

[the great regression]

:: philippians 3.15-16 ::

We're all worried about the Great Recession. At least our culture is. What's causing it? What will we do to avoid it? How will this policy or decision effect the economy? What about debt? What about inflation? How do we get back to where we once were and where we want to be?

These are questions that seem natural and needful in the economic realm, but they are also the type of questions that have a place in our personal faith, at least according to the Apostle Paul.

He continues his address to us in Philippians chapter 3, starting in verse 15, where he says:

Philippians 3.15-16 - 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. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

We receive Biblical commands in this text, which means we should take special note of the direction God is giving us. So, if you want a life of spiritual fulfillment, you can find the necessary guidance in this passage.

He says, 'therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.'

The *mind* Paul is talking about is the mind that is fixed upon the pursuit of Jesus. The athlete that is sprinting flat out for the goal. That's the perspective we should have day to day here on the earth. That's how we keep pace with the work that God wants to do in and through us.

Paul applies this command in a very specific and interesting way. First of all, he includes himself. He says, 'let **US**.' We see again, like we did last week, that Paul fully expected that there was more for him to receive and become and partake in as a Christian. He didn't believe in spiritual retirement this side of eternity. He didn't want to live in a state of plateau. He wanted to press *forward* in his relationship with Jesus that he might know God more fully and serve God more effectively. He understood that the fullness of God is not discovered at conversion, but is a continual process that a believer can enjoy throughout their life on the earth.

But then he says, 'as many as are mature.' That's who he's commanding to 'have this mind.' 'Us' and 'as many as are mature.'

When Paul says 'mature,' or perhaps your Bible renders it as 'perfect,' he's referring to the believer who has stepped up as a disciple, which means they have shunned the world in order to pursue Jesus Christ, not in part but in whole. That's the group he's addressing, because that is the group that is eligible to receive the spiritual supply and satisfaction that he's been teaching us about for 3 chapters.

Those who have *not* separated from the world, those who are *not* pursuing Christ actively are *not* going to discover the fullness of God. They will, instead, discover the vexation of Lot and the defeat of Samson. They will find the anxiety of Saul and the brokenness of Solomon. But, to those who are mature, those who have set their focus on heaven and are making pursuit of God, to them Paul says, ‘have this mind,’ which can also be translated as ‘exercise your mind.’

We are to actively, personally challenge ourselves to move closer to Jesus Christ. Because, if we don’t, we’re going to regress into what Paul has warned us about. Either legalism or apathy. Those are the two pits on either side of our path. One seeks righteousness based on human effort and works, the other gives up the first love of Christ and becomes spiritually stagnant, disinterested in heavenly things.

We know that God is moving forward. He has a progressive plan for your life. He has seasons that He wants to bring about in you and depth He wants to build in you and fruit that He wants to cultivate in you. He wants to fill and to stretch and to use you. And He does that as we move closer to Him and further from the world. But if we regress into legalism or into apathy, then all of that stops. The progress halts and we’re left in a sort of spiritual wilderness, halfway between Egypt and the Promised Land. God is with us, He loves us, but in either of those pits, we’re just wandering. And God says, “I don’t intend for you to stay in the wilderness. I don’t intend for you to stay spiritually immature. I intend incredible amounts of filling and sanctification for you.”

But that doesn’t happen if we wander off the disciple road. This is what Paul’s talking about. He says that we are to have the mind of a focused athlete. We are to exercise our minds to lock into the person of Jesus Christ so that we can live the life He intends for us.

I love the next statement Paul makes. He says, ‘and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.’

This is a great example of being filled with grace. And something all of us need is more grace. Because there are lots of spiritually immature people out there. On top of that, there are lots of instances where we might second guess the direction of God ourselves. And to that, Paul says, ‘the Lord is going to straighten you out because that’s what God does.’

‘Well, I need to be economically secure and *THEN* I can start diving into my Christian life.’ Paul says, ‘You can’t find satisfaction with that mindset, but I’ll let God reveal that to you.’

‘Well, I need to get a little more recognition in the ministry, then I’ll know God’s called me to serve Him at my church.’ Paul says, ‘You’ve taken your eyes off the finish line, but I’ll let God reveal that to you.’

‘Well, I’m pretty happy with my spirituality and I don’t really need to move further in my walk with the Lord because everything’s good.’ Paul says, ‘That’s not the disciple road, but I’ll let God reveal that to you.’

This is Paul showing us how we speak the truth in love. And it also demonstrates to us the fact that God is in the business of working out immaturity in our lives. Our part is to accept that, show grace to others, and allow God to true our hearts and trim away whatever worldliness or carnality might be lurking around in there.

The text goes on in verse 16.

Philippians 3.16 - Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

This verse is a fun one to look up in different translations because you get a lot of perspectives on the language and the interpretation depending on which version you read.

For our purposes you have 2 sections in this verse.

The first half is, ‘Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained,’ describing who we are right now.

And the idea Paul is getting across there is this: According to the standard that God has given us, the growth that we’ve received by the Spirit of God, to the degree that we’ve pursued the Lord and found the fullness that follows, since progress with God is the key to all that He has for us, then we should do the second half of the verse. If this first half is a description of who we are in Christ, wherever we’re at on the disciple road with Jesus, then the second half is a description of what we should *now do*.

And there Paul says, ‘let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.’ Meaning that the pursuit must continue. The drive forward must continue.

See, Paul was worried about what we might call The Great Regression. There’s a tendency within all of us to fall by the wayside either into the pit of legalism or the pit of apathy. And, he would say in verse 15, if you don’t believe that, you’re wrong, but I’m going to let God reveal it to you.

A plain thing that every Christian can and should do is simply to stay on the disciple road, moving forward with God. That means shunning the world so as not to be drawn off by the lusts that lead us away from Godliness and into apathy. It means staying humble, so as not to be drawn into the pride of legalism. Paul says that we are to have the same mind he had. One commentator put it this way, that Paul’s personal aims were to become the goal of the Philippian church as a whole and, therefore, you and I by extension. And we are *commanded* to do this. Because *THIS* is the Christian life.

Galatians 5.25-26 - If we *LIVE* in the Spirit, let us also *WALK* in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (emphasis added)

That’s the Christian life. Being filled with the Spirit and moving forward in that power, that we might know more of who God is and what He has done and what He desires to do through us.

But, too often, we don’t walk in the Spirit. We slip into apathy. We slip into legalism. We lose some of the drive to get to that finish line. And we find ourselves in the wilderness. Where God has said, “Here’s where I’ve called you, here’s where I want you, here’s what I’ve prepared for you. Will you take hold of all of this?” And we say, “We’re not really into it.” We start preferring the garlic and leeks of Egypt over the milk and honey of Canaan. And the wilderness is never where we want to be. It may seem like God is there because God is always with us. But the

growth and the spiritual blessing that the Lord wants for us cannot be found in the wilderness of apathy or legalism.

Instead, we need to take hold of the calling God has placed on our lives. And, first and foremost, God has called us to follow Him. Beyond that there are relational callings and specific callings. But the road we're all called to is the disciple road. And so, we should walk by the same rule. The word rule is the word *canon*. The word of God. Which empowers us and blesses us by revealing what God has done on our behalf. And then we must be of the same mind. Unified in the pursuit of God. Not the pursuit of greatness or wealth or power or prominence. Just Jesus. Pursuing His heart. Pursuing His glory. Pursuing His provision.

That's how we avoid The Great Regression. And, more importantly, that's how we receive the kind of dynamic life and ministry and satisfaction that Paul had and commanded us to have.

We must choose to move into the Spirit-filled life and choose not to linger in the wilderness. Moving past salvation *INTO* sanctification each day. That's the road that leads to fullness and it is attainable for any Christian who is willing to leave the world and receive the Lord.