

“The Upward Call”

By David Phillips

Introduction

1. A new year is always a good time to stop and think about goals.
2. It also a good time for reflection, to consider what we have accomplished in the past year and how we can improve in the year to come.
3. This is not a sermon on new year’s resolutions, but it points out some principles that every Christian must look to and ask, am I living up to God’s expectations? Am I seeking God as I ought to?
4. In Phil. 3 Paul shows us how to seek God as we ought to, but before we go to that passage we ought to consider some principles set forth by Jesus.

Discussion

I. God’s Expectation of All Christians.

A. Luke 13:6-9: “bear fruit”

1. In this parable Jesus shows that it is normal and expected that a fig tree to bear fruit after three years, but this tree did not.
2. Because the tree was not normal the landowner was going to have the tree torn out.
3. But the vine dresser said he would try to make it normal, by caring for it, fertilizing it, pruning it he would see if he could get the tree to bear fruit.
4. Jesus spoke this parable before the synagogue and left it at that. He did not offer an explanation, but expected the hearers to understand what He was talking about.
5. It is normal to bear fruit.

B. John 15:1-5: “much fruit”

1. Jesus applies this parable to all of His servants, to everyone who seeks salvation in Him.
2. He is the vine, and we are the branches that actually bear the fruit.
3. When we bear fruit our God is glorified in us.
4. This is not something extraordinary or unattainable.
5. This is the way things are. It is normal for Christians to bear much fruit.

C. Heb. 5:12-14: “By reason of use.”

1. We must also understand the need for growth.
2. Consider the classroom: it is not normal for children to be instructing other children, but for there to be an older, educated, and more experienced teacher.
3. It is normal for children to grown into adults and parents and them to eventually teach their own children.
4. This is what the Hebrew writer was talking about when he said, “*For when by reason of time (or “by this time”) you ought to be teachers.*”
5. He is not saying that every Christian has to be able to preach a sermon or teach a Bible class.
 - a. A person who has been doing a job is expected to be able to teach someone else how to do their job (carpenters, plumbers, electricians often have apprentices).
 - b. Those who have been Christians should eventually be able to teach others to do the things they do.
 - c. After we have been praying, studying, and doing good for several years we should be able to teach other younger Christians to do those same things.
 - d. This is normal for God’s people.

D. 1 Cor. 9:24-27:

1. Paul points out that “those who run in a race all run.”
 - a. We might say, but of course!
 - b. It is normal for a person to run when running a race; it is expected.
 - c. It is not normal for someone trying to attain the prize to be walking.
2. But, he says that just as it is normal for an athlete to run in a race, it is normal for Christian to be running as well.
 - a. It is normal for Christians to be working so hard in their Christian life that they are considered to be running.
 - b. Paul did not say that it was normal for Christians to walk, but to RUN!
3. “Every man that strives for mastery” (competes for the prize)
 - a. It is normal for athletes who want to be the best to make great sacrifices, and to put forth great amounts of effort.
 - b. Even so, it is normal for Christians to make great sacrifices and to put forth great amounts of effort in order to attain their goal.
 - c. It is normal for Christians to sweat and work and toil in order to master their craft: to bear fruit for their master, and to be productive in His vineyard.
4. Therefore, Paul said that he ran in order to attain the prize.
 - a. Not with uncertainty: He clearly saw his goal before him, he did not doubt but was confident concerning the prize.
 - b. Not as one who beats the air: He did not struggle for nothing. Rather, he put forth all of his effort to attaining the goal.
 - c. He disciplined his body: He did not allow his body, his lusts or physical desires to control him, rather he controlled his body in spite of those things.
5. Why did Paul do all of this? Because this is normal for a person striving to attain the goal of eternal life in heaven.

II. Phil. 3:7-15: Normal Christians and the Upward Call.

- A. Paul shows us how a normal Christian approaches the upward call of God.
 1. vs. 14, “*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”
 2. This upward call is the same for all men; God expects the same commitment from all of His people.
 3. “*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*” (Eph. 4:1).
 4. We have seen the need to put forth great effort in order bear fruit for our Master.
 5. The question is what does it take in order to bear fruit for our Master? Paul shows us in the verse leading up to this one.
- B. The costs of attaining the prize: Phil. 3:7-14
 1. “What things were gain to me”:
 - a. His circumcision as a Jew, his place in the tribe of Benjamin, his status as a leader among the Jews, his zeal for the law of Moses, his authority and prestige.
 - b. All of the things that might have help great importance to him before becoming a Christian.
 2. “These I have counted loss for Christ”:
 - a. He needed to get rid of them.
 - b. Though these things might have meant something before, when he became a Christian they were the things that would have held him back like weights.
 - c. He knew that they only way he could run his race the way he ought to was to get rid of all of those things.
 - d. As in Heb. 12:1, “*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*”
 3. This is what Paul did: he gave up family, popularity, power, etc. so that he could be a good Christian.

4. *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37-38).*
5. Here Jesus shows us that it is normal to give up many things for Him.

C. Phil. 3:15: “have this mind.”

1. Brethren, if we want to be normal Christians then we will learn to think like Paul according to this passage.
2. We will not regret giving up everything that used to be important to us, because we know that as we strive for the upward call we look forward to far greater riches than this world can supply.
3. But if we are not willing to give up the old things then we are not normal Christians, we will not attain the prize.
4. If we are not casting off those things that used to be important to use (and may still be) then we are not being normal Christians and we are not striving for the upward call in Christ.

D. Phil. 3:16: “To the degree that we have already attained.”

1. We may not be the “best” Christian.
2. But we can be the kind of Christian that we know how.
3. If we know what to do and how to do it, then that is what we must be doing.
4. Paul’s point is that we should not fall back in to things we have already overcome, but continue on that we may grow as we ought to.
5. This is what we will do as true Christians.

Conclusion

1. If you find yourself struggling in these things, Paul reassures us that God will help us to see our faults so that we may change.
2. Maybe not all of us have committed ourselves to showing the kind of faithfulness and zeal that God expects of His people.
3. God gives us the means to improve on this. He shows us through His word how we can do better and He gives us our brethren to encourage us.
4. But none of this will do any good if we do not first put on the mindset of wanting to live for Christ. What is your attitude toward the upward call?