

Eschatology
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
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Phil 3:19 – 20

(NA 27th ed.)

(RSV)

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| ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπόλεια, | 1 Their end is destruction, |
| ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία | 2 their god is the belly, |
| καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν, | 3 and they glory in their shame, |
| οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες. | 4 with minds set on earthly things. |
| ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, | 5 But our commonwealth is in heaven, |
| ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα | 6 and from it we await a Savior, |
| κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν | 7 the Lord Jesus Christ |

The first word is the pronoun “their.” *Telos* is “end,” and for *apōleia* see Rev 9:11’s “Apollyon.” Line 2 of course you know *theos*, but here it is not the true God, but a phony god comprised of the *koilia*, “belly,” similar to English “colon.” Line 3 features *doxa* as in “doxology.” *Aischunē* is “shame” as in Aeschyn-anthus (shame flower). Line 4’s *epigeia* is from *epi* (“upon”) and *gē* (“earth,” as in geology or Gaia). *Phroneō* relates to “frantic” or schizo-“phrenia.” Of course you notice “politic” in line 5, with Uranus (Latinized Greek “heaven”). *Sotēr* (line 6) is of course “savior,” the Σ of ΙΧΘΥΣ; think “soteriology.” Whew!

Phil 3:18 references unidentified “enemies” of the “cross of Christ.” What is of interest to me is how Paul framed their religion here. Although these unnamed foes would probably not have confessed this—in fact they probably considered themselves to be orthodox and spiritual—Paul describes them as actually serving a counterfeit god: their “belly.” Indulge me in a muse for a bit.

I consider the reference to the *koilia* to be a synecdoche that stands for all sensual pleasure in general (Rom 16:18); “minds set on earthly things.” Their religion, their god, their motivation and outlook, centered on the craving of sensual pleasure. I think that gratification of the body functioned as their hidden master—and they probably didn’t even know it.

This should arrest our attention. We should stop at this point and consider how strongly sensuality tugs at us. Is there a sense in which we could be described as having a secret religion—what I call a clandestine faith—that trusts in luxuriation to bless us and make us feel normal and relieve stress and escape from reality for a time? Although we confess the gospel of Jesus, is there also a sense in which we obey our physical drives like gods?

Let’s see. You set your alarm 15 minutes early to get up for a quiet time, and when it goes off what do you do? It is a religious act to stretch out your arm and press the snooze button with your finger. At that moment, you are swayed by something other than your commitment to your confessed Lord. Your deference to your body overrides that devotion. And let’s not even talk about your lack of exercise.

What do you do when you are bored, alone at home? Do you reach for the freezer and get out ice cream? Does your belly bless you with good feelings and a sense of well-being that overrides your health issues? What god do you serve, anyway? And let’s not even talk about drugs and alcohol.

And let's not even talk about sex. Right? You can tell that a sensual pleasure has become a functional god in your life when you are willing to sin against the true God to get it.

What is the way out of this? What is the opposite of living for the pleasures of the moment? I think it is stated in the next verse: we await a Savior from heaven, in whom is our true identity. In other words, the reason that you are deferential to the love of sensual pleasure is that you have a defective eschatology.

You see, when you are slothful, or actively sin with your body or give in to a physical urge against your better judgment, you reason that it is not worth waiting for the pleasure. Grab it now, partake now, feel it now, rather than later. Don't you believe that God provides you with every good gift (Jms 1:17)? Don't you believe that all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:33)? Don't you believe that he will give you pleasures forevermore (Psa 16:11)?

Simple answer: no you don't. Not at the moment you give in to temptation. You tell yourself that you must have it now. You just can't wait. Jesus is coming—and this gets a yawn compared to the here and now. The problem is that you have a defective vision of your future.

It takes a lot of faith to say “no” to a carnal pleasure.

Something to think about.