

State of the Church 2016

Douglas Wilson

Christ Church - Moscow, ID

Sermon #1903 - A.D. December 27, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

This last fall, our congregation celebrated its 40th year. God has been extraordinarily gracious to us, mostly by letting us survive, and so we naturally want to express our thanksgiving to Him. As we look forward to the next 40, at the end of which time I will be 102, we hope to be able to recognize the markers of His grace as we approach them. And the best way for us to do that is by reviewing what He has done for us thus far.

THE TEXT:

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” ([Phil. 3:13–16](#)).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

Paul is thinking about the day of resurrection, and he knows that he is not yet there. He doesn't consider himself to have already attained that goal (v. 13). But one thing he does do—he forgets what lies behind him, and stretches out for what lies before him. He presses forward toward the goal, which is the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ (v. 14). This appears to be another way of speaking of the final day of resurrection. He then says that any of them that are perfect (i.e. mature, complete) should think this way (v. 15). If they are mature but don't quite see it this way, then God will fill it in for them (v. 15). So then he notes that we run the race *later* in the same way we ran the race *earlier* (v. 16). So “forgetting what lies behind” clearly does *not* mean forgetting what it means to run. It does not mean forgetting how to run, or forgetting where you have been. It means that you don't go back there and stare at the scenery. This is both conservative and progressive at the same time. It is anti-conservative and anti-progressive at the same time.

CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE:

There is a way of forgetting what lies behind which is synonymous with *drifting*. There is a way of pressing forward that loses the point of pressing forward. Whenever someone tells you they are a progressive, always ask them where they are going. You can't be a progressive without an eschatology. But mindless conservatism is little better. The guardians of the new wineskins frequently find themselves, without doing *anything*, with warehouses full of old wineskins.

THE STARTING POINT:

When this church was planted, it was a loosely-organized Jesus-people sort of outfit. We sang hymns and Scripture songs, led by guitars. There were songs and a sharing time, but the sermon was central. The theology was conservative, Arminian, evangelical, and with a very light dusting of charismatic. We gathered the offering in the back, just as we do now, but we used a Maxwell House coffee can for it. Some things now are just as they were, while others have changed dramatically. What I want to do is walk through it chronologically, and simply testify to what God has given to us. Hang on to these things, in the right way, and God will bless your children's children after you.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION:

From the very beginning, we have emphasized practical Christian living in the home. How does the gospel relate to marriage, to courtship, to child-rearing, and so on? Also from the beginning, this congregation has demonstrated its commitment to a true Christian education for our children. The first tangible step in this direction was the founding of Logos School in 1981. The school and the church were institutionally connected at that time. And from the start, we wanted to teach all subjects as parts of an integrated whole, with Scripture at the center. I have no idea where that came from, but such Christian worldview thinking is probably our baseline commitment. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). Christ is the one in whom everything hangs together. And this is still what we want to emphasize—all of Christ for all of life.

HISTORICAL OPTIMISM:

In the mid-eighties, we went through our first great doctrinal shift. The transition was from the standard pre-mill understanding of eschatology to the conviction that the Great Commission needed to be understood as our actual marching orders, and not as a Glorious but Futile Ideal. This is not a doctrinal point that we harp on a lot, but rather a doctrinal assumption that suffuses everything we do. It really does matter whether or not our labor here is in vain or not (1 Cor. 15:58).

CALVINISM THAT LAUGHS:

In the late eighties, in part the result of an unfortunate decision on my part to preach through Romans, we became Calvinistic in our soteriology. All this means, in short, is that all the glory for our salvation goes to God, and all the humbling comes to us. God is sovereign over all things, absolutely sovereign, but this truth does not make us grim and bitter. Rather, we have enjoyed a resurgence of what happened in the first century after the Reformation—a sunny and robust Chestertonian Calvinism. This formulation would no doubt annoy Chesterton himself, which is, as he would point out in his better moments, an excellent reason for using it. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

COVENANT BAPTISM:

In the early nineties, we began to include the baptism of infants. We managed to do this without excluding our baptists and agno-baptists, and God blessed our commitment to unity. This was probably the bumpiest transition, but it was still a good one. In an important respect, if you recall our family emphasis from the beginning, this was just a matter of the water catching up. It was as though someone told us to put our water where our mouth was.

PRESBYTERIAN, BUT...

When you are talking to people on a plane, and they ask you what kind of church you attend, a good answer would be that we are kind of Presbyterian, the kind that believes the Bible. In 1998, the CREC was founded. We began with 3 churches, and we are now just shy of 100 churches. We have seven presbyteries that meet annually, and a Council that meets every third year.

And underneath all is a commitment to *practical Christian living*. If you say you believe it, then why not live like it?



PUBLISHED BY: CANON PRESS • P.O. BOX 8729 • 205 E. 5TH ST. • MOSCOW, ID 83843
WWW.CANONPRESS.COM • ORDERS@CANONPRESS.COM
PHONE 800-488-2034 • FAX 208-882-1568