

Dear Friends in Christ and especially our Junior Confirmands,

Over these many years of Junior Confirmation I have consistently told my classes the following, which some of you might not like. It's this: Approximately one-third to one-half of this class will willingly compromise what they have learned from the Word of God and walk away from the Lord and His church. I'm reasonably confident that the percentages have held true. We cry out for God's mercy.

And so, we've arrived at another day of the confirmation of our young ones. Sadly, it's rather traditional that the pastors bemoan that Confirmation is too often the end of any real study of the Word of God. Therefore, whether you're an old confirmand or one being confirmed today, the question is . . .

## WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO GO WITH THIS?

### I. The American Christian.

In 2010, Craig Groeschel published a book entitled "The Christian Atheist." I understand what he was trying to emphasize, but there is no such person as a "Christian" Atheist. However, I want to relate something he wrote in that book. I've related it before. I'm convinced it demands repeating. It resembles similar incidents your pastors have encountered countless times over these years.

The incident is about a conversation he had with a young grad student by the name of Michelle. He sat next to her on a flight. He writes, "Michelle asked me what I do for a living... I answered, 'Well, as matter of fact, I'm the pastor of a church.'" (Craig Groeschel, "The Christian Atheist", Grand Rapids Michigan, Zondervan, 2010, p. 14) And then followed this:

"This revelation gave Michelle permission to unleash a stream of Christian words and stories... she described how she 'gave her life to Jesus' at the age of fifteen at a Christian youth camp. (How she) was eager to get back to school to share her faith and live a life of purity...held on to her new belief in God but soon slipped back into her old way of life.

"As if in a confessional, Michelle continued pouring out her life's darker details. She looked down as she admitted that she was doing things with her live-in boyfriend that she knew she shouldn't. She told me she wanted to go to church but was simply too busy working and studying. She did pray many nights - mostly that her boyfriend would become a Christian like she was. 'If only he believed in Jesus, then he might want to marry me,' she said, wiping her tears.

"At last, Michelle expressed one final confession: 'I know my life doesn't look like a Christian's life should look, but I do believe in God.'" (Ibid., p. 14)

Michelle is unwittingly part of a trend in this country that's been developing for some generations. Michelle is an *American Christian*. That can take on all shades of meanings, but here's my definition - and I'm going to read it to you in order not to miss a word. An American Christian is a person who lives their life trying to mesh some sort of belief in Jesus with a life style that travels the course of many questionable directions; willingly accepts all cultural changes; is typically confused about theology, knows fragments of the Bible and is committed and sacrificial only **when** and **if** convenient; wants to be entertained; is easily offended, and loyal only to the self. It's where far too many of our Junior and Adult confirmands land.

All of it puts the spiritual life on the back burner, or else something to be used for baptisms, weddings, funerals and tragedies. It is not the pursuit of salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ and growth in the knowledge of Scripture and sacrificial serving the Lord. That's too boring! That's asking too much! On the contrary, American Christianity (*Americanity*) is a strange appendage - an attachment. It's always immature, always on the run and demands a life of fun, distraction and happiness with this world.

## II. God's Word vs. Mans' Thinking.

Here are verses 8-11 of our text from Philippians 3:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul underscores what the entire Scriptures teach - what few American Christians truly grasp - what makes Christianity so unacceptable: We are sinful and cannot win God's love and favor. That's why he counts all things of this world "rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...not having a righteousness of my own (that is, self-righteousness)...but that which comes through faith in Christ." Faith that trusts that Christ paid for every sin. And that faith points us in this direction: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings (And that's a real negative for the American Christian. Suffering for Jesus? Anything but that!), becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." So, life really isn't about this world for the Baptized child of God. It's about the life to come. How many sitting in pews listen but never hear - in fact, don't want to: Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Martin Franzmann wrote: "In this world grown alien to him the disciple will be confronted with an alien majority, a mass of men indifferent to him and pursuing a course which is easier than and the exact opposite of his own." (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, Concordia Publishing House, New Testament Section, p. 22) But, you see, that is also describing a massive percentage of what sits in pews today.

The Albrechts, in their little commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, write this about all other religions: "This is a multi-lane highway, and it is crowded all the time. Because those who travel this road are the vast majority of humanity, they imagine that they must be on the right road, for how could so many people be wrong?" (G. J. Albrecht and M. J. Albrecht, *Matthew, People's Bible Commentary*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1996, p. 110) That was published 20 years ago. Most of what sits in pews 20 years later travel the same multi-lane highway! It's a matter of God's Word verses mans' thinking.

Jesus said, "the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give." (Jn. 5:21) He said, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him." (Jn. 5:23) He said, "everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life..." (Jn. 6:40) He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn. 14:6) Jesus said, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the God's one and only Son." (Jn. 3:18)

## III. What Do You Think of This?

So, *Where Are You Going To Go With This?* What will happen to this group of confirmands? What will happen to us? The evil foe, the roaring lion looking for someone to devour, is always tearing at our heels - and that is **intensifying**.

And so, Paul writes these words for our children and us this morning; from our text:

Not that I have already obtained this (that is, "the resurrection from the dead") or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (vss. 12-14)

That's it! That's the focal point! Here's the daily drive for the child of God! Not this world. But pressing on to "the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Heaven. Eternal life.

And this is the real hard part: Paul says, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...". Oh, if only our children and all who love and support them could just keep that straight - instead of straining for the "stuff" of this world. We pray God bless and love these precious young ones now and forever - for the glory of Christ!

The post sermon hymn is "What Is the World to Me?" We sang it, and I made reference to it in the sermon last Sunday. Listen very carefully to what we're singing and the truths with which we are agreeing. Because, after all, the truth is this: if we don't really mean it - we really shouldn't sing it - should we?

And so the question for this morning: "Where Are You Going to Go With This?" God bless and help our Confirmands - bless and help us all!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

*JUNIOR CONFIRMATION*

*May 1, 2016*

*Philippians 3:8-14:*

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- II. God's Word vs. Mans' Thinking.*
- III. What Do You Think of This?*

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