

Philippians 3:4a-14

“Strive for the Goal”

March 13, 2016

Last week I shared that Christ did not die on the Cross to obligate us to return to Him something for the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Rather Christ died to make peace between us and our God possible again. Christ died to open the gates of heaven to all who once again believe in our God. We don't owe a thing to our God for this gift. In fact what could we give Him that He does not already have as His possession? He is God and He possesses all glory and honor right now. Nor does He need us to follow Him because He can make another new Creation. We are blessed that He is filled with undeserved grace and mercy for us.

In our text Paul tells us that He was a zealous Pharisee. Paul was then called by God on the Damascus road. Paul was assigned by God to be a witness to the Greek and Roman world. Now that zeal is for the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's zeal would lead to his death in Rome after three missionary journeys. Truly Paul took up his cross and followed Jesus as God desired. Again Paul is under no obligation to be a missionary for Christ to the Greek and Roman world. Paul gives freely even His life because He loves God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul describes his journey as a race to gain heaven. He tells us that he strives for the prize for which he has been called. Heaven is a gift from our God out of His

undeserved grace and mercy. However, three enemies oppose us on the race to heaven. Our three enemies are the devil, the world and our sinful nature. Yes, our body and our sinful soul oppose the things of God as long as we have breath. In Hebrews we are encouraged to **“throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”** In Hebrews it also says; **“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** Yes, we can grow weary and lose heart as we struggle to gain heaven.

In Hebrews we are encouraged to support each other in the journey to heaven. We support each other through prayer and worship. We support each other through the sharing of God’s Word to remind each other to keep on the path laid out for us by our God. We support each other in common confession as we struggle in this world where itching ears want to hear what the devil, the world and our sinful flesh use to distract us from our God. They attack the Word of God. They attack the fellowship of believers. They attack the very existence of our God. We don’t have to support each other because God has given us the free will to do what we choose to do in life. However, the price of not supporting is to lose souls to the devil, the world and our sinful nature.

“forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” God does not want us to live in our past sins, weaknesses and failures. God does not

want the fellowship of believers to live in their past sins, weaknesses and failures. He has freed us from their grip and allowed us to learn from our mistakes and step forward in new and different ways. It is sad when people build around them traditions like the Pharisees did in Jesus time. We are freed to express our God in new and different ways as we learn from the past. We don't have to go back to the same old ruts if they don't support and encourage our faith and the faith of others.

I am not saying that we throw away the way we live for Christ. I am saying that we reexamine and possibly throw away the traditions which no longer give glory to God. We are to live for Christ not our traditions. For example I love the Catechism because it is the table of contents to the Bible. We consider it a servant of the Bible. Yet, we keep adding to it as new challenges come our way. Some turn their traditions like the Catechism into laws that are equal to God's Word. For example some believe that God is a loving God and therefore He would not condemn the weaknesses of the flesh. Only our God considers it a sin to tell a little white lie or to hold a grudge. There is no difference between what the world calls major or minor sins because all come from the sinful flesh. God condemns the unrepentant flesh as in adultery, homosexuality, etc. that leads to sin as well at the sin. We are blessed to live in His undeserved grace and mercy and not under the thumb of the law that we cannot live by. Amen.