

Sermon Title: The Perfect Attitude  
Scripture Text: Philippians 3:15-21 (Philippians #11)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 11-28-10

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It seems almost impossible to me that after today, we will be three-fourths of the way through the Book of Philippians. I feel like we just started. And I trust you are finding, as I am, that Philippians is one of the most intensely practical of all of Paul's letters in the New Testament. Week in and week out, paragraph by paragraph, I continue to find significant things for all of us to *really* know how to live the life that we are called to live in Christ (Col. 2:6).

The end of this chapter wraps up many of the thoughts that Paul has started to put together so far. And in yet another creative way, he tells us how to live as believers—true Christians—in this world.

When I was a young Christian—and I got saved right in the crazy days of transition from high school to college, and I went to a college where there were four Christians, two of whom were the strangest people I think I had met on the planet at that time—and I got a change to hang out with some believers at another school, and we were working our way through a group Bible study. And I was given a series of studies; I think it was called "Ten Basic Steps To Christian Maturity." And I was hungry to figure this stuff out, so I worked my way through that study, and I learned a lot; I don't even think I took anywhere near ten weeks to do it. I started that when I was a young Christian, and did all "Ten Basic Steps To Christian Maturity," and I discovered: I was still a young Christian! *It didn't work!* I did not *achieve* maturity in a matter of *days!*

Well, I then had the privilege to become the roommate of the other believer there—who was *not* one of the strangest people on the Earth. I was jealous of him; he had grown up in a Christian family, and I noticed that *every single day*, he pulled out his Bible, *and he read it!* And I thought, "What an idea!" And I started reading the Bible, and I began *making* consistent steps *toward* maturity (see Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:2). I've gotten a little closer in forty-some years since then. If I get there, I'll let you know! The point is: *It is not* something that you "knock out" in ten days or ten weeks; it's a *lifetime*.

During my first year of seminary—and I was privileged to enter seminary when I had only known the Lord a little over four years—I went to a seminar that was attended by thousands. It was touted as something that would deal with virtually *every* aspect of the Christian life. And for a week I listened to a man bend Scripture to fit list after list of duties that he had decided were the responsibilities of Christians. It was wonderful to go to class in the morning and learn how to study the Bible, and go to the seminar in the evening and learn how *not* to study the Bible. It was a *horrible* abuse of Scripture; and when I got through, I had no more understanding of the Bible than I did when I started, but I had this ambient sense of guilt over almost everything I did, coupled with guilt over everything I *did not* do.

Among other things, that man taught me that I was *completely out of God's will* for going to seminary against the wishes of my father, who did not know Christ! I went up to him after he had said that, and I said, "But what about this passage," and I said, "You know, 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me' " (Matt. 10:37), and he explained to me how that didn't apply...except that it was the words of Jesus, and they are not ambiguous. You know, we can complicate the simple *so many ways*.

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Now as a pastor, I get mail and e-mail every week, inviting me to buy a book or a video or go to a conference that is going to make me an *incredibly* successful pastor—which is defined as: more people in the pews, more money in the offerings, more glitter in the things that you do. All I need to do is adopt this or that program for church growth. Well, I have seen any number of ministry tricks and fads come and go over the years, and I have presided over the funerals of program after program which maybe last for a month or two, or six months—*maybe* even a year.

What happened is that people in our world tried to make spiritual growth happen by gimmicks. It never does! It *never* does! All the wonder cures for spiritual immaturity *do not work!* They are like fad diets that you can go on to lose weight. They all work for a *while*—but they don't work in the end. If you go on a fad diet, you can lose weight. By this time next week, you could probably have lost five pounds—maybe even more—and then you will gain it back, probably with more than you started with in the first place. And that is *just like* spiritual gimmicks.

The only people who *really* achieve success adopt a *lifestyle*. If you need to be more healthy, I have the formula. It always works! *From now on:* eat less, move more! Anti-American, I know; but *it works!* This book or that seminar or that church's program for spiritual health—it is going to get results, maybe, for a while. If you rigorously follow what some well-intended person writes or says, you will probably see some change. But when the luster fades, when the novelty wears off, when you have finished the last chapter or the last booklet, you are going to discover: You are *still* struggling with the same things!

You are *still* struggling with the motivation to continue when the program is missing, because the problem is not that you haven't found the right gimmick; *you* are the problem! It's *your* "heart" (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19); it's in here [indicating the heart]. The only people who become spiritually mature and remain effective in ministry for the glory of God are the ones who adopt a *lifestyle* of healthy spiritual eating and exercise.

And the passage before us is yet another capsulized glimpse of the long-term attitudes and practices that will *really* make you spiritually healthy. It deals with your attitude, and it deals with your conduct. And if you adopt what is here in Philippians Chapter 3—the end of this chapter, from Verse 15 through Verse 21—you *will* continue to grow in Christ and to serve Him effectively for the rest of your life.

You need to Learn Whom To Follow—that's Verses 15 to 17.  
And then, you need to Learn Who *Not* To Follow—Verses 18 and 18.  
And in case you need to figure it out, he provides a great insight into Your Motivation—Verses 20 and 21.

So, join with me in Philippians Chapter 3; we will put in at Verse 15. Paul writes: "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect..." Well, that's a wonderful little statement, isn't it? "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

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He starts out with this gentle exhortation. When you see a "let us do something," that is the mildest, gentlest, friendliest way in Greek to give a command. It's kind of like, "Come on, let's go do this together." It is not one of those screaming, yelling, "Stop! Do it now! You're in danger!" It is appropriate here because this is an all-inclusive, universally true statement that is appropriate for any and every one of us to heed. It worked for the Apostle Paul, it will work for you, it will work for me.

This is addressed to "as many as are perfect." Now you say, "Okay, well then, I don't have to bother with *this* passage, because I'm not 'perfect' yet." Well, this is a wonderful play on words. Paul used the same word in two different but both legitimate ways in a span of three verses. If you let your eyes scan back up to Verse 12, he said, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on..." And in practically the next breath, he says, "Let us therefore, as many as *are* perfect, have this attitude." Well, it's a play on words. Paul was fond of using as many linguistic techniques as he could to teach.

Remember that group that he has scolded in this chapter—the "Judaizers," those "false" teachers lurking in the background of this book (3:2), who followed Paul around—they regarded themselves as the ones who *were* "perfect" in *their* brand, which was actually a perversion of Christianity, which basically says, "You have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian—or, in order to live the life of a Christian" (e.g., Acts 15:1, 5). That's what Paul was referring to when he says, in his own testimony in last week's passage, that according to "the Law, [I was] found blameless" (vs. 6). By *their* standard—by that human self-righteousness standard—"I was at the top of the heap!"

But when Paul uses this word—which is translated "perfect" here—seven other times in his letters, he consistently uses it *mainly* with the emphasis of "mature" (1 Cor. 14:20, NASB) or "full-grown" (1 Cor. 14:20, Biblos Interlinear Bible). And what he is saying here is: "We who have a mature understanding of the way of salvation—we who have this perfect comprehension of what it means to be in Christ—we must also maintain and live by the proper 'attitude.' "

And if you understand what the Gospel really is, you realize: In Christ, you *are* righteous (Is. 61:10; Rom. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:21), you *are* "perfect," if you will (Heb. 10:14). You stand "complete...in Him" (Col. 2:10). But *in this world*, your call is to continue to "press on" toward *living up to* who you are (Phil. 3:14; cf. Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:24; 5:8; Col. 3:10). He realized he had not achieved perfection; and it the Apostle Paul had not achieved perfection, I don't think *I'm* going to (see Matt. 26:41b; Rom. 7:18; Gal. 5:17; Jas. 3:2). He knew he *never would* achieve it until he was with the Lord (Heb. 12:23). But the fact that he could never be perfect in this life did not deter him from "striving" to be better and better (Col. 1:29; Heb. 12:4; cf. 1 Tim. 4:10).

"Let us *therefore*," he says, "as many as are perfect..." Well, what does the "therefore" refer to? Look at the two previous verses where we ended last time: "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vss. 13-14).

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"Pressing on," he says. "So therefore," he says, "if you have this understanding, this perfect understanding of what this is all about, press on." Yesterday's victories are not sufficient. Prior growth is wonderful, but it does not excuse you from today's need to grow more. So, in Verse 15: "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, *have this attitude*." That is the main exhortation here: "have this attitude." The word that is translated "have an attitude" or "have this attitude"—the word in this command is based on the word "mind." Translators and commentators have struggled to come up with how to capture this word in English, because it does not really translate exceptionally well, but it has to do with how you think.

I looked up all the different translations of this. The New American Standard says "have this attitude." The New International Version says "take such a view of things." The King James says "be thus minded"—which is probably the most literal of any of them, but people don't speak that way today. Others include "let this be your resolve," "think thus," "cherish these thoughts," "see eye to eye with me on these things"—that's pretty liberal with what the text says—"set ourselves this sort of ambition," "think these things over," or here's another pretty good one: "set our mind on this." "Let us who are perfect set our collective thinking this way."

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude"—think this way—"and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." This, my friends, is the example to follow. It does not come from a seminar; it does not come from a book. You cannot maintain spiritual growth and fervor from the teachings or writings of any one man or woman. It comes from *relentless and consistent pursuit* of "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vs. 14); and if you understand that, "therefore...have this attitude."

Well, what *is* "the goal"? What *should* be our thinking? Well, what do we want? We want what *Christ* wants, right? (2 Cor. 5:9; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1) We want to see His "Church" built (Matt. 16:18), so we need greater maturity among the members (Eph. 4:12-13), we need greater outreach, we need more evangelism, we need deeper knowledge of God, we need more sincere worship.

How do you "pursue" the goal? (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 12:14) Well, the only way to get mature is to, over the passage of time, do the things that improve your thinking and improve your skills—so, it is consistent *growth* in your knowledge and your application of God's Word (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; cf. Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2-3; Heb. 5:13-14). Why? Because as you get to know the Word of God, you will get to know the God of the Word (Ps. 119:38; 2 Cor. 3:18).

When I began that adventure of actually reading through the Bible through the first time, I was discovering all of these things that I did not know, and putting the pieces together, and hearing how *this* story that I had heard fit into *this* incident that I had heard about, and seeing it all fit together—that was wonderful, but the *profound* thing was the changes on the *inside*, because as I began to have the Word of God penetrate me, I became a better and better ambassador for *who God is!* You get to "know" Him by knowing what He says (Ex. 33:13; Ps. 111:2; Jn. 17:3, 17; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:10).

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When people get married, I know in other cultures it can be an arranged thing, and perhaps a husband and wife may meet at their wedding ceremony; but in *our* world, it is not that way. We actually get to *choose* a person to marry, and we do it by spending a lot of time together, right?—talking to each other. Well, how do you, as the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25), expect to get to know your Bridegroom, other than to spend a lot of time with Him, listen to what He says? (Col. 3:16)

Verse 16—"However"—and here is where he puts together this play on words: "as many as *are* perfect" think this way—"let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." What is he saying? Live up to what you "know" (Jn. 13:17). Live in practical reality, like *who you are* "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Eph. 4:24). God is not *anywhere* nearly as concerned over the few portions of the Bible that you might not yet understand very well, as He is interested in helping you live by the parts you know so very well.

This is about having the right attitude about being "perfect" in Christ, and so he says in Verse 17: "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."

If you want to learn something, if you want to learn a skill, what do you do? Well, you seek out people who know it better than you do, you watch what they do, you ask them how to do what they do, and then you practice and practice and practice *doing* the same. If you want to be more mature in Christ—and if you belong to Him, you *should* want to be more mature in Him—identify people who have progressed in Christian maturity, observe how they live, and do the same (1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7, 8; Heb. 13:7; Jas. 5:10). Or as Paul said, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." (cf. Phil. 4:9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3)

Watch people do it, learn how to do it, practice doing it (e.g., Matt. 10:1-42). Remember our studies in James: Chapter 1, Verse 22—"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Get out there and *do it!* Verse 25 of James Chapter 1—"But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." And then, Verse 27—"Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this"—to go to seven different Bible studies every single week! Oh, no, wait; that's the *American* version! It's to *do* it, right?—"to visit orphans and widows in their distress..." It's to take what you *hear* from your Bridegroom, and then *be* His ambassador! (2 Cor. 5:20) *Go do it!* "Keep [yourself] unstained by the world" while you do *everything* you can to *penetrate* the world with the wonderful demonstration of the goodness of Christ and the message of His Gospel! That's how James put it.

Real Christianity is not a matter of keeping a list of spiritual rules, it is a matter of living according to what he calls "the perfect law"—*the* rule—which is the sum total of everything revealed in the Word of God (Ps. 119:128, 151, 160). It is, as James calls it, "the perfect law, the law of liberty"—what *liberates* you (cf. Ps. 119:45; Rom. 6:18, 22). And by the way: That is the same word—"perfect"—as Paul uses in Philippians Chapter 3.

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True Christianity is just *living out* a relationship "with God" (Mic. 6:8; cf. Gen. 6:9). It is not performing so that people are going to like you better. We strive always to live out the life of the One who has *given us eternal life* by forgiving our sins, by putting His eternal life in us (Gal. 2:20)—so, if we have been "forgiven," we become forgiving" (Eph. 4:32); if we understand "mercy," we act mercifully (Matt. 18:32-33); if we understand grace, we show "grace" (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:12; 9:8; Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:1).

That is how you do it: Follow the example of people who are "pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Learn Whom To Follow.

And then he slips this in: Learn Who *Not* To Follow. There *are* some people who, if you are making good progress in Christ, they will kick you in the spiritual shin; there are some people who *will* mess things up for you (see 1 Cor. 5:11; 15:33; cf. Prov. 13:20b; 22:25).

He says this, in Verses 18 and 19—"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

Now, *who are these people?* Well, we can construct a composite drawing of the suspects, just from this text:

First of all: These are people who "profess" to be Christians (Titus 1:16). Paul had warned the Philippians about them *because* they had come into the church at Philippi; they were identified with the church. He treats them as a threat from within (cf. Acts 20:30), not an attack from the outside.

They are people who cater to "the flesh," rather than living "by the Spirit" of God (Gal. 5:17; cf. Rom. 8:13; 2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 4). He says they "set their minds on earthly things." Now, look: We all have to deal with "earthly things," alright? You have to fix your meals, you have to put on your clothes, you have to comb your hair, you have to get from Point A to Point B—to do that, you need a car; to do that, you have to buy a car; to have a car, you have to maintain a car, you have to put gasoline in it. There are *millions* of "earthly things" that we have to deal with. *But*—remember, I said this passage is about thinking?—they "*set their minds* on earthly things" (cf. Rom. 8:5). That is the *opposite* of "have this attitude" as you have seen "in us."

Thirdly, they were gluttonous seekers of gratification, rather than servants of God. They wanted to bring *themselves* glory and comfort, rather than glorifying God (2 Tim. 3:4d). Paul said of them: "whose god is their appetite." Literally, the metaphor is "whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame" (NKJV). These are the people who seek attention (e.g., 3 Jn. 9). "It really is all about *me*," they think (e.g., Gal. 5:26; Phil. 2:3a; 1 Tim. 6:4a; Jas. 3:14).

And despite their profession of faith in Christ, they were not Christians. Their doctrines—what they really believed—their practices proved their profession to be phony (Ti. 1:16). He calls them "enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction" (cf. 2 Pet. 2:12).

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Friends, you know the really, really tired old worn-out criticism of the church? "I don't want to go there! There are *hypocrites* there!" Well, yeah, but you will *pack out* the football stadium for a football game. Do you think everybody *there* has pure motives?

It isn't a matter of *perfection* among us. Satan *hates* the Church! (see 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:17) He has promised—and Christ has promised that Satan will do this—every single place there is a gathering of true believers, he will infiltrate, he will plant somebody there to besmirch the reputation of the *whole group*! (see Jude 4) There are enemies who *always* infiltrate (Acts 20:29; Gal. 2:4; 1 Jn. 2:19; Jude 4, 12-13). If I knew who you are, I would paint a big red "X" on your back, so we could *know*. Paul says these are the "enemies of the cross."

What are the "friends of the cross"? They are the ones who have the opposite attitude, the ones who live by self-denial (Lk. 9:23). Remember back in Chapter 2, starting at Verse 3—"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude"—guess what word *that* is? Same word that is translated "have this attitude" over in Chapter 3. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."

There are some people who *are* "selfish." There are some people who *are* motivated by "empty conceit." There are some people who *don't* want to be "humble"—they *are* proud, they *are* "looking out for their own personal interests." The "enemies of the cross" are those who have the opposite attitude: *Even though they claim* to belong to Christ, they are self-indulgent (Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:10); giving in order to get, rather than giving because God is worthy of your gift (e.g., Job 21:15; Is. 58:3a; 1 Tim. 6:5); it is being faithful so you will be blessed or happy or healed or wealthy or famous or popular or whatever, rather than giving because you want God to be honored, rather than being faithful because God is faithful, and your faithfulness honors Him, regardless of whatever earthly rewards you might or might not receive.

Earlier in this book—actually, it was in this chapter—Paul warned about those Judaizers: the legalistic heretics; he subtly called them—remember his terms—"dogs," "evil workers," and "the false circumcision" (vs. 2). That is *one* enemy of the Cross—one *kind* of enemy of the Cross.

Here is the other one, from our passage—the other extreme of the heresy. Not the "legalists"—you know, [the ones who have] the rigorous list of do's and don'ts—these are the "libertines"; they "turn the grace of God" (Jude 4) into permission to "indulge" themselves for their own personal convenience and comfort and fulfillment of their "desires" (2 Pet. 2:10; cf. Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16). It fits well if your "god" is "your belly."

It was an idea that is *certainly* popular today. Frankly, there are a lot more libertines around in our world that there are legalists. We have both, but it is just as anti-Christian today as it was in the first century. We see it in a lot of ways today: Turn on TV and you can get a pretty good look at it.

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There is the "Health and Wealth Gospel" that teaches that God wants every Christian to be healthy and to prosper financially—that *that* is God's will for every Christian. Well, *biblically*, it is not.

There is the "Name it and claim it" perversion; it is usually called the "Word Faith Movement." It is associated with people like Joyce Meier and Joel Osteen, some of the most popular names in Christian media. It teaches that we can create or alter reality by what we say. That is basically called "mysticism"—"shamanism"—and it has been Christianized. By the way: That message does not play *nearly* as well in Bangladesh or Somalia as it does in a capitalistic and prosperous nation like the United States.

We have, in our world, this mixture of modern definitions of beauty and health and comfort with spirituality—we have a lot of "New Age" malarkey that comes along with this stuff, and so-called "Christian" disciplines of this or that: you know, we have "Christian" Aerobics and ""Christian" beauty classes and "Christian" weightlifting, and all the other nonsense that is nothing less than professing Christians "whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

Now, look: Contrary to appearances, I am *not* against a healthy body. It is a nice thing to have. I *do* work on maintenance of this one, because it is the only one I have—tattered as it is. But *that* does not make you spiritually mature (1 Tim. 4:8). You know, if you need to follow that principle I gave you before—"Eat less, move more"—it would be *far more* productive if you do the "moving more" part somewhere out there where there are some people who need Christ! *We don't need "Christian Aerobics"!* We don't need "Christian" *copies* of everything the world does! We need Christians *to penetrate* "the world" (Mk. 16:15), not *isolate* ourselves from it by doing all of our *own* things!

Then there is the idea today that the church should always be non-threatening and entertaining and inviting to unbelievers (Is. 30:10). That *completely* turns it upside down (2 Tim. 4:2-4). The church should be *different!* (1 Cor. 14:24-25; 1 Tim. 3:15; 6:1b; Titus 2:10b) We are "a *holy* people" (1 Pet. 2:9); we are to be "set apart" from "the world" (Ps. 4:3; Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15), but people today are saying, "Well, there are certain biblical topics that should not be the subject of sermons because they are negative" (contra Acts 20:20, 27).

Some people act as if they want the world to think that Christianity is the most comfortable "ism" that they can buy into—like it is a worthwhile hobby. No, it is the "life" of "Christ" (Rom. 8:2; cf. Gal. 2:20), it is *different* (Phil. 2:15), it is "set apart" from everything in "the world" (Jas. 1:27b).

Those are modern examples of the *counter*-example of true Christianity. The *real thing* involves the "example" of Paul (3:17). He told us to "have this attitude" in Chapter 2—remember, back in Verse 5: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but [He] *emptied Himself*," and He became "obedient" to the Father: "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (vss. 5-8; cf. Is. 53:10-12; Jn. 10:18).



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Learn Whom To Follow: Follow people that are on their way toward greater maturity.

Learn Who *Not* To Follow: Realize that there *are* people who will cheapen the whole thing; there are people who *will* settle for a miserable misrepresentation of the truth.

And he concludes with this; here is Your Motivation. One of the profound truths of Christianity is that even though it brings you blessings on Earth—it *does* give you "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1); it *does* give you "the peace *of* God, which surpasses all comprehension"—that one is coming up in Chapter 4 (vs. 7); it *does* give you "comfort" when you are "afflicted" (2 Cor. 1:4)—there are many, many blessings to you while you are here on Earth (Prov. 11:31a), but your motivation *is not* to be blessed "*here*" (Heb. 13:14); your *primary* motivation for living as God calls you to live is because of *future* rewards (Matt. 5:12; 6:1; Lk. 6:23; Heb. 11:8-10, 13-14; 2 Tim. 4:8), it is because of who God is (1 Pet. 1:15), it is because you yearn for and you are waiting for something *far better* than what Earth could *ever* give you (Ps. 16:5; Lam. 3:24; 2 Cor. 4:17; 5:1-4).

Here it is: Verses 20 and 21—"For..." There is an important connecting word. *Why* do all this? *Why* change your "attitude"? *Why* change your lifestyle? *Why* be committed for the long run? "For"—he does not say, "This is the way to comfort, personal peace, and affluence." *Here* is what motivates you: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

Do you realize that you are a foreigner here? (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11) I have said many, many times since my first experience over 30 years ago leaving our culture, that I hope for every Christian that someday you have the opportunity to go somewhere else on Earth where they do not speak your language—preferably where they do not dress like you do—so that you understand what it means to be a *foreigner* in a different country.

You are living now as a foreigner. We are pretty comfortable here; we have it pretty good here, as human standards go. But "heaven" is our homeland (Col. 1:5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:8; Eph. 2:6, 19; Col. 3:3; Heb. 10:34; 1 Pet. 1:4). Right now, we have to "submit" to earthly authorities (1 Pet. 2:13), who have a tendency to take themselves *far* too seriously; but this is only a temporary dwelling that we have in a *foreign* land for a while (Heb. 13:14; 2 Cor. 5:1).

Think of your identity as a Christian with a "citizenship...in heaven"! Listen: If you belong to Christ, *Heaven* gave you birth. In the terminology that Jesus used with Nicodemus, you are "born from above" (Jn. 3:3, 7, YLT; cf. 1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Jn. 5:1a, 4). Your name is inscribed on *Heaven's* register (Lk. 10:20). Your "name" is "written in the Lamb's book of Life" in Heaven (Rev. 21:27; cf. Col. 3:3).

Your life is governed ultimately by the One to whom you must ultimately give account; we call Him our "heavenly Father" (Matt. 5:48; Lk. 11:13). Only His standards matter. Your rights in eternity, and your eternal and unfading "inheritance" is secured, according to First Peter 1:4, "in heaven"—not secured by anything you do here.

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It is only Heaven, ultimately, that has your best interests in mind (Lk. 15:7a). When you "pray," your prayers ascend to "heaven" (1 Kings 8:33-34), and to "heaven" your "hopes" aspire (Col. 1:5). You probably have some friends who are there now, and you yearn to be reunited with them (Ecc. 12:7; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Heb. 12:23).

We do not serve Christ merely for the crumbs of blessing which fall our way "in this life" (1 Cor. 15:19); we await the *ultimate* blessings of eternity (Rev. 21:3-7). We await hearing: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, NKJV).

People struggle right now; people go through hard times. And so often, I hear people who profess Christ say, "I don't *understand* what God is doing!" Well, have you been *listening* to Him? *This is not your home!* (Jn. 16:33) Don't *expect* to be treated like royalty—you're *not!* You are associated with the One "the world hates" (Jn. 15:18-19).

This *is not* the last chapter! This *is not* the end! Right now, it looks like the bad guys are winning (Ps. 12:8); in a lot of ways, *they are* (e.g., Rom. 1:28-32; cf. Ps. 37:7; 73:3-12; 2 Tim. 3:13). But this is not the "end" (Ps. 73:17-20; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:7).

We "wait" for the appearance *from Heaven* of "a Savior"—Christ Himself. We await the transformation of those corrupted and withering bodies that we live in now, so that we will be transformed and conformed with "the body of His glory" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42; 2 Cor. 5:1). My friend, *that* is the Motivation! What are we *looking forward* to? (Jn. 12:26; Col. 3:24) It is *worth it* (Rom. 8:18).

Now, I skipped over a phrase. Maybe you caught me, maybe you didn't. I want to make it the focus for the conclusion and the main application of these verses. If you go back to Verse 15, the command: "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude"—"think this way"; "be thus minded," if you will—"and"—look at the last part of this—"if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." "If in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." My observation is that a large percentage of Christians—and *especially* Christian leaders—don't really believe what this verse says; at least, they do not conduct Christian ministry as if this is true.

The legalists of our world have ignored this for *centuries*. The fact is, legalists—people who make up the rules—they don't seem to believe that the Holy Spirit actually works in anybody else's life! The fact is, if we truly *are* the people who "have this attitude"—the attitude of "press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vs. 14)—then God *will* convict anyone who needs convicting about anything that they are doing which is contrary to that pursuit (Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:14; Phil. 2:13).

What we need is to just make our focus "pressing on" toward Christian maturity. That is *why* we "preach" and "teach" the Scripture (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:2). That's why we try to set good examples of living by it (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). We need to "encourage" (1 Thess. 5:11; cf. Rom. 1:12; 14:19; Heb. 10:24-25) and "comfort" (1 Thess. 4:18) and "exhort" (2 Tim. 4:2; cf. Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16) each other along the way, and we need to trust God—who puts His Holy Spirit in *every* believer (Rom. 8:9)—to deal with His children on issues of developing maturity in them.

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Don't let *anybody* force you into their mold—like Colossians 2 says: Do not "submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' " (vs. 20). Spiritual maturity has *never* been defined by what you don't do; it has never been gained by submitting yourself to self-righteous, judgmental people—that's the legalistic way of doing it; you will miss the point.

The libertine approaches the Christian life by not paying *any* attention to this. "What can I get away with?" (cf. Deut. 29:19; Jer. 7:9-10) He doesn't add extra rules to Scripture; he fails to think about what it is wise to avoid, according to the Scriptures. He is the one focused on what he wants to do at the moment, rather than what is good for eternity. He's the one whose motto is not, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"—that's the legalist's motto (cf. Mk. 7:3-4, 8)—the libertine's motto is, "All things are lawful for me" (1 Cor. 6:12). I'm "not under the law" (Rom. 6:15)—I can do anything I want!" And they *both* miss the point. People can't seem to figure out how this works. They either think in terms of how much we can get away with, *or*, what is the letter of the law?

We had a situation one time. I had used this in an old sermon, and I just ran across it this week. I remember the situation. We went to a store, and we bought two things. The clerk rang up one. We didn't pay attention, got home, and discovered we had only paid for one. I got back in the car, and went back to pay. I remember our son saying, "Oh, you don't have to do that!" Ah, here is an important lesson! I got back and I showed the receipt; and I said, "You remember we were here"—I got the same sales lady, and she said, "Oh, I can't believe this!" You know, one of those subtle things like, "You've restored my faith in mankind! This is so honest!"—just going on and on about how wonderful I was. "That's incredible! That is so honest of you! I am so impressed! I need to see your driver's license and a check guarantee card."

You know, it's either, live by the extremes of the rules *or*, "What can I get away with?" Just *put those out of your mind!* *Neither* one of those is Christianity. *Both* are foolishness! *Both* are spiritual poison! It's *not*, "How much can I get away with?" It's not, "What is the minimum I have to do to achieve enough?" It's "the upward call" of *being like Christ!* (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:1, 10) Get your "eyes" on *Him* (Heb. 12:2), and it won't be that hard to figure out what to do along the way!

This verse tells us God's ways of dealing with the excesses of the libertines and the pet peeves of the legalists—and it has to be the way of a church if that spiritual family is going to be healthy; it has to be *your* way, if *you* are going to be spiritually healthy. The way is: Teach the truth, focus on Christ, live out the Scriptures, and let God be God in other people's lives (Rom. 14:4; Jas. 4:11).

If you are "perfect" in the sense of: by faith in Christ, you have been "blessed us with every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3), "your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2), you "belong to" Him (1 Cor. 3:23), please join me in the attitude of "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead...press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." A fad won't get you there. Rules and regulations won't get you there. Eating less, moving more—that's how you lose weight. Eating good spiritual food, exercising by serving Christ—that will make you more like Him.

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And, my friend, "If you have a different attitude in anything," you are not accountable to me; "God will reveal that also to you." *God* will show it to you! He does it in me.

Do you *want* to "press on" to be more like Christ? I trust your answer is "Yes." Well, is there a recurring sin that gets in your way? When I say "recurring sin," what is it that is flashing on the screen in *your* mind? Well, *that's God* speaking to you, in the sense that He reveals to you the difference between yourself and His Word (Heb. 4:12), but you have to know His Word to know the difference between your behavior and His Word (Phil. 1:9-10; Heb. 5:13-14).

Do you want to grow? Do you want to grow in Christ? Do you *want* to be somebody who others look up to and say, "Now, *that* is an example of a Christian man! *That* is an example of a Christian woman! *That* is what I want to be like!" Well then, let me ask you: Is there something in your life that is more important than that pursuit? Because you will never get there, if there is. Are you *willing* to ask God to convict you? Are you *willing* to face the truth when you see your reflection in what James calls "the perfect law, the law of liberty"? (Jas. 1:25; cf. Ps. 119:45) Are you willing to make a change?

You know, most lifestyle changes *don't change* 90 percent of what you do; they change *one* percent of what you do—trimming off something that doesn't need to be there, replacing it with something that makes it better. You know, if you are sailing a battleship, you don't see people waterskiing behind them and cutting s-curves. Those things don't turn on a dime. But, start a battleship off on *our* side of the Pacific, and ten minutes later, change course two degrees—you're going to *miss* by a *mile*, or you are going to get *back* on course if you make *those little changes*. Are you willing?

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." My friends, *that* is "The Perfect Attitude"! That is the attitude of the "perfect" ones in Christ (Col. 4:12).

And so, we need to pray. Let's pray:

*Our Father, thank You for the riches that are ours in Christ. Lord, You know that recurring prayer of mine: "Do whatever You need to do in our lives to make us more useful for Your glory"—perhaps now, perhaps especially in light of the passage that we have just seen, maybe more clearly than before. I pray for each one of us now, that we would be willing to have You show us any way in which we differ from the attitude that is necessary for us to serve You. Father, if there are those among us that are seeking righteousness on their own, and want to conform others to their ways of thinking; if they think that spiritual maturity can be gained by climbing rungs of a legalistic ladder, please slap them and wake them up to understand what grace really is. If there are any among us who put on a Sunday morning face of spirituality, but then the rest of the week, act as if "I'll get away with as much as I can," slap them to the reality of seeing "the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." And so, Lord, the way to summarize all of that is to say, "Please, whatever needs to be done in each of our hearts, do it, I pray, that we would be the more useful for Your glory." For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*