

Abraham Lincoln famously stated, “The person who is incapable of making a mistake is incapable of anything.” “To err is human,” said Alexander Pope. Mistakes are common to human nature. Wisdom is using errors as learning opportunities. When he was once chided, “It is too bad you had so many failures before you were successful,” Thomas Edison replied, “I didn’t have failures. I learned many things that did not work.”

Learning from things that do not work is one aspect of being a lifelong learner. However, some things – such as eternal truths – are too significant if we err. Foolishness is “always learning and never [being] able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7-9).

People make two significant errors regarding God. *First*, they believe entering heaven is by good works. Some believe they can earn their entrance into heaven. Many people believe heaven is gained by belief in God *and* doing good things, yet Scripture says:

*Isaiah 64:6 – “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

*Ephesians 2:8-9 – For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Good people will never enter heaven because goodness is not the requirement: God requires perfection. Philippians 3 describes a good, religious person; however, without Christ, this individual could never be good enough to be received by God into heaven.

*Second*, people assume more time than is theirs to have faith in Christ. Many are mistaken in thinking they can indefinitely halt having faith in God, yet just like the leaves that wither, so will our earthly lives. Jesus gave an account of an individual who did not give any thought regarding eternity. God responded to him:

*Luke 12:20 – “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?”*

Jesus articulated the tremendous error involved in only thinking of life in the present and not being mindful regarding eternity. Scripture states, “Behold, now is ‘THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,’” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” (2 Cor 6:2). Like the individual that Jesus addressed, we never know when God requires our soul. Now, is the time to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord God and Savior, and only then can we know that we are ready for eternity and will enter heaven.

## BE MATURE AND WATCHFUL

*(Phil 3:15-19)* What attitude of life is pleasing to God? Scripture urges us to know the truth of what had been stated previously.

Moreover, we are promised that those who are not living as they ought (i.e. “forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,” 3:13) would have this “different attitude” revealed to them by God (3:15). We should always live consistently with an understanding of the truth and not postpone a life of spiritual maturity. The immature, for instance, were not living as they ought; rather, as the result of incomplete understanding of what God had revealed, they were postponing maturity as opposed

to living in accord with the truth that they did understand. Therefore, all are urged to pursue maturity in Christ (3:15-16). The life that pleases God must always focus attention upon the person and work of Jesus Christ as the believer is transformed into his likeness.

The admonition is concluded with an exhortation to watchfulness (3:17-19) and to hopefulness (3:20-21). Not only was it necessary to pursue maturity in Christ, but also it was crucial to be watchful because many live “as enemies of the cross of Christ” whose “end is destruction” (3:18). False teachers are described threefold: (1) their “god is their appetite” (i.e. fleshly and sensual); (2) their “glory is in their shame” (i.e. disgraceful living); and, (3) they “set their minds on earthly things” (i.e. the material and physical as opposed to the eternal and spiritual) (3:19). Therefore, believers are to be observant of those who live according to the standard of Christlikeness and to imitate such behavior, in contrast to those whose lifestyle indicates they are enemies of God (cf. Gal 4:3, 9-11; Col 2:21-22).

**Philippians 3:7 – But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

The foundation of the gospel (“good news”) is in Christ Jesus. The word “beware” warns believers with regard to legalists (3:2-6). The most resolute language is used to warn those tempted to embrace false doctrine. There have always been false teachers among true believers, who attempt to subvert faith in God by communicating “destructive [damnable] heresies,” (2 Pet 2:1), which is false teaching that, if believed, would damn your soul to hell.

Paul explained that growing in “knowing Christ Jesus” would help them to overcome the false teachers. If one *could* have “confidence in the flesh,” Paul explained that he was most able to boast in who he was *and* his accomplishments, but explained why he *would not*.

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The reason to pursue maturity in Christ and to be watchful is related to the hope of the believer (Phil 3:20-21). The church does have citizenship on earth, yet also has citizenship in heaven (3:20).

Maturity in Christ is the goal of the believer's life because heavenly citizenship is eternal as opposed to the earthly life that is but a vapor (Jas 4:14; cf. Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10). The biblical exhortation is an obvious contrast to those whose minds are focused upon "earthly things" and whose destiny is destruction. One challenge of the Christian life is learning to live as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb 11:13; cf. 1 Pet 2:11). Consequently, the believer is to "eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

## BE HOPEFUL AND EAGERLY WAITING

(Phil 3:20-21) According to Acts 16:11-40, the Apostle Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. The citizens benefited from an autonomous government, immunity from taxation, and conduct as if living in Italy. Therefore, verse 20 first asserts that the believer's "citizenship is in heaven."

This world has a characteristic spirit of its own. Worldliness is the common bond of citizenship in it. There is another commonwealth, not of the world (John xviii. 36), which inspires its members with a different tone of life. They "seek the things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. . . . The stability and security of the *pax Romana* (one of the most favorable influences for Christianity) filled the thought of the time with high conceptions of citizenship and its value. This would specially appeal to the Philippians [who would have greatly esteemed the right to possess all the privileges of Italian citizens] [H. A. A. Kennedy, "The Epistle to the Philippians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols., ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 3:462].

The child of God eagerly waits for the Savior's return from (Gk. *ex ou*) heaven. The believer's citizenship is in heaven, and therefore, the church may lay appeal to the Savior, just as the Philippians may have rightfully pleaded to Rome for protection. The double compound (*apekdechometha*) translated "eagerly wait" (cf. Rom 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Heb 9:28) indicates anticipation and eagerness for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as the habitual perspective of the believer whose citizenship is in heaven. The normal attitude of the believer is eager anticipation of the Lord's return. The longing for the coming Savior is an incentive for holy living (cf. Tit 2:13; 1 John 2:28).

Coinciding with the Lord's return, the body of the believer's "humble state" will be transformed "into conformity with the body of His glory" (Phil 3:21). The transformation of the believer's body will be into a glorified body just like the Son of God (1 John 3:2). The distinction is between the "the body of our humble state" and "the body of His glory." In this earthly life, the believer's body is humbled by death, disease, persecution, and sin. The body is earthly, perishable, weak, natural, and mortal (1 Cor 15:35-58), so that believers "groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of the body" (Rom 8:23). At the Lord's return, the glorification of the body will occur either by resurrection of the dead or by the instant translation of the living (cf. 1 Cor 15:50-58; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 5:9-10). The glorified and resurrected body will be just like the Son of God ("the body of His glory," Phil 3:21), and the believer's sanctification will be ultimate. The expectation of the Lord's return should produce a purifying hope as a citizen of heaven while sojourning on earth (1 John 3:1-3). The transformation will occur "by the exertion of the power

that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil 3:21). The same power that will ultimately subject all things in the universe to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is what accomplishes the transformation.

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Philippians 3 concludes with an exhortation to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14). The believer will demonstrate this persevering attitude by pursuing maturity in Christ (3:15-16), watching for those who reproduce the biblical standard (and follow their example) and being aware of those who are "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:17-19), and "eagerly" waiting for the "Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20-21). The heavenly citizenship of the church parallels Jesus' words in John 14:1-3, and challenges every believer to live with an eternal perspective. The hope of the Lord's imminent and personal return has sustained the church throughout the ages. The expectation of the Lord's return should stimulate the church to live holy and pure lives "so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

*Thank you for allowing Capitol Commission the honor to provide Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please talk with us, or contact by email or phone. These notes are adapted [with permission and minor revisions] from Capitol Commission Georgia.*

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### About Capitol Commission

Capitol Commission state ministers are pastors-missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. The Bible studies are hand-distributed, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and to pray for their eternal salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). The desire of Capitol Commission is to witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

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We hope to join with you again next week. Until then we pray for your growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



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