

## Heavenly Minded and the No-Earthly Good

Many years ago, I remember a man in church who would listen to us talk and then roll his eyes and say, “You’re so heavenly-minded, you’re of no earthly good!” The quote is likely from Oliver Wendell Holmes, but it found its way into a rock song by Johnny Cash, with the lyrics, “You’re shinin’ your light, and shine it you should, / But you’re so heavenly minded you’re no earthly good”. What the saying seems to mean is that if you are so occupied with heaven and the next life, you become impractical, detached, so theoretical that you can’t live a practically useful life in this world. To be honest, I don’t know that I’ve ever met such a person. I meet people who seem out of touch with the responsibilities of this life, but I don’t think it is because they are meditating on Heaven. I know people whose vision of Heaven has been shaped by the shallow and sentimental hymns I spoke about last week, so that they become a kind of saccharine Polyanna, where “everything is going to be all right” without any serious gospel work.

In fact, C. S. Lewis said, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.”

The New Testament verifies this repeatedly. Christians are to live their Christian lives now with a firmly Heavenly perspective.

<sup>17</sup>For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup>while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)

<sup>1</sup>If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1–2)

Heavenly-minded Christianity is neither an out-of-touch dreaminess, nor a kind of wishful thinking optimism. Heavenly minded Christianity is simply bringing eternal and ultimate realities into focus right now, treating the invisible as visible, treating the future as a present reality. If you remove that, then what are you left with? If you subtract eternity from Christianity, what does it become?

We’re about to find out in Philippians 3:15-21, where Paul is going to describe what it looks like to be Heavenly-minded, and also what it looks like when people who profess Christ are the opposite, when they are earthly-minded.

This is Paul’s closing argument after teaching the Philippians the great secret of Christian living: knowing and loving Christ through the faith of dying and rising. That is the heavenly-minded Christian: one who wants Christ more than anything, and is willing to die to certain things now, so as to gain and rise to certain eternal and ultimate things. Dying and rising to gain Christ.

We gain Christ in justification when we by faith accept His death as our earth and His resurrection as ours, and so we gain the position of being found in Him, and having His righteousness imputed to us. We gain Christ in sanctification by small deaths and resurrections, fellowshiping with Jesus in the death-side of suffering and sacrifice and self-denial, and then experiencing His enabling power in the resurrection side of obedience and love and patience. By faith, we die and rise every day, and we know Christ. We will gain Christ in glorification when we physically die, and then experience the bodily resurrection, and on that day we will gain Christ face-to-face.

Now Paul is going to finish off this section by saying to the Philippians: this is the Christian life to mimic, the one I have just described. This is the gospel of dying and rising which every Christian must embrace, and which every heavenly-minded Christian does embrace. Those who are earthly-

minded cannot and will not embrace this life, but true Christians belong to another world.

## **I. The Christian Life to Copy**

<sup>15</sup>Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. <sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. <sup>17</sup>Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

After describing the Christian life of justification in verse 9, sanctification in verse 10, glorification and endurance in verses 11 to 14, Paul says, adopt this attitude. Use this approach. Have this mind is the same word he used back in 2:5 - "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus". For Paul this is how it works. You have to get the Christian mindset of dying and rising, of humility and exaltation. If you adopt this mindset which was in Jesus, which was in Timothy and Epaphroditus, and which was in Paul, then you are adopting the true Christian life.

Paul says, if you really are mature, then adopt this mindset. And if there is something that doesn't yet make sense, that doesn't add up, that doesn't fit in, don't worry, Paul says, that will become clear to you. God will show you. The more you grow, the more this pattern of the Christian life will become obvious to you.

Now he is using some wordplay in verse 15 and 16. In previous verses, he said he was not perfect, he had not attained, but now he says, as many as have attained, or are perfect. Paul disclaims being the one, but includes himself here with the other. What he means is, not perfection or attainment like we have in glorification, but attainment and maturity as we have in sanctification. We grow, we develop. And as we do, Paul says, adopt this mindset, and walk by this pattern, this standard.

Verse 17 tells us to simply follow Paul's example, taking careful note of everyone who walks this way. They have Paul for a pattern, and should copy that.

Now why does Paul make such a big deal of adopting this mindset, following this example, noting those who do this? Because Paul understands that the Christian life doesn't come naturally to us. We are not inclined to be heavenly-minded. Most often, our examples have not been believers. We have likely learnt bad ways of thinking and acting.

In fact, a huge part of our lives is shaped by example and exposure. We absorb from our parents our language, our words, even our gestures and habits. We copy our siblings, and then our friends, and then people we admire.

Imitation is a powerful thing. When learning a new skill, the best way to learn is to have someone show you how to do it, and you simply copy him. You copy how he holds the tennis racket, or uses the sewing needle, or unscrews the pipe. You watch and copy.

The Christian life has many disciplines, and attitudes and ways that must be learnt. The best way to learn these is to copy them. The mark of immaturity is following the wrong models. We copy the wrong people for the wrong reasons. And especially when those people are beautiful, powerful, interesting, wealthy, we want to set them as our models. Paul says to the Philippians, you have me and my fellow-workers as a pattern to follow. We showed you the life of dying and rising. We showed you what it is to have an eternal perspective. We lived in front of you the Christian life that lives as a citizen of heaven.

So what does that look like? Before he tells us that, he is going to tell us not to imitate another kind of Christian life.

## II. The Counterfeit Life to Condemn

<sup>18</sup>For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: <sup>19</sup>whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

Verse 18 begins with for: Paul is giving you the reason why you should imitate him. The reason is the contrasting, dangerous form of the Christian life out there.

Now Paul tells us that there are many people who live the opposite of the Christian life he is advocating. Paul says he has warned the Philippians about them before, and is now doing so again. It is not often that Paul displays or speaks of his emotions, though he was a deeply affectionate man. <sup>31</sup>Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:31 )

But in this case, Paul says that they bring tears to his eyes. Perhaps it is because of what will happen to these people. Perhaps it is because of what their influence does to others.

But they are a tragedy to Paul. They are enemies of the cross of Christ. That means these are people who claim to be Christians, but who deny the gospel with their lives. Paul does not call ignorant unbelievers enemies of the cross of Christ. An unbeliever is at war with God, and unreconciled, but he is not an enemy of the message of the cross. That title is reserved for someone who claims to know the cross of Christ, who claims to believe in the cross of Christ, but then undermines its message, twists and warps the gospel. This is what we call an apostate: a wolf in sheep's clothing.

We know this because Paul tells us in verse 19 that their end is destruction. That simply means, the conclusion of what they are doing and saying is going to result in the destruction of Hell. These are not believers, whom Christ is able to keep from falling, who are kept by the power of God unto the day of salvation, these are not like the Philippians believers who have the promise that He who began a good work in you will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ.

There are many of them, and Paul says they walk a particular way, they live life a certain way. What is that way?

Look at three characteristics of their walk. **First, their greatest love is pleasing their appetites.** Paul says, their god is their belly. The word that Paul uses for belly is the Greek word koilia. Our English colon is derived from it. But the Greeks imagined the human being divided into three parts. The head, or the kephale, which was the seat of reason. Here is where your mind knew what was the right thing to do. Then there was the koilia, the gut or belly, the lower parts, associated with human appetites of eating, drinking, sex, sleep, and appetites. But not just bodily appetites, even what we would call feelings, or certain emotions, where you feel pulled and swept away by extreme anger, or despair, or gloom, foolish revelry, they put here. This was where those parts of you that are most irrational and visceral, and just connected with mindless pleasure. The third and mediating section was the steithos or chest, and splanchna. This middle part was the place where honourable and noble desires lived. The love of beauty, reverence and awe, mercy and kindness, patience and charity, meekness, bravery, gentleness. They all lived in the middle part. The Greeks believed that if you knew the right thing to do in your head/ reason, but you felt like doing something else in your koilia and appetites, they said that the koilia would win over the kephale 100% of the time. Appetites beat reasons every time. Except, they said, when the chest intervened, and strengthened the reason with noble affections. They said, the head rules the belly through the chest. Good reason

needs noble affections to control feelings and appetites.

Well, why should we care what a bunch of pagan Greeks believed? Well, first because it's possible for unbelievers to get things right some of the time. And more significantly, when the New Testament was written, it was written in Greek, and it picks up that terminology and uses it. It uses the words kephale, splanchna, and koilia. By NT times the word steithos had really been collapsed into splanchna, though John uses it in Revelation 15. Koilia can be translated womb, or stomach, but Paul uses the term koilia here and in Romans 16:18 in a way that corresponds with that Greek view of the human being.

<sup>18</sup>For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ( Romans 16:18)

The idea is this: some people live by their feelings and their appetites. Sometimes this is the desire for food or sex, but it can also be the desire for amusement, excitement, entertainment. They don't live by the noble desires of love for God's glory, joy, kindness, patience, meekness, reverence, sacrifice, endurance. Their chief loves are the things that please their bodies and please their feelings. They are sensual. To use the older sense of the term, they are passionate, controlled by their passions, passively suffering whatever their appetites inflict upon them.

Whatever you love the most is your god. These people love their appetites and feelings more than anything else, so Paul says, their god is their belly.

**Second, they are proud of what they should be ashamed of.** Their glory is in their shame. This is an obvious striking contrast because glory and shame are opposites. Glory is what you boast in, what brings you honour. Shame is what makes you want to hide, cower away, it is what you are ashamed of. Paul says, these professing Christians have now made a boast of what they should be ashamed of, they are proud of the things that should be hidden.

That's an accurate description of the world right now. People used to be ashamed of being naked in public, but now celebrities show it off on film, wear things that provoke lurid glances. It has now become a boast, a thing to be celebrated. Reality shows now glorify people fighting with each other, slandering each other, being immorally intimate with each other – all the things that were supposed to be shameful, are now displayed and celebrated and delighted in.

A sign of the enemies of the cross is not only being controlled by sensual appetites and feelings, but rejoicing and celebrating what ought to be hidden, because what used to be shamefully hidden is now glorified and must be celebrated. Once we go from tolerating sin, to performing it, we eventually land all the way over in defending it and cheering it on when it comes out. These false believers delight in what ought to be hidden.

**Third, they devote their focus to this life.** who set their mind on earthly things. They don't just think about earthly things, they set their minds on earthly things.

For Paul, wherever you set your mind, or your focus, is where you are. These people do not factor in eternity. They do not live for the next world. They are motivated and controlled only by what they can have and taste and touch and see and consume here and now. Only what this world and this life can give: power, pleasure, fame, fortune, is their concern.

Here is the way to distinguish one of these people from a true Christian. A true Christian is living and acting and thinking in ways that will only make sense if eternity is real. If it is not, then a good portion of his life is wasted on a fantasy. But one of these people is indistinguishable from an atheist, a pagan, a worldling, because all they do, even their religious activities are for things you

get here and now: popularity, acceptance, man-pleasing, celebrity, power, influence, status.

Be very careful of those people who live this way, and yet claim to believe in Jesus or love Jesus or say they are Christians. They may be pastors, they may be politicians, they may be actors, they may be social media influencers, they may be singers, models, royalty, billionaires, or they may just be the colleague or friend you know. If their greatest love is pleasing their appetites, if they are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and if they devote their focus to this life, then they are not Christians by the Bible's definition.

Paul says, these people are distorting the meaning of the Christian life, because there is no Heaven in it. There is nothing they die to in this life, and nothing they are waiting to rise to in the next. It is all now. And if it is all now, then their end is destruction, and they have completely misunderstood the message of the cross.

### **III. The Christian Life's True Citizenship**

<sup>20</sup>For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:15–21)

Here Paul tells us what has been an important theme throughout Philippians. Christians are first and foremost citizens of Heaven. Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony, Latin was its official language instead of Greek. Citizens of Philippi were official citizens of Rome and were very proud of it. Back in 1:27, he said, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,” the word there for conduct was live as a citizen. Citizenship-conduct. Paul again makes the point: Christians belong ultimately to God's city, God's empire, are under God's government. If there was a heavenly passport, then Christians would carry two passports. Citizens of this heavenly city must live in a certain way. The church is an outpost, a colony of Heaven, here on Earth, and its citizens should live in light of that, even in foreign territory.

Now Paul tells of the great realities that have to do with heaven.

First, Heaven is where the Lord Jesus is and from where He will come to fetch us. We wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be heavenly-minded is to know and believe that the Lord is returning. Life is not going to simply go on like it is now, limping along under the curse of sin. God has dramatically intervened in history multiple times: the Flood, the Exodus, the Exile and return of Israel. Every Christmas we celebrate the greatest of these interventions, that just over 2021 years ago, a boy was actually born, who was truly named Yeshua, He lived and we believe He was God on Earth. Now to be heavenly-minded is to believe that there is a part 2 to Christmas. Jesus is coming again, this time to judge and rule and reign. A heavenly minded person can embrace death and resurrection because he believes Jesus is coming back, and whatever Jesus judges or destroys is not worth keeping or pursuing. Everything Jesus will permit in His kingdom is worth pursuing.

Paul says that we eagerly await for this second intervention.

Second, Jesus from heaven is going to give us bodies fit to live in Heaven. who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,

We spoke last week about the intermediate state. But the intermediate state is not our ultimate hope.

Our ultimate hope is that one day Jesus is going to transform, or literally transfigure our bodies of humiliation into the same form as His glorious body. We right now experience the curse in our bodies, and there are ways that our bodies humble us and humiliate us with their sickness and pain and failing, and ageing. The worst thing about the body right now is something we don't often think about. Our bodies right now are simply not strong enough to handle the joy and the pleasure we will have in Heaven. Such joy would shatter them, like music that is too loud, light that is too bright, smells and tastes too overwhelming. In fact, in Scripture, most of the people who saw just the beginnings of a vision of God or Heaven either felt sick, or fainted, or were bedridden for days. But He is going to give us bodies that will not only handle the glories of Heaven, but will go from one degree of glory to the next, growing in our capacity for joy and delight, so that if we looked over our shoulders down at the pleasures of this earth, they would seem so childish, so infantile, so limited we will be amazed that we were ever allured by them.

How will He do this? By His power, and that is the third thing which heavenly-minded people know. according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

The Lord Jesus is not only going to subdue our bodies, but all things. The entire creation is going to be released from the curse, all evil will be judged and put away, finally it will be true: all is well. Nothing is undone, no loose ends. Perfect beauty, perfect goodness, perfect truth, which will grow or at least our experience of it will grow for an eternity. As Psalm 2 and Hebrews and 1 Corinthians tells us, all things will be put under is feet. That means nothing again will ever afflict us, harm us, attack us, hurt us, for it will all be under His dominion.

Now consider what it is to be heavenly minded in this way. If this is where you really belong, to the coming King, who will fit you for eternity, and will subdue everything, how then shall we live? Should we live for our body? Should we live for money? Should we live for celebrity? Should we live for power? Should we be controlled by appetite, or earthly concerns, or shameful things? Citizens of heaven can die to this world, and die to sinful pleasure, and die to worldliness. Why? Because we fellowship with Him in His sufferings, because we experience the power of His resurrection, because we have this hope of ultimate glorification. Is such a person of no earthly good? Is such a person useless in this life?

No, you can't be too faithful a citizen of heaven. You can't be too good an ambassador of Heaven.

In fact, C. S. Lewis said, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither."