere crucifixion and certainly not a tragic end. Rather, they say that Christ like Moses is going through the Red Sea of death for our sins in order to lead us out of this sinful, dark world of "Egypt" and into the Promised Land of a new life with Him.

Thus, the reason Paul wants to conform His life to this cross-shaped journey is because he knows that Christ's cross leads to new life. When we by faith die to sin, self and Satan, we rise to spiritual newness of life with a new heart and will that joyfully desires to walk with Christ. It is a most joyful, new beginning to a life worth living. Sing about the surprising joy and new life we find at the cross, using hymn # 708 in our red Trinity hymnals:

1 O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

2 O Light that follow'st all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

3 O Joy that seekest me through pain
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.

4 O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
**I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.**

Weds/Thurs/Fri: Read Philippians 3:12**Relentless Pursuit**

After Paul's declaration that all things are loss compared with the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord (Philippians 3:7-8), he turns to a picture from athletics.

He describes himself as "pursuing Christ" or seeking to "apprehend" Him. The language is taken from running a race in the ancient world. Here is how the verse is translated by various scholars:

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. (ESV)

Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have "arrived", spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. **But I keep going on ...** (J.B. Philips)

The idea is of relentless pursuit. Paul will simply not stop hunting down the closest possible communion with Jesus. He runs like a marathon runner to gain the prize. He knows that there are many witnesses who line the way, cheering him on (Hebrews 12:1).

But most wonderful of all, Paul knows that his pursuit of Christ will not be in vain, since in the first place, it was Christ who lay hold of him before he *ever thought* of pursuing Christ.

Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have "arrived", spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on **grasping ever more firmly** that purpose for which **Christ grasped me.** (J.B. Philips)

But I press on **to make it my own**, because Christ Jesus **has made me his own.** (ESV)

The Apostle Paul, driven by the Spirit to exercise every spiritual muscle of His faith, is also reminded by the same Spirit that it was Christ who first claimed him long before Paul responded to Christ's call. I love the way Fisher's commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it:

Q. 30. Is it the Spirit on Christ's part, or faith on ours, that which unites the sinner to Christ?

A. They both concur in their order: Christ first apprehends the sinner by his Spirit, 1 Cor. 12:13; and the sinner thus apprehended, apprehends Christ by faith, Phil. 3:12.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about God's energy in apprehending us in Christ so that we can then respond by faith and seek to lay hold on Him, using the following hymn. # 471:

1 'Tis not that I did choose thee,
for, Lord, that could not be;
this heart would still refuse thee,
hadst thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
hast cleansed and set me free;
of old thou hast ordained me,
that I should live to thee.

2 'Twas sov'reign mercy called me
and taught my op'ning mind;
the world had else enthralled me,
to heav'nly glories blind.
My heart owns none before thee,
for thy rich grace I thirst;
this knowing, if I love thee,
thou must have loved me first.

Sat/Sun: Read Philippians 3:12-14**My Chief Complaint**

Though we indeed with Paul thirst for more of Christ, and seek by God's enabling grace to put Christ first in all things, we must confess that we often fall very far short of these desires in terms of our actions, deeds and even our thoughts. Sadly, we not only *fail outwardly* to attain to close fellowship with Christ in our words and actions – we also *fail inwardly in terms of desires and motives*.

Meditate and Pray: Amazingly, we often don't *want to conform our lives and minds to the ways of Christ*. How does the hymn by William Cowper put it in verse 6?

1 Hark! my soul! it is the Lord;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee,
Speaks to each one, "Lov'st thou Me?"

2 He delivered thee when bound,
And when wounded, healed thy wound;
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,
Turned thy darkness into light

3 Can a woman's tender care
Cease towards the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be;
Yet will He remember thee.

4 His is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

5 We shall see His glory soon,
When the work of grace is done,
Partners of His throne shall be;
Hear Him asking, "Lov'st thou Me?"

**6 Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love Thee and adore;
O for grace to love Thee more!**