

## **THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS**

### **III. Philippians: Nurture In Living In Preoccupation With Christ**

#### **L. Nurture In Paul's Instruction On Spiritual Maturity In The Church (Philippians 3:15-16)**

##### **I. Introduction**

- A. From every corner of the globe in Christendom comes the call for spiritually **mature** believers and leaders.
- B. Thus, Paul's short but pithy directives on spiritual maturity in the Church in Philippians 3:15-16 is of great importance for today's believers, so we study that passage for insight and much-needed application:

##### **II. Nurture In Paul's Instruction On Spiritual Maturity In The Church, Philippians 3:15-16.**

- A. Following his Philippians 3:4-14 personal testimony on his drive toward spiritual maturity in his Christian walk, Paul directed believers at Philippi who were **mature** to think the way he had just expressed, Phil. 3:15a.
- B. Thus, for any believer to be mature, he or she must make the decision to think after the pattern Paul thought in Philippians 3:4-14, and we review that passage briefly to understand how a mature believer is to think:
  - 1. To be mature, the believer must consider what human heritage he has as useless in itself, Phil. 3:4-7. This is not to say that one must despise his heritage, but that he not make it his source of spiritual vitality just as Paul gave up looking to his Hebrew heritage as the source of his spiritual life to rely on Christ for vitality.
  - 2. To be mature, the believer must subject all other things that are valued by man in this life to the surpassing value of a fulfilling personal fellowship with the Lord, Phil. 3:8, and Paul explained this in Phil. 3:9-14:
    - a. First, maturity entails subjecting all things that are usually valued by man in life toward the attaining of righteousness with God to resting on the imputed righteousness of Christ given by God's grace through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Philippians 3:9.
    - b. Second, in the Christian life, maturity entails the believer's yearning to know on his walk fellowship with Christ in going through suffering, dying and rising with Him relative to life's events, Philippians 3:10-11. Such an experience is readily applicable to negative trials in life where one "dies" to selfish interests in a trial as an act of faith to obey the Lord only to see the Lord reward that rejection of selfish interests with great blessing in one's experience and ministry. However, God wants the believer to "die" to the appealing world and its lusts of the flesh, of the eyes and of the pride of this earthly life (1 John 2:15-16) much as Paul in Galatians 6:14 wrote that he was crucified unto the world and the world unto himself.
    - c. Third, maturity entails a life of seeking to apply the positional truths given to the believer at salvation in his walk, a living out of the salvation that had laid hold of him at salvation in Christ, Philippians 3:12. Lewis Sperry Chafer has identified 33 such positional truths in Scripture and explained them in his Systematic Theology, vol. III, p. 234-265, "The Riches Of Divine Grace."
    - d. Finally, maturity entails **faithfully sustaining** throughout one's earthly walk a refusal to rely on human heritage and all other entities for fulfillment to find fulfillment in fellowship with Christ, Phil. 3:13-14.
- C. However, though a given believer may choose the road of spiritual maturity, the challenge often comes in wondering how he might influence *others* unto such a maturity, and Philippians 3:15b addresses this issue:
  - 1. Paul claimed that if in some way his readers might think otherwise, that is, if they might think in a way that was faulty on any matter he had just addressed (J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, 1974, p. 153), God would also reveal this to them so they could make the correction, Philippians 3:15b.
  - 2. Thus, Christ as Head of the Church and the discipleship of every believer in the Body was overseeing the walk of those who meant to mature in the Lord so as to lead them correctly to mature. Of course, one could choose not to mature, and slip into hardness (cf. Hebrews 6:1-10 with 5:11-14), but the believer is assured that if he genuinely seeks to mature in the Lord, God will guide in the process in the correct path.

***Lesson:*** (1) *Spiritual maturity entails abandoning reliance on any earthly entity valued by man to favor the pursuit of fellowship with Christ as life's most valuable acquisition. This pursuit entails relying on Christ's righteousness for salvation, on Christ's blessing for dying to selfish interests in the Christian life in favor of the will of God, of applying positional truths to the Christian walk and of doing these things faithfully throughout one's earthly walk.* (2) *Regarding the maturity of other believers, we must trust that IF any believer SEEKS to mature, GOD will effectively GUIDE him unto maturity, but we must realize that maturity occurs ONLY to those who truly WANT it!*

***Application:*** (1) *May we follow Paul's example unto spiritual maturity.* (2) *May we entrust the maturity of others unto the Lord's oversight, realizing that only those who want to mature will actually do so by God's grace!*