



“Follow Me” is the title of our next XL Conference, November 3-7, 2010. What greater topic could there be than to consider the life of our gracious Lord! We are very excited as we plan for this special time together.

Our morning and afternoon topics will include *Name Above All Names*, *Jesus and Sinners: A Pattern for Evangelism*, *Jesus and Forgiveness*, *Servant Leadership*, and many others. In the evening sessions we will focus on the last hours of Jesus’ life. We will continue to have special sessions for women, and for teens and young adults, plus a session that deals with *Common Pitfalls to Staying Faithful*.

Our annual conference would best be described as a family-friendly conference with an emphasis on leadership development. In our pre-conference we meet with interns who are completing their mock candidating and mock ordination. The conference begins Wednesday evening, with sessions geared towards those who know and love the Lord and desire to serve Him both vocationally and as lay leaders. We provide a children’s ministry that is also focused on

teaching our youngest children the truths about our great God. We also have a great group of young adults who attend our conference. We are very grateful for the opportunity we have to teach the younger generation the eternal truths about God’s Word.

We invite you to join us this November! Registration is open at www.xlministries.org. Please pray with us as we anticipate this time together!



Often for those in ministry it is a financial struggle to participate in conferences. As God provides through His people, we make scholarship funds available to assist those in ministry to attend, and to bring their families with them. If you are able to donate towards conference scholarship funds, it would be a great blessing. Donations are tax deductible. Questions? Email us at conference@xlministries.org.

Web site: www.xlministries.org

X'ENT NEWS

PROVIDING EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP THROUGH QUALITY CHRISTIAN TRAINING

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2 Timothy 2:2
And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Pursuing Christ

Philippians 3:7-21

Bryan Ryan

In the first three verses of Philippians 3, Paul lists five distinctive traits that are true of genuine believers. True believers rejoice in their position in Christ (v.1), discern the true gospel (v. 2), worship God in the Spirit (v. 3), glory in Christ (v. 3), and do not put confidence in the flesh (v. 3).

In verses 7 to 21, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives a sixth trait: true believers pursue hard after Christ. When Paul was confronted with the glory of Christ on the road to Damascus, he realized all the things in this world that he proudly held onto and that he thought would bring him salvation were entirely worthless. Verses 7-9 state:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,...

Paul counted all things in this world as human excrement compared to following hard after Christ. For the Apostle Paul, and all genuine believers, knowing Christ is to be desired above all. To pursue hard after Christ is having Him as your treasure... having an attitude that there is nothing in this world worth pursuing other than Christ.

In verse 9 Paul explains why Christ is so much more precious than all of Paul’s

moral achievements. Moral achievements do not bring the righteousness of God. Only through faith in Christ can one stand in the presence of God clothed with the perfect righteousness of God. Being found in Christ—united to Christ by faith, in a permanent relationship of identity with Him—is ten thousand times more valuable than our self-made righteousness based on law.

Paul called himself “blameless” in verse 6 “as to righteousness under the law.” But all that work was worse than useless. It was damning. Only one thing will count before God: being found in Christ with a righteousness that comes only from God. Paul treasures Christ above all things because only in Christ does he have a righteousness that counts with God.

Just as the five distinctive traits listed in Philippians 3:1-3 confirm our justification, so our hard pursuit of Christ validates our justification. Paul forsakes the things that are rubbish and he pursues Christ. Why? In order that he might gain Christ and share in God’s righteousness.

Don’t get me wrong, God’s righteousness is imputed to genuine believers by faith alone. However, we pursue hard after Christ, not to gain justification but to confirm our justification. Saving faith is not merely a one-time decision for Christ. It is an ongoing preference for Christ over all else. The pursuit of Christ is the evidence of genuine, saving faith in Christ. Therefore, we must go hard after Christ in order to confirm our justification. Verse 12 gives us the reason we are to pursue hard after Christ: because we are not yet made perfect. Now, some may reason: “If Christ has already laid hold of me, then I do not need to pursue hard after Christ. After all, Christ already has me.” On the contrary, Paul reasons exactly the opposite in verse

12. Paul presses on in order to gain Christ, because Christ has already gained me. Paul’s conversion was not a cage to hold him back but a catapult to cause him to pursue hard after Christ.

The irresistible grace of Christ overcoming Paul’s rebellion and saving him from sin did not make Paul passive; it made him powerful! The irresistible grace of Christ overcoming our sin makes us powerful by His Spirit. The same power that raised Christ from the dead propels us to pursue hard after Christ. Philippians 2:12-13 argues this same point:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Genuine believers go hard after Christ because Christ is at work in them. Work out your salvation, because God is at work in you. Your work is His work for His glory when done in dependence on His power. The most fundamental reason why genuine believers go hard after Christ is

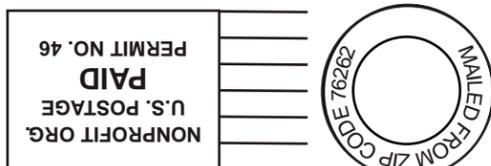
that Christ is in them, moving them to go hard after Him.

How do I go hard after Christ? Verse 13 gives us 3 steps:

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,

The first step is to develop a holy dissatisfaction with your spiritual life. Stand in front of the mirror of God’s Word and realize that none of us have arrived. The hearty admission of our spiritual imperfections is the starting point for the pursuit of God.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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The second step is to forget what lies behind. We need to forget all those things that hinder us from pursuing hard after Christ. We are to put out of our mind all those memories that produce reasons not to pursue Christ. But we are to remember those things that the Lord has done for us and the times the Lord has intervened and directed our hearts towards Him. We remember the things that the Lord has done for us but put out of our mind all the times we failed Him.

Psalm 77:11-14 says:

I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds. Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples.

The point of this is that we are only to look at the things that lie behind that cause us to press forward.

The third step is to reach forward to what lies ahead. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 likens the Christian life to that of an athlete. The way to go hard after God is with all the discipline and self-denial of an athlete. God does not promise His riches to aimless people. Paul did not run aimlessly or beat the air. He lived with spiritual goals in view and controlled his passions for the sake of those goals.

1 Timothy 4:7 tells us to “discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.” If you are going to pursue hard after Christ then you need to come up with a plan to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. It is like the Nike slogan – **Just Do It!**

The apostle Paul lived the Nike slogan. He pressed on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The prize that Paul is referring to is Christ-

likeness, with all its eternal benefits. The finish line of that prize is heaven, where we will be in God’s glorious presence.

Verses 20 and 21 are the motivating factor in pursuing hard after Christ: being in God’s glorious presence:

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.

Paul says our citizenship is in heaven and we are eagerly waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus because when He comes He’ll transform us to be like Him and He’s got the power to do it. In other words, we have a heavenly perspective. Heaven is our primary preoccupation. This is what motivates us. This is the focus of life that is required if we’re going to pursue hard after Christ. Christ is of heaven, from heaven, in heaven. Heaven is His place. Christ is ours, thus, heaven is our place. If I am preoccupied with Christ, then I will be preoccupied with heaven.

The time is coming when the Lord will call us to meet Him and we will be forever with Christ. That’s our focus...or at least it should be.

Most who call themselves Christians are not caught up in heaven. Most believers are bound up to things here. Most Christians really don’t want to go to heaven...at least not now. Don’t get me wrong, we all want to end up in heaven. However, many who call themselves Christians do not want to be preoccupied with heaven now. They would rather be so preoccupied when their life is almost over.

But if we are going to pursue hard after Christ with the same passion as Paul, we would do so with an absolute

determination of our sights set on heaven. Colossians 3:1-3 says:

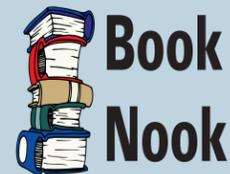
If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

According to Romans 8, I’m not looking for comfort here, I’m not looking for pleasant emotions, and I’m not looking for a pain-free life. This stuff doesn’t matter to me because I’m looking for what’s in heaven...what’s coming.

Why do we eagerly wait for Christ? Why do we wait with anticipation? Because Jesus 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.

That’s why we look for Him. We pursue hard after Christ...we eagerly wait for Jesus Christ because we’re groaning for the redemption of this body. We’d like to get rid of this sinful flesh. Those who don’t pursue hard after Christ...those who are not preoccupied with heaven...are that way because they like their imperfection. He will transform the body of our humble state – our unredeemed flesh. We’ve already been made a new creation in the inner man. But the inner man is a prisoner locked in unredeemed flesh. The new creation dwells in unredeemed humanness, and the new creation longs to be liberated.

Genuine Christians, according to Philippians 3, rejoice in their position in Christ, discern the true gospel, worship God in the Spirit, glory in Christ, and do not put confidence in the flesh. Genuine Christians also pursue hard after Christ.



A Book Review of *True Spirituality* by Francis Schaeffer

It is my joy to recommend to you this great book! First published in 1971, the current edition was updated in 2001. Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith headed up the communal, Christian philosophical retreat L’Abri in the Swiss Alps. L’Abri flourished in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, impacting thousands of lives and still has a major influence through Schaeffer’s writings and L’Abri institutions around the world. Schaeffer wrote twenty-two books, notably *The God Who is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He is There and He is Not Silent* and was known for his strong philosophical apologetic for the Christian faith.

True Spirituality is one of Schaeffer’s lesser known titles. It is based on a series of lectures and sermons he first gave while traveling in the United States in 1953-54. His motivation to preach and then write out these messages was his concern over a lack of depth and joy in most Christians with whom he met and interacted. The timelessness of the work lives on. In our day, do we not see this lack of depth and joy in Christianity at large and in our own lives, perhaps? He writes (p. 144), “How beautiful Christianity is – first because of the sparkling quality of its intellectual answers, but secondly because of the beautiful quality of its human and personal answers.” Indeed, our relationship with our Savior and Great God is to be marked by absolute confidence and joy, as Jesus Himself had. Our Savior speaks in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (NKJV) Schaeffer’s goal in this work is to call his readers to not settle for a weak, truncated Christianity, but rather to a depth and biblical richness in our relationship with Christ, to which our Savior Himself calls us. And, along with Scripture, Schaeffer states that when our relationship with God through Christ is marked by such depth and richness, the world will take notice and lives will be changed.

The book is divided into two sections. Section one is titled “Freedom now from

the bonds of sin” and deals with how one embraces the gospel and then lives it out. He states on page ten, “The beginning of man’s rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart.” Schaeffer develops this theme and expresses with clarity man’s inability, due to sin, to be in relationship with God and that God, in love, provides Christ as the means of being brought into that relationship. Thus, due to this glorious salvation, thankfulness towards and trust in God should mark the life of a believer, even in the midst of difficulty and hardship. He says on page 11, “...there is a personal God. He is my Father since I have accepted Christ as my Savior. Then surely when I lack trust, I am denying what I say I believe.” This trust will manifest itself in peace and joy and a lack of envy or hatred toward our fellow men. Schaeffer then calls followers of Jesus to, as with Christ, willingly and joyfully *take up our cross daily* and die to self for the greater glory of God. In the face of our modern society “that says no to nothing” (p. 17) we are called to say no to self, to die to self, for a far greater good. And that good is to live to God for which we are created. The resurrection of Christ, says Schaeffer, shows that this is what Christ did...He died to the life of this world and now lives to His Father. And, thus, Christ’s followers will do the same and are called to live in this reality now.

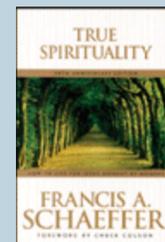
He goes on and explores the resources that we have now to live this awesome life, including the presence of God in our life and the resource of the Word to guide, direct and comfort us as we live in this gospel. Towards the end of the first section Schaeffer remarks, “We accept Christ as Savior at one moment and our guilt is gone on the basis of the value of the finished work of Jesus Christ. But after we become Christians, the moments proceed, the clock continues to tick; and in every moment of time, our calling is to believe God, raise the empty hands of faith, and let fruit flow out through us.” In our modern language, we are to live out the gospel moment by moment, and this is true spirituality and the Christian life.

The second section is “Freedom now from the results of the bonds of sin” and deals with man’s personal issues as well as in relationship with others. Schaeffer calls Christians to live out the facts of the

gospel. His concern is that the facts of the gospel, while perhaps believed, are kept in the realm of the theoretical. He states, “Reality is not meant to be only credal, though the creeds are important. Reality is to be experienced on the basis of a restored relationship with God through that finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.” (p. 93) He then works through several aspects of living in reality of the work of Christ. Of course, the thought-life must be brought into control of the truth of the Word and work of God. This will lead to what Schaeffer calls “substantial healing of the whole person.” What he means by this is not that all is now well in health, attitude and circumstance. Rather, through the gospel, man is made into who God intended him to be...a worshiper of God first and foremost, and that the rest of life then flows from this position of wholeness in relation to God. Also, there will be “healing in personal relationships” because the basic human relationship is with God. Thus, expectations for perfection in relationship are being met in relationship with God and therefore, unrealistic expectations in the human realm are not fostered. He states, “We are finite, and therefore do not expect to find final sufficiency in any human relationship, including marriage. The final sufficiency is to be found only in relationship to God. But on the basis of the finished work of Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit and the instrument of faith, there can be real and substantial healing of relationships, and thus true joy.” (p. 142) Schaeffer ends this work discussing how the gospel impacts the life and interactions of the church and makes the work of the church effective and strong.

From talks given in the 1950s and published in book form in the 1970s, this work sure sounds familiar to our day and resonates with many excellent, similar works of recent publication. The need to believe the gospel and live it out moment-by-moment is a timeless truth. Be encouraged to include this excellent discussion of the Christian life in your upcoming reading and perhaps let this work introduce you to an excellent Christian thinker’s other wonderful books.

♦Eric Ellis



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