

The Crisis of Complacency
Philippians 3:12-4:1

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Introduction to Text: I want to speak this morning on the subject, “The Crisis of Complacency.” To be a little more specific, though there is danger in all areas of life regarding complacency, my subject this morning is spiritual complacency. A.W. Tozer said, “Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth.” He went on to say, “One in a 1,000 Christians reveals any passionate thirst for God.”

What about you? Have you fallen victim to complacency in worship attendance, private devotion, prayer, evangelism, giving, or any other spiritual matter?

One of texts that I have turned to over and over again is the book of Philippians. Paul wrote from prison, but the word “joy” keeps showing up in this book. More practical than theological, Paul wrote as someone who knew that his joy did not come in outward circumstances, but inner peace in relationship to a growing, never complacent, walk with the Lord.

Text: 12 Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, 14 I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. 16 In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. 17 Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, 20 but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

Introduction: Paul’s concern in this passage is that the believers of Philippi “press on” in their spiritual maturity. The question of the day in Philippi is, no doubt, some heretical teaching of the first century. The teaching is causing some of the believers there to be confused and even revert back to a pre-conversion lifestyle.

In our day, perhaps you have learned or experienced already, that if we are not growing in our faith, we are sliding away from the will of God. There is no such thing as just staying where you are. You are either growing in maturity or growing to some degree of complacency. You are not standing still. So, notice two things about the spiritual complacent and then see the strategy for protection.

The Problem with Spiritual Complacency

Notice the **Designation** of the Spiritually Complacent in verse 18. *“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.”*

I don't think there is a lot of reason to have discussion as to whether those referred to in verse 18 or believers or unbelievers—saved or lost. It really doesn't matter for purposes of our application of this text. I happen to think that they are Christians who have become complacent. The context of this passage suggests Paul's warning to "press on" or else. I think in verse 18 is the designation of some who have ceased to "press on." They are designated as enemies of the cross of Christ. You know, it is possible to be a Christian and be an enemy of the cross of Christ. You may be saved, but in fact, you are guilty of doing more harm to the cause of Christ than good.

Notice the **Description** of the Spiritually Complacent in verse 19. They are described as those "*whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*"

This list of descriptions certainly is indicative of the life of an unbeliever, but it also reflects the life of some believers.

- Whose end is destruction—Again, this doesn't have to be eternal destruction, although, eternal destruction certainly applies for the non-believer. Destruction could imply simply the awful consequences of sin that destroy a person's life.
- Whose god is their belly—Belly, here, is the idea of the flesh. These individuals are being described as doing whatever to gratify their sinful desires. They live for the pleasure of the flesh.
- Whose glory is in their shame—Some, unfortunately, are known for their sin. I could mention several prominent, national names, both recent and historical, of which your first thought would be on their sin. They have become known by their sin, not whatever good they might have otherwise done.
- Who set their mind on earthly things—The spiritually complacent are focused on earthly things instead of eternal things.

Aaron Burr, the 3rd Vice President of the U.S., was reared in a godly home and admonished to accept Christ by his grandfather Jonathan Edwards. But he refused to listen. Instead, he declared that he wanted nothing to do with God and said he wished the Lord would leave him alone. He did achieve a measure of political success in spite of repeated disappointments. But he was also involved in continuous strife, and when he was 48 years old, he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. He lived for 32 more years, but through all this time he was unhappy and unproductive. It was during this sad chapter in his life that he declared to a group of friends, "Sixty years ago I told God that if He would let me alone, I would let Him alone, and God has not bothered about me since." But Burr realized that God had not really left him alone, but had hounded him all those years. The loneliness of his life reflected his complacency toward God and the turmoil he felt was the grinding judgment of God in his life.

Protecting Ourselves from Spiritual Complacency

So, how can we protect ourselves from spiritual complacency? The text under consideration today gives us six very practical steps that we can take to protect ourselves from spiritual complacency.

1. Remember to whom you belong. (v. 12)

We belong to Christ. He has laid hold of us. We must want to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of us.

2. Realize that the strength of your relationship with Christ yesterday or today says nothing about the strength of your commitment tomorrow. (vv. 13-15)

Every day, we must press toward that goal of maturity. We cannot let up, give up, or give in. We must press on. Forgetting the things that are behind refers to the good things of his spiritual life, but he cannot rest in these things.

3. Resist the urge to lower your standards. (v. 16)

I like to say that one of the easiest ways to determine whether we have grown spiritually complacent is to evaluate where we are today in relationship to where we might have been at some other point in life. Are you involved in Bible study more right now than ever before? If not, you may be on the brink of spiritual complacency. Are you spending as much time in prayer as any other time in life? Are you resisting temptation right now? If not, why not? Have you accepted a lower standard for your life?

Bro. Luther Burney, my assistant, gave a great reflection of this the other day in a funeral. He said that he always used the occasion of the Lord's Supper to identify where he was in relationship to Christ since the last time he had received the Lord's Supper.

4. Recognize Godly examples and follow them. (v. 17)

Paul is not boasting in giving this command. In verse 12, he acknowledged that he was not perfect. So who should we follow? We should look to follow those who are making it their life goal to press on toward the call of God.

5. Re-order your priorities to reflect an eternal perspective. (v. 20)

I believe that there are two easy ways to determine whether you have an eternal or an earthly perspective—your calendar and your checkbook? How do you spend your money and how do you spend your time?

6. Resolve that your spiritual journey will last a lifetime. (v. 21)

So What?

Here is a place where we have an unfortunate chapter break. We have our "So what" in 4:1. "So stand firm in the Lord."

I'm sure many of you have heard this before, but I love the passion in this piece. Many people have their theory of its origin. I'm not sure, but since I've been to this place, I like its origin being attributed to a group of athletes attending National Fellowship of Christian Athletes Camp in Black Mountain, NC in 1966. It goes like this:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotion, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me...my banner will be clear!"

Conclusion:

I'm sure that Satan wants to keep us complacent. In fact an old man-made parable suggests how Satan once summoned his top aides to plan how to stop a group of dedicated Christians. One suggested working to convince them there is no God. Others suggested that would never work, because there is too much evidence to suggest there is a God. Another suggested that they work to convince them that God really doesn't care about right and wrong. That was dismissed rather quickly. Finally, it was suggested that they just keep whispering, "There is no hurry, there is no hurry."