



The Test

In every class there is a familiar word, a dreaded word, but a very necessary word... the word is "TEST". You see all learning has purpose. A test is simply a measuring tool to see if the student has gained the knowledge or achieved the necessary goals of the instruction which has been given. Let's look at Philippians 3: 18-19 this week and consider them in light of this word, "TEST". They say,

"For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

Have you ever failed a test? It is a horrible feeling to get a paper back with a big red **F** at the top. I know when I was a teacher, whenever I passed back the graded tests; I always passed them out face-down on the desks of my students. Why? Because... I didn't want to humiliate the students who had failed. I would always verbally praise the students who had done well, but my heart went out to the students who failed, because I too have known that horrible feeling of failure.

As I memorize and review verses 18-19 and consider the classroom of faith, I know I never want to feel God is passing back my paper with a big **Enemy of the Cross of Christ** written across the top. I had my share of failing science tests (I am not a science girl at all) but failing in the classroom of faith is totally unacceptable. And... I imagine if you are doing this project, you probably feel the same. As much as most people dislike tests, in the classroom of faith, we have to take them. Verses 18-19 are the perfect testing verses for us. So, gear up, it is time to test our faith.

This entire passage we have been memorizing has been focused around instruction about our faith. Faith is a very large term, people can have faith in a person, faith in a program, faith in a chair to hold them up, faith in a leader... but we are talking about faith in a living God! It is a much more important kind of faith, it involves life and death. Verse 18 talks about people living as enemies of the cross of Christ. Because the cross is central to our faith, because it was the ultimate work of Christ on this earth, the last thing we would want to do as a Christian is to be an enemy of the cross, instead we want to be a friend of the cross of Christ. The ministry of the cross is vast, and so are the teachings about it, but let's ponder some of its work in our lives...

First of all Jesus died on the cross and resurrected to bring LIFE. I love John 10:10b. It says,

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Some other versions say "abundant life", "rich and satisfying life" and "more and better life than they ever dreamed of!" I think you get the point. The cross came to bring LIFE; LIFE lived here on earth according to the Spirit. This LIFE takes us way beyond what we can ever find on our own if we only live according to our fleshly desires. It also brings us LIFE that will take us into eternity, into a heaven we can't fully imagine.

Secondly Jesus died on the cross to bring wisdom, power and freedom. The Bible speaks of this in many ways, but again, in John, Jesus speaks of the life we can have through the cross. In John 8:31-32 Jesus says,

"If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Because of the cross of Christ, we are now given free access to the things of the Spirit (see Hebrews 4:14-16). We can boldly approach God's throne and learn from Him and His Word. When we engage our minds to study God's Word and abide in it, we can understand our sinful condition, we can understand His perspective and we can request power to live according to Truth. All these things bring wisdom, power and freedom in our day to day living.

Thirdly the cross restores our purpose. God created us to glorify Him. When something is glorified, its attributes are put on display. We were designed that we might live in such a way as to constantly display the wonderful awesome attributes of our God. As we do that, His glory is released in the world and we live in the wonder of God. In our sinful condition, we don't glorify God, we glorify sin, in all its dysfunction and poverty and strife. Take a look at II Corinthians 4:6,

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Because the cross restored our relationship to God, we are able to look at Christ and we see life differently. We see as Chris Tomlin says, "who we were meant to be". The cross restores our purpose and we begin to live as God intended. As we live out our faith, His attributes are released to be on display in the world!

This is just a sampling of the work of the cross. It is such a great work. It is no wonder that Paul says,

"For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ..."

Paul has a heart for people and it brings him to tears when he sees people living as an enemy of the cross of Christ. When I taught school, I wanted my students to "get it" and it hurt me when they failed the tests. Paul is in tears here because he sees many who don't "get it". Their faith has not moved beyond a mental assent and in reality they are living as enemies of the cross. How does he know that they are living as enemies of the cross? Look at what he says in verse 19,

"their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame."

Let's look again at what we discussed about the work of the cross.

First, Christ died on the cross to bring LIFE, wonderful LIFE directed by the Spirit of God here and wonderful LIFE for eternity in heaven. But verse 19 says, "

"their destiny is destruction"

Destruction is the opposite of LIFE. When we live according to our flesh and not according to the Spirit, we are destining ourselves for destruction both here and for eternity and... in reality we are living as an enemy to the purpose of the cross.

Secondly, Christ died on the cross to bring wisdom, power and freedom. As we live exalting the Holy Spirit's charge of our mind, our will and our emotions, He releases these things in our life. But verse 19 says,

"their god is their stomach"

That is the exact opposite. In other words, the person who is living as an enemy of the cross is not putting the Spirit in charge of his mind will and emotions to bring wisdom, power and freedom, but instead, he is fully ruled by whatever his flesh wants. Self, and whatever it hungers for, is his god.

Thirdly, Christ died on the cross to restore our purpose, glorifying Him. But, the person who is living for self, with self as the god, doesn't put the attributes of God on display in their life. Their life choices bring attention to all the stuff representing self which often is a bunch of "junk" and "shame" that is present in their lives. That is why verse 19 says,

"their glory is in their shame."

Let's go back to the test concept. Some tests are long, some are short. Remember that Paul was writing this letter called Philippians to Christians. As Christians I believe we can use verses 18 and 19 as

a short test in our lives to see if our faith is really being lived out in the day to day. So... let's take this faith test to measure if we are living as a friend of the cross or an enemy of the cross.

Question 1 – choose one

_____The LIFE of the Spirit is abundant in you both here and for your eternity

_____Destruction is abundant in you now and you know it is leading you to further destruction

Question 2 – choose one

_____ You are abiding daily in the Word of Christ, allowing it to bring wisdom, power and freedom in your mind, your will and your emotions

_____ You are allowing your "stomach" to be your god... in other words you are being ruled by your fleshly desires in your mind, will and emotions

Question 3 – choose one

_____You often experience the wonder of God's attributes in your life

_____You often experience shame and dishonor due to your choices

I encourage you to take some time on this test. Remember tests aren't always pleasant, but they are measuring tools and at times we all need to be measured, even in our faith! After you finish, you and God are the only ones who will see your answers and the grade at the top. When you look at it, you won't see an **A** and you won't see an **F**. You will see **Enemy** or **Friend**.

As we close this week, let me remind you that God called you to be His friend. He did that in mercy, we didn't deserve to be his friend. He writes His evaluation of our lives and how we live for Him in red, not as condemnation, but in His blood that covers all our shortcomings. He is the perfect friend, we are not. If you discovered today that you have some tendencies to live as an enemy of the cross, I encourage you to repent and talk to your Perfect Friend who will never leave you, nor forsake you. If this test affirmed your friendship with Jesus today, then spend some time with Him, just enjoying that. Let me close with Jesus' words in John 15:15 from the Message Bible,

"I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father."

Jesus has let us in on this good life of faith. His death on the cross opened the door to us. Let's embrace His cross, and all His cross has to bring us, as His friend!

A friend of God, learning, growing, changing...

Sharon Thomas

Established Footsteps Ministry