

Discover Hour
Philippians 3: 15 – 4:1
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We are looking at the last half of chapter three today, but it is important to see this section in connection with the first half of the chapter. Interestingly, in this chapter Paul addresses two extremes of the time. On the one hand, as we saw in chapter 3:1-11, there was the desire by some to return the faith more directly to its Jewish roots. Paul strongly addresses this by describing this group with strong words: “watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision ...” (v. 2-3). Here, Paul is addressing a different group, likely an early form of Gnosticism. Again, his words are very strong:

For as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (18-19).

Paul thus presents two fundamental paths to avoid: legalism and libertine. If the first involves a near complete focus on a list of rules and regulations as a means of earning and maintaining God’s pleasure, the second involves a complete disregard for what a person does, says, and thinks. These are enemies of cross because they do not see that they have a need for Christ’s sacrifice as they have attained perfection on their own by their superior spirituality.

Paul recognizes that he is far from perfect and thus he continues, even after having been a Christ follower for about 25 years to “press on” (v. 12) and he notes that all those who are mature should see things this way. We must also understand ourselves to be citizens of heaven. So, we live in a tension between the struggle to faithfully live the Christian life here and now and the hope we have in the future when our citizenship in heaven will be fully realized. In this time of tension we are to avoid those who are enemies of the cross and follow those, who like Paul, seek to follow Christ. There is a way in which this passage is really about where we focus our vision. We are to focus away from the enemies of the Cross and away from earthly things. We are also to look toward Paul and presumably others who follow Christ and toward heaven and our citizenship there.

Discussion Questions

Why are role models so important? Is there a point in life when one no longer needs models to follow? How does one find and get to know role models? What happens when our role models fail?

Where do we see antinomian living and thinking today? One phrase does come to mind, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” can you think of other phrases or examples? Can you think of times you have heard others glory in their shame?

