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Philippians 3:18-21

How Should We Think About Ourselves?

Many of you know that I recently spent a couple of weeks in England doing two conferences there. One for all of the pastors and leaders of Vineyard churches and some friends of the Vineyard in both the English Vineyards as well as churches from continental Europe and then I did another general conference in London on “Breaking Life Controlling Habits.”

I just want to share with you that I don’t think that the conferences could have gone any better than they did. The Lord came in power. Many, many people were touched. The weather was beautiful. My kids had a great time. We were able to take them on this trip for the first time ever on any of the trips I have made, which was just very, very wonderful for Marlene and me. Overall, we came away personally blessed and personally refreshed and I felt like we were able to leave something that will multiply and bear fruit for the various people in the future.

I also want to say “thank you” to those of you who prayed for me while I was away and share with you that honestly there is nothing that I would want more from you than that you would pray for me and for the church and for my family. If you could do one thing for me, it would be to lift me up before the Lord and lift this church up before the Lord. So for those of you who prayed, “thank you” and perhaps some of the rest of you would consider praying for me and my family and the church on a regular basis.

In any case, this morning I am going to continue in a series that I have been doing from the book of Philippians. The subject that I am going to consider tonight is how we

should think about ourselves. In other words, what attitudes should you adopt regarding yourself? I think this is one of the toughest subjects for any of us to deal with— that is our whole perception of ourselves, what we say regarding ourselves, how we think about ourselves—the Bible regularly speaks to us regarding our self image and tells us to not think about ourselves more highly than we ought to, but think about ourselves with sober judgment. It is definitely okay to think about yourself. You can hardly help it anyway. But how should you think about yourself?

It is really common these days to talk with people who suffer from a terribly low self image. Many people have just crippling feelings of inferiority where they generally feel bad about themselves and say things about themselves that are indicative of feelings of low self-worth: I am stupid. I am ugly. I am fat. I am a loser.

A lot of the negative feelings can be traced back to childhood experiences of neglect, of deprivation, of false standards raised by parents or others regarding how you are to be measured. Some of us have very recent, fresh experiences of failure and being unloved and unwanted. That can contribute to a negative self image.

And then I think living in a modern culture which is highly competitive, which has lost a sense of community so that people are no longer valued just by being members of a family—instead, now, people are valued not by their role in family as aunt, as brother, as dad, as child, but rather by what they produce. Living in an isolating, extremely competitive society only makes matters worse. Where do you stack up economically, or academically or athletically? Certainly, we add to this whole mix the experience of many of you, of sexual discrimination and put downs, racial discrimination, vocational problems, so that you have experienced a lack of encouragement in work and the whole modern attitude of disconnectedness from seeing ourselves as being created by

God, so that we are nothing but machines or bodies or as some women feel “pieces of meat.” Certainly all of these things contribute to strong feelings of negative self worth and negative self esteem.

Then there is this very confused church teaching that has badly misunderstood, in my opinion, the biblical message regarding how people should think about themselves. A great deal of church teaching suggests that you are more spiritual and you are more holy if you feel horrible about yourself all of the time. It is this church teaching that is reflected in some very famous hymns like the hymn, “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” which is a wonderful hymn, very moving in many ways, but it has a verse in it that is indicative of the kind of church teaching that reinforces people’s negative view of themselves. The verse is:

“And from my smitten heart with tears,
Two wonders I confess,
The wonder of his glorious love
And my own worthlessness.”

So to be a good Christian, it is asserted, you need to remember that God has tremendous love, but that you are completely worthless. You read stories of the holy saints in the past and how they always said about themselves that there were “filthy” and like “spiders dangling over a fire.” So, you have this church teaching which reinforces the negative self image on the part of many Christians.

And then, of course, there is that voice that comes from the outside which we often hear, that is filled with malice and self-loathing statements—the voice of Satan. Now, it is not always apparent to us that we are listening to another voice that is full of malice and hatred toward us. On occasion, God, in his mercy, pulls the curtains back and

allows us to see the warfare that we are involved in as Christians, the spiritual warfare that the Bible speaks about. The problem that we have as followers of Jesus is not just in dealing with ourselves, dealing with our pasts, or even dealing with God, we also are involved in a spiritual war with intelligent beings who hate us deeply.

The other day I was made aware of how much I was hated by the demonic. I dropped a rake on my head. It was hanging on a hook in the garage and I reached for it and it fell and slammed me in the head. And the moment it hit me in the head, this series of thoughts came through my head: You are so stupid. I can't believe you dropped a rake on your head. You are so dumb. Just these pounding negative thoughts and I stopped for a moment and in that moment, I realized that that voice was the voice of a demon. And I was made aware of the hatred that was directed toward me in a way that I haven't been for some period of time. That voice was not my own internal voice. And it certainly wasn't the voice of my Father in Heaven, which we will talk about in a moment and how our Father in Heaven thinks about us. Yet, I believe, brothers and sisters that we listen to a hateful voice, a malicious voice, a voice that despises us. And it is appropriate to turn when that voice comes into your mind through those rutted out grooves of habit that we are so accustomed to listening to and just say: Shut up! I won't listen to that voice. That is not the voice of my Father in Heaven.

Well, because of this horrible brew of past experiences, living in the modern world, growing up in the kinds of families that we do, perverted church teaching and the voice of Satan, many of us suffer from very negative self images. And there has been a move on the other hand, among people in the human potential movement, secular psychologists and self-help therapists, to counteract people's low feelings of self-worth by attempting to give people positive self-images through positive thinking. Paul Vitz in

a book called “Psychology is Religion—the Cult of Self Worship” has done a wonderful job of detailing how various, what he calls, self-theorists—folks like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm and Rollo Mayhow—how they have tried through different means and through different twists and turns to affirm the intrinsic goodness of human beings and to tell people that they needed to unconditionally love themselves and to self-actualize. Vitz, I think, rightly, calls it an enormous exercise in self-deification where people have been taught to make themselves into God. You see lots of people who are going around trying to say wonderfully positive things about themselves simply because they think it.

Vitz quotes a *Psychology Today* article that is filled with this kind of selfish jargon, psycho-babble: I love me. I am not conceited, but I am just a good friend to myself. I like to give to myself whatever makes me feel good.

And it goes really far, this self-deification. One of the psychologists said in a book called, *Playing the Game the New Way*, he says: “You are the supreme being. Reality is just a reflection of your notions, totally, perfectly. You make up the rules. You are responsible for the way the game of life is played, all of it. It has no significance. You are it.

Well, of course, as Christians—those of us who have committed ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ—we have a basic foundational understanding that Jesus is Lord and we are not. So, how should we think about ourselves? If we don’t want to go over into the error and the modern trip of calling ourselves “God” or just trying to view ourselves positively because we say so, and on the other hand, not live with this very negative view of ourselves—how should we think about ourselves?

Well the passage we are going to look at, I think, lays out a wonderful way to understand ourselves. But first, let's pray.

Philippians 3:17-21:

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 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. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Let me give you a picture that you can fix in your mind to illustrate how you ought to think about yourself. The picture is that of a suspension bridge like the Golden Gate or the Verrazano. It has two big pillars that hold two cables and that keeps the bridge up.

Well, here is my understanding of how to think about yourself, if you are a believer in Christ. One of the great pillars would be the cross of Christ that we find in verse 18: Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. And then the other great pillar is found in verse 20: Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there the Lord Jesus Christ. The second great pillar is the coming of Christ. And here we are, standing on the bridge, between the cross of Christ and the coming of Christ—between the first and second comings—we stand between those two great events.

The two cables that hold our lives together are, first of all, what we are personally by way of the fall and we are going to go through that in verse 18 and 19. Verses 18 and 19 describe what we are by way of the fall that we need to deny, that we need to oppose, that we need to kill off. And then verses 20 and 21 are what we are by way of our salvation, what we are becoming. This is what we need to affirm and bless regarding ourselves.

So, we have two pillars: the cross and the coming, and two cables: what we are by way of the fall running parallel with what we are by way of salvation. The one, what we are by way of the fall, we deny and suppress. And what we are by way of redemption and salvation, we affirm and bless and lean into.

Now, let's take a look at verses 18 and 19: "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."

Paul, here, is talking about a group of people who he calls "enemies of the cross" and as such, it would certainly not be applicable to our present state as believers in Christ. But we must understand that this is what we were. That all the things said in this text, verses 18 and 19, were true of us. We were enemies of the cross of Christ, every one of us. We must stand in this text. Our destiny, all of our destinies, was destruction. Our God was our stomachs. And we did glory in things that now cause us shame.

You say, "Gee, that is a very harsh criticism, Rich."

But flip over to Romans 5. Paul says in Romans 5: "You see at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Paul calls us powerless. We were ungodly, opposed to God. Then he goes on, "God demonstrated his love for us in

this while we were still sinners...” We always miss the mark in our behavior. We never shot straight. We were crooked. That is what it means to sin. You missed the mark. You are off target. God has a purpose for your life and you veer off, you vector off in a different direction. You never accomplish the things that God wants you to accomplish. That is what sin is. You veer away from God’s ambition and you veer away from God’s target for your life.

And then he clearly goes on and says in verse 10, “If when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life?” We used to be enemies of God, same word as enemies of the cross, enemies of God. You can see the same kinds of adjectives applied to our lives in Ephesians 2:3 when Paul says, “All of us also lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature (sounds very much like making gods out of our stomachs) gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts like the rest, we were, by nature, objects of wrath.”

This is what all of us are by way of the fall of men and women. In other words, this is what we are by nature as we have inherited the pollution and the stain from generation to generation coming down from Adam and Eve. When we are born, we are born with these certain qualities. When folks say, “People are born good, they need to be taught to do bad” the Bible says that that is completely false. We are like classic automobiles that have been run into a tree and the headlights are broken. The radiator is pouring steam and the suspension is thrown off. The gas tank is leaking. That is the way people are born—in the image of God, but broken and stained.

As one theologian commented, there is no Christian doctrine for which more evidence can be proffered than the Christian doctrine of original and universal sin.

Because all of us, daily, are exposed to our own sinfulness, the sinfulness of everyone else. All you need to do is pick up a newspaper to know what people are like.

Now, when Paul considers what men and women are by way of the fall in all of our distortions, in all of our perversions, in all of our sinfulness and opposition to God, I love the way he begins. In verse 18 he says: “As I have often told you before and now say again, (and here is what I want you to underline) even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross...their destiny is destruction...” We are never to talk about the sinful condition of men and women and, particularly, the destiny of men and women who are headed toward destruction and toward hell without asking God, “God, let me talk about it the way Paul did with profound sorrow and even, perhaps, with tears.”

You know, one of the things that is such an incredible turn off to so many folks as they listen to Christians talk about the condition of the world and all the bad stuff that is happening in the world and all the bad stuff that people do, is that we say things with such a lack of feeling, with a matter-of-factness, with a harshness and self righteous judgment. And I have heard people talk even about hell and this horrible truth that we are all going to face God in judgment and that hell is real and many, many people are going to be dropped into hell. I have heard hell referred to almost glibly and lightly, as if it is not the most horrible thing in the world.

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul revealed the heart of Jesus wonderfully when he said, “I can’t talk about fallenness and sin and hell and destruction without it breaking my heart. I can’t talk about these subjects indifferently and coldly. I say what I am about to say with tears!”

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army once remarked that one should never speak about hell unless you can speak about it with tears. This was the apostle

Paul's method, by the way, whenever he dealt with another person's sins, whenever he brought a rebuke, whenever he needed to confront something strongly, the apostle Paul always had tears brought to his eyes. In Romans 9 when he considers the hardness of the nation of Israel toward Jesus, he says: "I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." He had unceasing anguish.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4 when Paul is referring to a letter that he wrote to the Corinthians that contained a rebuke in it toward the church he said, "I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you."

And in Acts 20 as he speaks to the Ephesian elders, he says in verse 31: "I never stop warning you night and day with tears..."

Paul often cried, he often wept as he had to bring correction and deal with people's sins. It broke his heart. And we see the same thing, of course, in our Lord Jesus Christ as he looks at the nation of Israel that turned its back on Jesus, the one who was their promised Savior, the one who would bring them blessing, they turned their backs on him. You see Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem and crying out, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to you. How often I long to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate."

Here is the question I want to ask you: Do other people's sins and the thought that people's sins will plunge them into destruction, does that break your heart? Are you heart broken and have you ever been brought to tears by the thought of the miserable

condition of people in this world? Have you ever been brought to tears, let me ask you, in having to bring correction or to rebuke, to confront someone in their sins. Has that ever broken your heart? It should. It broke Paul's heart. It broke Jesus' heart.

You know, when it is an easy thing to just write a letter and have a prophetic word for the church and how God is going to bring his judgment and his anger. God is going to judge this place and that place. When it is an easy thing for us to bring rebuke to somebody else and it doesn't cause us any anguish, we are not operating by the Spirit of God. I have had people say that they have had ministries of confrontation and admonition. Oh, not by the Holy Spirit, they don't. Not without heart break.

So, when we look at ourselves and what we are by way of the fall, and we look at others and what they have become by way of the fall, it should break our hearts. That is the first thing.

So, there is nothing of this hard-faced, self righteous tone in the apostle Paul as he describes folks who are currently what he calls "enemies of the cross" and, of course, he is describing every one of us before we were born again. It is not clear from the text who, exactly, these people are in verses 18 and 19 as Paul describes as being enemies of the cross of Christ whose destiny is destruction, whose God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. I want to run it out, therefore, in two directions. Because, frankly, I think it is a description of everyone by way of the fall. I think Paul's description in verses 18-19 works equally well with the immoral person and with the highly moral person. What Paul says here in verses 18 and 19 applies to hedonists and pagans, and it applies to the person who sits on all of the local charitable boards who is a moral prude. Paul's description applies to the whole human race. By way of the fall, we are all enemies of the cross.

Let me apply it first to the hedonist, the raw, rank, pagan who just loves to party hearty, who has a bet with his friend regarding how many girls he can bed down, who's theme in life is "don't worry, be happy." The hedonist who just wants to have some fun. Paul calls such people enemies of the cross. There are people, even in the church, who don't understand the cross of Jesus Christ and who distort grace as the book of Jude says. They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and who deny Jesus. There are a lot of people who view the cross of Christ and the grace of God as being like a forgiveness machine. Just continue to sin and sin and sin and then we go to the machine and pull the lever and we get forgiveness because that is God's business. They don't understand that the cross is meant to do something to us. That when we go to the cross for forgiveness, we are also going to the cross to be changed. You cannot sincerely ask for forgiveness without in one and the same prayer asking God to change you so that you don't continue to sin. Yes, we can always go to God to forgive us. Yes, we come to God as we are. But our prayer is, "God, don't allow me to stay as I am, change me." Any encounter with the real God and any encounter with the real cross is going to change a person. The licentious, the hedonists, they live as enemies of the cross because they don't want to be changed.

And, of course, their God is their belly. Verse 19: "There God is their stomach..." What Paul is saying is that the hedonist, the partier, the just-live-for-now person is controlled by their appetites—self indulgence, sexual appetites, materialism. You know, we live to satisfy some drive, some appetite. And it could just be the ambition to be the center of attention or the ambition to accumulate more and more and more. He goes on in the description and says: "Their glory is their shame."

In other words, the hedonists, the party-goer, the person who just wants to have a great old time, will often be proud of things that they should be ashamed of. I don't need to press this point, given network television and talk shows, how people advertise behaviors and practices and perversions that folks use to not talk about ever, even in private, and then only in very hushed tones with their eyes cast down. We have no problem loudly announcing to everyone, to strangers, our brokenness. People celebrate what a former generation would have been horribly ashamed to admit.

Paul says, "Their end is destruction." The profound tragedy of where the party-goer is going is that they are going to hell. Yes, we just want to have fun, but the party won't last forever. Not only is their sin destroying their own life now, and not only is sin destroying their relationship with other people, but their sin is destroying their relationship with God for eternity. And so Paul says, "their destiny is destruction" because sin destroys. It ruins. Sin devastates all relationships.

Now, let me quickly apply these same verses to the moral man and the moral woman. As I said, these verses apply equally well, and perhaps better, to the moral person, to the religious church-goer who does not understand the cross. To the man and woman who serves on charitable boards. Who works down at the United Way agency? Who gives away money, time and effort to those less fortunate—the good person. The one who cares about the poor and the needy. The one who does not just indulge their appetites. The moral, religious man or woman can also generally be classified as an enemy of the cross. Indeed, I believe that these were the people that Paul was speaking about. He was not, in this text, actually talking about the hedonist party-goer. He is talking about the same people that he was discussing in the first few verses of Philippians 3 when he speaks about those mutilators of the flesh. Those who put confidence in the

flesh. He is talking about religious Jewish people, but in our day religious people of all stripes, good charitable people. And he calls such people enemies of the cross.

Why? Because the notion that Jesus Christ must be crucified, that God needed to send his Son and have nails driven through his Son's hands and that his Son's body needed to be ripped and blood had to come out of his Son's side in order for anyone of us to be saved scandalizes and offends the moral person, the good man, the charitable woman.

You mean all my striving and all my good deeds, all the ways that I have helped people and served and given time, money and energy amounts to nothing in the sight of God? Are you saying, Paul, that all I've done does not impress God? And that I need saving and can only be saved by the bloody death of Christ on the cross?

The apostle Paul says that such a notion offends the religious person because the cross is a scandal. It scandalizes the mind of the moral.

You see, you can be a wonderful person and still be an enemy of the cross of Jesus. And, in fact, it is a good litmus test regarding where you are with Jesus Christ – how you respond to the idea that you need saving. See, until you kneel before the cross, you are an enemy of God no matter what you have done. I should think that is one of the best tests of where you are with God regarding how you, personally, respond to the idea that until you bow your knees and pray to be saved based on the bloody death of Christ, you are an enemy of God and God's wrath rests on your life.

Does such a notion offend you? Do you say, "How dare that guy call me an enemy of God or say that God's wrath is on my life after all I have done?" If you are offended, if that bothers you, then you really need to read over the New Testament and what it says regarding you. It says "There are none righteous, no not one."

It says that you need to come to God empty handed. That you need to become like a little child, bringing nothing. That you need to be poor in spirit. That no one can be saved who is full of themselves. That the only way into heaven is to be broken and to cry out that God would save us and forgive us. So, a good test of where you are is how you respond to the notion that you need saving.

And then it goes on regarding the moral person and says that their destiny is destruction. Imagine that all the good, religious moral people who have given to charity, their destiny is destruction. Everything they have done will come to nothing, Paul says.

When I was in England I saw some wonderful films of a personal hero of mine, Winston Churchill. I read part of a biography of Churchill while I was in England and then I went to visit Churchill's wartime bunkers. And we saw some films on Churchill. I mean, I am a Churchill nut. I really enjoy his speeches, his person. And yet, as far as I can tell, for at least most of his life, he was not a Christian. I hold out some hope. He got together with Billy Graham in his declining years and who knows? Only God knows where anyone is. None of us can say regarding another, "This or that person has definitely gone to hell." We don't know. And we leave judgment to God of anyone. But Winston Churchill said regarding himself in his declining days, he spoke to one of his secretaries and said, "With all I have done, I have accomplished nothing. And my whole life boils down to nothing."

The secretary was quite surprised by this and said, "But, Mr. Churchill, you of all people as you look back at your life ought to feel wonderful about your accomplishments. You saved the world from Nazism. You single-handedly saved the world from Nazism. And you were the Prime Minister (and what a wonderful Prime Minister he was) and you are universally loved and respected by millions of people all over the planet. You won

the Nobel Prize for literature (which he did in the 50's for his wonderful set of works on the Second World War).

And yet, in his old age, Winston Churchill said that he could never stand by a balcony in a hotel lest he throw himself off and commit suicide. And he could never stand by the edge of a subway platform lest at the last moment an impulse would arise in him and he would throw himself under a train. Because when all was said and done, he had a strong feeling that he accomplished nothing.

The good moral man or woman, the one who strived to do good, must understand that without God in your life at the end of your life, it all just runs through your fingers like sand. Everything, ultimately, without Jesus is profoundly empty. There is no substance. And it broke my heart to listen to Churchill's secretary and to think what he could have had if he had Christ. What fulfillment and what peace in old age.

And then it goes on and it says: "Their God is their stomach." You ask how does that apply to the moral person?

Well, certainly, to the Jews of Paul's day who spent so much time thinking about dietary regulations and what went into the stomach. Mark 7 is an echo of this when Jesus says, "That you violate the commandments of God in order to serve your regulations regarding food." They make their stomach and what goes into their stomach God.

I think about the moral people of our day and how more and more folks are, again, turning to regulations regarding food as a test of your morality. "Oh, no. I don't eat this, I am a vegetarian." There is a sense of superiority about the kinds of diets that different ones have. We have cut back on cholesterol and we have done this and that as if it is a sign of moral superiority. Paul says, "Their God is their stomach. And their glory is in their shame."

Well, there I think he is talking about the circumcision that is worked on the private parts of one's body and how they glorify in the shameful parts of the body. In any case, this is a description of fallen men and women—hedonist, moral, fallen. And this is a description of us. And to the extent that we find these things in our lives—self indulgence, pride in accomplishment, a feeling of self-sufficiency that we don't need anything, a feeling that we don't deserve the wrath of God, that we do deserve God's favor.

How is it then that we think about ourselves? We take those things to the cross. And when we take that fallen part of us, whatever we see, to the cross, we are not simply asking God to forgive us. We want such things in our lives to be crucified, to be put to death, to be nailed to the cross along with Jesus.

You say, "How should we think about those fallen, broken, sinful parts of our character?"

Jesus tells us very well in Mark 8 when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow." In thinking about yourself, that part of you that is dark and that functions continually as an enemy of God and wants to be the center of attention all of the time, wants to assert yourself over the rights of everyone else—in thinking about that part of yourself, Jesus says, "I want you to deny yourself. I want that part of you denied."

What does it mean to deny yourself? Well, we treat ourselves the way that Peter on the night that Jesus was betrayed, we treat ourselves the way that Peter treated Jesus. You will remember the apostle Peter, three times when questioned about his relationship with Jesus denied the Lord Jesus Christ. Threefold, the denial of Jesus. He was asked, "Do you know him?" He said, "I don't know what you are talking about." He was asked

by a young woman, “Surely, you were with him.” He denied knowing Jesus. Another came up and said, “Surely, you are one of his disciples.” And he called down curses on himself, but he denied ever knowing Jesus.

It is the same word—deny—regarding yourself. The way you treat that fallen part of you is that you treat it the way Peter treated Jesus. You turn your back on it. You say, “Go away from me, I never knew you. You have no rights over me anymore. You have no claim to loyalty. No claim to followership. Whoever you are, I deny my obligation to you. I don’t care what your assertion is. What your plea is. How much time I have spent around you. I am going to betray you now, I am leaving you behind. I am walking away.”

Not negative self image, self denial. Not feelings of low self-worth, rather we turn our backs on ourselves in terms of all that we are by way of the fall. Now how can we think about ourselves positively?

In thinking about how we think about ourselves, we make certain affirmations. And these affirmations, I want to start off reminding you of, are not positive thinking statements built on the thin veneer of our own projections or our illusions—what we want to say about ourselves, the kind of selfish thinking that I spoke of in the introduction. These affirmations are statements we make based on God’s own Word. We say these things about ourselves because they are true. And they are true because God said they are true.

You say, “How might I affirm myself without the emptiness of the human potential movement?”

We remind ourselves, first of all, of our citizenship. Verse 20: “But our citizenship is in heaven.” Now, this business of citizenship would have particularly

spoken to the Philippian audience that Paul was writing to. The city of Philippi was one of the few Roman colonies in the ancient world in which a person born outside of the city of Rome would have the full status and rights of a citizen of Rome. Here was somebody born far away from Rome in the city of Philippi. Yet, because of Philippi's status in the eyes of Rome, they were considered full citizens of Rome as if they had been born in Rome.

Paul is saying that the same thing applies to you, Christians, who are born again. Born far away from heaven and into this world. And yet, you who are born far off enjoy the full privilege and the status and all the rights of a person who would be born in heaven because you have a piece of heaven in you. Peter says that you have a divine nature in you. You, who have gone through a second birth, who have been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are citizens of heaven. And note, as you think about yourself, and you make certain affirmations regarding yourself so that you might positively regard yourself, the Bible does not say our citizenship will be in heaven, it says our citizenship is in heaven right now. Even now you enjoy, Christian, the full privilege and rights of citizens of heaven.

What are those privileges and rights? Well, one of the privileges that you, Christian, have is the right of access to God. As a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, you have a right to stand in the presence of God and to present your petitions and requests to the King. Because of the grace that has been given to you, you can draw near to God and ask God for what you need. Understand that you are a citizen of heaven right now by the new birth. And even though you don't live in heaven in the same way that the Philippians didn't live in Rome, it is as if you lived in heaven by virtue of the new birth.

Now, this is so important to grasp because you are made a citizen of heaven not just by a legal change, like an immigrant coming in and going through a naturalization process. The immigrant is the same person, just with a different legal status. Maybe they were born in El Salvador, but now through a legal process they become an American, but they are still the same person. That is not the way our citizenship in heaven takes place. Our citizenship in heaven is not just a legal change of status, but a change of birth. Something is different about you because the Holy Spirit came into your life, you are now different than what you were. Yes, I was an enemy of the cross. Yes, I have tendencies that still connect me in that old direction that I deny. But now, I am different. I am a citizen of heaven so I have certain rights and privileges and a new status. And the Holy Spirit in you is like a genetic change in your chromosomes, so that you are looking more and more like your Father in Heaven and your older brother Jesus. The privilege of citizenship is the privilege of access to God and the privilege of family likeness.

You also have certain responsibilities. Citizens of colonies of Rome, like the Philippians, had the responsibility of spreading the rule of Rome, the culture of Rome and the language of Rome throughout the area that the colony was in. The colony was responsible to extend Roman rule and Roman culture in the area that it occupied.

What is your responsibility, citizen of heaven? To extend the rule and the culture and the language of heaven to every place that you touch and influence. It is the responsibility of Vineyard, as a little colony of heaven on earth, to extend the culture of heaven to our surrounding area. To touch it with a new language, a new way of thinking, a new way of relating. In other words, to have the Lord's prayer "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done" take place.

We remind ourselves not only of our citizenship, but of our destiny. “Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under this control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

As we are thinking positively about ourselves, we say, “I am a citizen of heaven, but not only that, I have a glorious destiny.” You see, what we feel like now is determined by what is coming to us in the future. And many of us don’t understand that we can take our identity not only from our past, not only from our present, but most importantly Christians in the Bible chiefly take their identity from their future. My destiny is to be changed and to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. The body that I will have will be a glorious body and not like this body of humiliation. That is literally what the text reads in verse 21. This body that brings me shame, this fallen body. But I am going to have a new resurrected body that will be like the Lord Jesus Christ’s own body. You will have a glorious resurrected body to be like the Lord Jesus’ body when he returns. When Jesus returns, he is going to completely change you. You have a glorious future.

Your body will be so glorious and you will be so glorious that in the words of C.S. Lewis, he says: “There are no ordinary people, at least among Christians.” And Lewis goes on to say: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses. To remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw him or her now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.”

Do you realize that you are going to be changed so much and be so glorious that if someone saw you now as you will be, they would be tempted to fall down in worship?

You say, “Who am I? With all my problems, with all my stuff, who am I?”

You are a person with a glorious future. Someone who is going to be changed. This is part of salvation. You see, to be saved means that in the past you were saved from the penalty of your sins. You will not be condemned because your sins have been brought to the cross and the payment, in terms of the guilt, for your sins have been taken care of by Jesus. You have been saved from the penalty of your sins right now, as you walk out your salvation. You are being saved from the power of sin. Sin is losing its grip on your life. Its power is being broken over you in a thousand ways. And in the future, when you finally will be saved completely, you will be saved from the presence of sin. No more sin in your being at all.

You have been saved from the penalty of sin. You are being saved from the power of sin in your future and you will be saved from the presence of sin. Your destiny is so bright, Christian. And you know, it is so important to think ahead. Think long and often on what you are becoming and where you are headed. The characteristic of revival is that Christians are seized with a view of heaven and what they are becoming and being changed into. They are caught up with the future, caught up with heaven, caught up with destiny.

Many people despise the idea that we are supposed to think about heaven. They say, "Oh, he is so heavenly minded, he is of no earthly good." But this is a complete denial of history. Everyone who ever produced anything for the kingdom of God, who did something really great in terms of this world as a Christian, was a person who was dominated by the thought of heaven. The most productive Christians are the people who live with the clearest view of where they are going. They understand that this life is not the only life. It is not a big problem to let go of certain things. It is not a problem to forgive because they know that God is ultimately going to judge and the world will

experience ultimate justice. What problem is there to let go of things when you have a God that says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”?

What problem is it to labor hard for the Lord when all of it is going to be rewarded? What problem is it to put off sin if we understand that every careless word will be repeated? And what is hidden in darkness will be brought to the light. The people who live best in this world are people who are clearest about the next. And so we affirm our destinies.

And one of the things that is happening to you and is happening to the church is that you are getting ready. Even at this present moment, the Lord is getting you ready for a tremendous wedding feast where you are his bride. And God is in the business of preparing his bride.

I want to share a personal word with you. You know, my calling to pastor, about nine years ago now, to leave my job and to come and to pastor here full time as senior pastor, was based on a number of things. But one of the things was some prophetic words regarding preparing a bride for Jesus. And I was in England nine years ago, when through a series of prophetic words, the Lord spoke to me about leaving my job. But one of the words was given by Danny Meyer. He had a dream about me. I was praying and asking God, “God, what would you have me do in the future?” The dream was quite clear, Danny said. In the dream I was combing a woman’s hair and fixing her hair beautifully, putting hair clips in her hair and all the rest. I laughed when Danny told me the dream. I said, “Oh yeah, God is calling me to be a hair dresser.”

He said, “No, no, no. This was the Lord, I am sure of it. God gave me this dream and you were preparing this woman’s hair.”

So I said, “Yeah, that’s right. Sure.”

I just laughed it off and that evening this woman stood up in our church and gave a prophetic word. She said that the Lord is calling people to prepare the hair of his bride. She went into great detail about how God was speaking to certain people about combing the hair of the bride and getting the bride ready. She went on and on talking about the preparation of the hair of the bride.

And so even my understanding of what it means to be a pastor is that I am a person who is called to get the bride ready, to prepare the church, and make her beautiful for the coming of Jesus.

What positive things do you say about yourself? Tell yourself about your citizenship in heaven. Tell yourself about your bright future. And then tell yourself that a Savior is coming to you. Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there—the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you understand that the best thing that is going to happen to you is not just that your body will change? It is not just that God will wipe away every tear from your eye and that in the future you will experience no more pain. It is not just that you will have a great reunion with those who have died before you in Christ—grandmothers, grandfathers, parents, children—that you will be able to talk with and fellowship with. Moses and Joshua. Paul and Peter. You will sit down and talk with them and get to know them. The martyrs and saints. And you will be mingling with these people and mingling with Christians from all over the world.

The best thing of all, the best is that God will be with you. The Savior, Jesus Christ, is coming for you and for me. John Wesley, on his deathbed as he saw the Lord coming for his soul, sat up (he was lying flat) and he suddenly sat upright and pointed to the heavens saying, “Best of all, God is with us.”

Revelation 21:4 says:

“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men [and women] and he will live with them. They will be his people and God, himself, will be with them and be their God.’”

So, how should you think about yourself? You say: Well, there are certain things about me that I have inherited from the fall that I am going to turn my back on, that I need to deny and walk away from, that I continually need to bring up to the cross and deny.

And there are other things about myself that I celebrate, that I glory in, that I take my identity from. And they have nothing to do with my work life, my promotions, my pay, my looks, my body. But they have to do with my citizenship, my destiny and my Savior. Let's pray.