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A Cruciform Life

by Bill Lockwood

One of the truly great moments in Paul's inspired writing is the appeal of Philippians 3. Beginning with former "advantages" found in Judaism (5,6). Paul explains that this "gain" turns out to be a total loss—mere "refuse" in comparison to the ultimate gain in Jesus Christ. The apostle will endure great suffering (10) *only that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection.*

In Christ Paul "presses on" [12, the word literally means "pursue"] that he might "seize" the prize. Diligent "stretching forward" [the word here means "straining" toward the goal] is the sum of his life (13). This *lifelong passion* is what might be termed "a cruciform life"—a life *forever marked by the cross of Jesus Christ and conforming to it.* The cross forever marks our behavior. Paul makes two points as he applies this.

One, Imitate My Behavior. "Brethren, be imitators of me" (17), Paul encourages. Two other occasions in Philippians he advises the same—1:30 and 2:18—and it is instructive to find that both of these occur in the context of *suffering*. Remember, Paul is in a Roman prison as he writes. Added to this is the imperative to "mark them that so walk, even as you have us for an example." The word "mark" is the Greek "skopeo" which means "have a discerning eye towards." In other words, Christians are to be on the lookout for others, besides Paul himself, whose lives are most clearly dedicated to Christ Jesus. Observe them! Copy their behavior!

Two, Take Careful Note of Those Whom NOT to Imitate. The very reason we must be "on the lookout" for cruciform lives to imitate is because, sadly, "many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are *enemies* of the cross of Christ" (18). Of these the final word is that "they mind earthly things" (19).

The fact that Paul weeps over them shows that these are Christians who have now become unfaithful. Instead of living a "cruciform life" in which they continually *stretch forward to the prize* they have become "earthly." The word is "epigeios" which translates the idea that their mind is on the mundane things of this world. Their pursuit is for temporal things—prestige, business, entertainment, notoriety, money, success, ... the list goes on. Their thought processes are concerned with themselves (see James 3:15); their goals are far from "heavenly" (see Colossians 3:2); their lifestyles are marked by the world. "World" does not mean "sinful" but merely the things that pertain to this life. Their occupation is set on temporary things and their time allotments show it. God is crowded out and their own appetites eventually become the measure of all. This is what Paul means by "whose god is their belly" (19). Their entire effort is on this present "scheme of things."

Sober reflection upon the thrilling chapter 3 of Philippians encourages us all to forge our lives according to the cross of Jesus Christ, as did Paul. Live a cruciform life!