*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 28 – October 3

Philippians

**Monday, September 28 Philippians 3:1-6**

*“Watch out for the Judaizers”*

These verses arise out of Paul’s concern about Judaizing missionaries in Philippi. Their “gospel” mixed the notion of faith in Christ for salvation with the idea that all who want to belong to God’s people must accept the yoke of the Jewish law. Gentile believers, in their view, had to become Jews in order to be saved. Paul compares the Judaizers with authentic believers. While their confidence lies in circumcision, a physical operation performed on the flesh, believers comprise the “true circumcision,” what the Old Testament refers to as a “circumcision of the heart,” a spiritual operation performed by God on the hearts of those who are truly committed to him.

Paul goes on to say that those things accomplished in the “flesh,” such as circumcision, being born into the right kind of Jewish family, having impeccable credentials as a member of God’s people and of the strict sect of the Pharisees, benefit a person nothing. If confidence in one’s own credentials mattered in the least, Paul’s were far greater than those of the Judaizers.

*For by grace we are saved through faith in you Lord, not by works. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 29 Philippians 3:7-11**

*“I once thought these things were valuable”*

Before becoming a Christian, Paul had been confident that his privileges and attainments guaranteed that on the final day he would be acquitted, “gains” that God would honor and in light of which he would proclaim Paul righteous. But now Paul sees these things for what they are – fleshy and therefore fallible human efforts, tainted with sin and therefore unable to receive God’s approval. Rather than “gains,” he now thinks of them as “loss.”

By saying that he considers all these former things to be “loss,” he does not mean that his Jewish upbringing, the law and everything else that had characterized his life before Christ to be evil, but that his confidence in them was evil. At his conversion, he had to drop the notion that he and God were partners in the project of salvation and accept the means for righteousness that God alone provided – the means Paul summarizes in the phrase “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” To “know Christ,” for Paul, means the human acknowledgment of and obedience to God’s revelation of himself in Jesus.

*Father, I desire to know your son, Jesus Christ, as my Savior and my Lord. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 30 Philippians 3:12-16**

*“I have not reached perfection”*

In the previous verses, Paul had stated that he had suffered the loss of all things in order to gain Christ. This did not mean that he had reached spiritual perfection. Paul affirms the incompleteness of his own journey toward the final judgment day stating that only those who understand their lack of perfection have reached spiritual maturity. To bring home his point, he repeatedly states that he is imperfect – he has not “obtained,” he has not “been perfected,” and he has not “taken hold” of his ultimate goal.

Paul also speaks positively of what he is doing in light of the incompleteness of his spiritual journey. His language comes from the world of war and athletics, and emphasizes the strenuous nature of his efforts to fulfill his mission. Paul vigorously seeks to “take hold of” the knowledge of Christ, his sufferings, his resurrection power and union with him at the final day because on the road to Damascus, Christ “took hold of” him. Had that event not taken place, Paul might still be busy persecuting the church instead of pressing on toward these goals.

*You have taken hold of my life, Lord, and I press on to know you better. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 21 - 26

Philippians

**Thursday, October 1 Philippians 3:17 – 4:1**

*“Their conduct shows they are enemies of the cross Christ”*

What is the conduct of a person that shows he or she is an enemy of the cross of Christ, that is, that while professing to be a Christian the person does not feel the need to confess their sin and seek the forgiveness provided through Christ’s death at Calvary? Some see themselves as being spiritually superior to other Christians because of their knowledge of the Scriptures and its teachings. Others use their wealth to indulge their physical appetites, seeing it as a sign of God’s favor, while ignoring the needs of the poorer members of the faith community.

Paul recommends two antidotes for these kinds of behavior. First, he asks the Philippians to unite in their efforts to follow the example he and other mature Christians have provided for them, their example being worthy of emulating only insofar as they in turn follow the example of Christ. Second, he encourages them to remember that they are citizens of a heavenly community, wanting them to understand that the fallen earthly realm is not the sum of their existence.

*I confess my sin, Lord, knowing that only through the cross am I saved. Amen.*

**Friday, October 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

*“I discipline myself like an athlete”*

Paul describes what is necessary for spiritual growth: it requires spiritual discipline, that is, consistent, daily, intentional obedience to Jesus Christ. Corinth hosted one of the most famous of the Greek athletic events, second only to the Olympic Games. It was impossible for anyone in that city not to be aware of the strict discipline and strenuous training required to compete on the track, let alone win. But, while the runner received a wreath that soon wilted, the Christian received an eternal reward. Further, while in the race only one person could win, in the Kingdom of God every child of God has the potential for spiritual growth.

Paul changes his analogy from the track meet to the boxing ring, stating that he is not merely shadowboxing. He is in a real fight, and the one he is fighting is himself, that is, his own sinful desires which threaten to derail him from engaging in the rigors of spiritual discipline. Paul is painfully aware of his humanness and the possibility that while he preaches the gospel to others, he himself could fail to live by it. To guard against this possibility, he disciplines himself.

*I discipline my sinful nature, Lord, that I may be committed to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, October 3 Hebrews 12:1-4**

*“Keep your eyes on Jesus”*

For the Christian disciple there is only one way to run the race that is the Christian life successfully and that is to look to Jesus, whom our writer describes first as “author” and then as “finisher” of our faith. The Greek word translated “author” can mean founder, leader, or pioneer, the first to run the race and even the designer of the race. As a leader or pioneer, Jesus is meant to be followed. He is not the one and only, but the first of many. He has set the course and we are to follow hard after him. He is also the first one to finish the race, the perfecter in terms of having completed it. Jesus not only designed the race, but he was the first to complete it and break the tape. With our eyes on him, so can we.

When we consider the hostility and suffering Christ endured, we may be tempted to consider the race too difficult to run. But, says the writer, don’t forget the outcome of Christ’s race. He won an ultimate victory that has an everlasting effect, the joy of knowing those who are saved through his death on the cross. When we run the race, with our eyes of Jesus, we will be his joy.

*I keep my eyes on you, Lord, living the Christian life as you lived it. Amen.*