

New Hope Missionary Baptist Church – Southfield, Michigan
Dr. Aaron L. Chapman, Pastor
#hope in the field

Bible Study Series: Philippians
Unified Hope: Loving Christ as we Love One Another

“Pressing on Toward the Goal” Philippians 3:12-21 & 4:1

Reflection Questions:

A. Do you experience any opposition in your effort to stay true to the Christian walk? Briefly explain?

B. Are you a disciple (follower) of Christ? If yes, are you discipling others? How?

Key Terms:

- Actualized
- Attain
- Attitude
- Believers
- Christ Jesus
- Citizenship
- Conformity
- Crown
- Destruction
- Earthly Things
- Enemies
- Example
- Forgetting
- Glorified
- Goal(s)

- Heaven
- Hold
- Joy
- Maturity
- Observe
- Pattern
- Perfect(ion)
- Persecution
- Power
- Prize
- Salvation
- Savior
- Stand
- Standard
- Transformation

Important Emphasis:**Process of Paul – not yet obtained vs 12****Pressing of Paul- but I press vs. 12****Purging of Paul-forgetting what lies behind vs. 13**

Conscious discipline or a Conscious effort. The (I) is used here not because Paul does all these things in the totality of his own strength. The (I) is also used here because it is not based only on assistance but the I is used for massive accountability. Colossians 3:23

Paul does not claim perfection. This means that he has not reached the peak of growth or maturity. His credentials don't give him clearance from striving to obtain the levels of character in Christ. Paul lives between the impressiveness of his past and the necessary efforts for the future. Psalm 42:1-2

Paul has a Pressing on the inside of him. There is a yearning that exudes from a Yes to God! This level of commitment to discard complacency doesn't derive from a casual yes to God, but an untrammled mindset toward Christ. Paul desires to take Hold of him, because Christ has already taken hold of him. Isaiah 6:1-8

Godly Goal**Gain Christ****Gain Righteousness****Gain Power of the Resurrection****Gain His suffering****Gain Conformity to his death**

“Paul’s language is vivid, tense, repetitious; pressing, stretching, pushing , straining. In these words the lungs burn, the temples pound, the muscle ache, the heart pumps, the perspiration rolls.” Fred Craddock 2 Timothy 2:4

This group who is not walking according to the standard of living in Christ are identified in three ways. Psalm 1:1-3

Whose end is destruction**Whose god is their appetite (craving)****Whose glory is in their shame**

Introduction

Paul's goal was to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ had in mind for him. This goal absorbed all his energy. This provides a helpful example. We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal—knowing Christ. With the single-mindedness of an athlete in training, we must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from being effective Christians. What is holding you back?

Lesson Outline

- I. Pressing on to Ultimate Perfection (3:12-14)
- II. Pressing on to Spiritual Perfection (3:15-17)
- III. Pressing on to Relative Perfection (3:18-19)
- IV. Pressing on to Glorified Perfection (3:20-21 & 4:1)

Exploring the Text

I. Pressing on to Ultimate Perfection (3:12-14)

¹² *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

¹³ *Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,*

¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Though salvation itself brings a status of perfection, the new life in Christ needs to be _____. What is its intended goal? For Paul, the goal is _____, on both an individual and a corporate level. And perfection has two stages: a _____ kind of perfection that Christians work to attain in this life, and a final state of _____ perfection realized only in the life to come.

Biblical Perfection defined:

In Paul's writings perfection or **maturity** entails several ideas related to the concept of growth, fulfillment, reaching a goal or attaining completion. The English word *actualized* [realized] capture an important nuance [distinction] in Paul's thinking on this subject: that which is perfect or mature has fulfilled its intended goal.¹

¹ Klein, William W. 1993. "[Perfect, Mature.](#)" In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, 699. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Pushing Towards the Goal

3:12 Paul saw the Christian life as a process. While believers are considered righteous when they accept _____, their entire lives are marked by _____ toward _____. Complete perfection will not be obtained until Christ's second coming, when he will take his people with him. While Paul may have seemed like a nearly perfect Christian to his Philippian friends, he emphasized that he had not achieved perfect knowledge of Christ, the power of his resurrection, or the sharing of his suffering and death (**3:10**). All of these were part of the process of _____—of working toward that day when we can be all that Christ Jesus saved us to be and wants us to be. **Sanctification means that we are delivered from the power of sin but we are not delivered from the presence of Sin until we arrive in glory with Jesus Christ.**

Pursuing the Goal

3:13 Unlike the Judaizers, Paul did not consider that he had achieved _____; he was not all that he knew he should be, but he lived in absolute confidence of his _____ salvation. Christians know they will be saved, yet they must have perfection as their goal (**Matthew 5:48**) while not pretending that sin does not exist (**1 John 1:8**). Like Paul, they should be focusing on one goal: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.

Persisting Towards the Goal

3:14 As a runner straining toward the finish line, Paul pressed on to reach the end of the race and receive the _____. While Paul didn't identify the prize, it seems from his writing above that the prize refers to gaining full knowledge of Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7-8**). Paul aimed to win the prize, but all who finish the race win it as well. The **full knowledge** of Christ is the final prize for which believers gladly lay aside all else (**Hebrews 12:1**). For this prize, Christ Jesus is calling us up to heaven. The **heavenly call** is the summons to win the victor's **prize of salvation**.

Understanding the Text (3:12-14)

1. What was Paul's testimony? (3:12-14)

2. In what ways did Paul's spiritual life resemble the discipline of a runner? (3:12-14)

3. What was Paul's view of the past? (3:13)

4. What was Paul's goal? (3:14)

Exploring the Text

II. Pressing on to Spiritual Perfection (3:15-17)

¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Attain a righteous attitude

3:15 After Paul described his spiritual goals, he explained to the Philippians that all _____ Christians should agree on these things. That is, they too ought to be pressing on toward the goal. _____ would understand that they could not, in their own humanity, gain perfection and acceptance by God (as opposed to the teachings of the Judaizers). Yet because of their love for Christ, they willingly pressed on to follow his example in order to become more like him in life, all the while knowing that they were promised to know him fully upon their death (or his return).

Paul made clear that those who were truly _____ were those who realized their dependence on God. They pressed on, not to make themselves good enough or to gain credentials by their accomplishments; rather, they pressed on to know their Savior better. Whatever problem of _____ may have threatened to divide the Philippian church, Paul stopped it. This was the final word on the matter; Paul invoked the illumination of God himself to make plain the truth of his words.

Attain a righteous standard

3:16 Christian maturity involves acting on the guidance that we have already received. The believers were in different stages, but everyone needed to obey the truth they had learned already. As they pressed on toward the goal, they should not use their lack of complete _____ as an excuse for taking lightly what they knew or for getting sidetracked. They should continue to learn and grow, while at the same time governing their lives by the _____ they had already received.

Attain a righteous pattern

3:17 Paul used these two key words for discipleship: _____ and _____. Paul challenged the Philippians to pursue Christlikeness by following Paul's own example and the examples of others whose lives were based on his (those _____ in 3:15). This was not egotism on Paul's part, for Paul always focused on Jesus Christ and urged the believers to also follow the example of others who followed Christ. They should not follow false teachers or the enemies of the cross (3:18). Instead, as Paul focused his life on being like Christ, so should they.

The Gospels may not yet have been in circulation, so Paul could not tell them to read the Bible to see what Christ was like. Therefore he urged them to _____ him as a practical guide for conduct. That Paul could tell people to follow his example is a testimony to his character. Can you do the same? What kind of follower would a new Christian become if he or she imitated you?

Understanding the Text (3:15-17)

5. How did Paul call the Philippians to share his view? (3:15)

6. What did Paul hope for the believers who disagreed with him? (3:15)

7. What was Paul's plea to the Philippians? (3:16)

8. How did Paul want believers to imitate him? (3:17)

Exploring the Text

III. Pressing on to Relative Perfection (3:18-19)

¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Resist the Enemies of the Cross

3:18 The reason for Paul’s admonition to follow his example was to turn the believers away from following the _____ of the false teachers, the **Judaizers**, and any others who claimed to be believers but refused to live up to _____ model of servanthood and self-sacrifice. These people focused on their own attainments, thus making them enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul had warned the Philippians about false teachings, and he continued to do so with tears. (**Romans 16:18**)

Recognize the Enemies of the Cross

3:19 Four characteristics were true of these “enemies of the cross” (3:18).

- (1) Because they refused to accept _____ on their behalf, they could not be saved. Their only alternative was _____ separation from God.
- (2) Their god is their appetite, meaning they worshiped those temporal elements that satisfy only physical desires.
- (3) They brag about shameful things. They _____ in themselves, when they should have been ashamed so that they could turn to God for salvation.
- (4) All they think about is this life here on earth. They depended on credentials, accomplishments, law-keeping, etc., for salvation.

IV. Pressing on to Christ’s Glorious Perfection (3:20-21 & 4:1)

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. ^{4:1} Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Set Your Mind on the Place Above

3:20 While the false teachers had their minds on earthly matters (3:19), believers ought to be yearning for their _____ (Colossians 3:2).

Charles H. Spurgeon suggested that our walk and our acts should be consistent with our dignity as heavenly citizens, “In heaven they are holy; so must we be if our citizenship is not a mere pretense. They are obedient; so we must follow the faintest monitions [words of advice] of the divine will. They are active; so, day and night, we should be praising and serving God. They are peaceful; so we should find rest in Christ.”

Set Your Mind on the Power from Above

3:21 When Christ returns, he will conquer everything, everywhere. There will be no more sin, no more evil rulers, no more persecution of believers. Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords, ruler over all (**Revelation 19:11-16; 21:22-27**) With that same power, he will _____ all believers’ weak mortal bodies into _____ bodies like Christ’s resurrected body. Our identities will not change, but our bodies will be like Jesus’ glorified body.

Set Your Mind on the Promises from Above

4:1 Because of these amazing and certain promises, the believers in Philippi ought to stay true to the Lord—standing against false teaching or divisiveness from within and persecution from without. Paul referred to the Philippians as his joy and reward (crown), proof that his labor had not been _____ (2:16).

Understanding the Text

9. How did Paul describe God’s enemies? (3:18-19)

10. Where did the Philippian Christians have their citizenship? (3:20)

11. Whom did the Philippian believers eagerly await? (3:20)

12. What characterizes citizens of heaven? (3:20-21)

13. Because of the great and wonderful promises outlined by Paul in verse 3:21, what were the Philippian Christians to do? (4:1)

Life Application:

- What spiritual workout or training this week will help you successfully run your Christian marathon?

- In what way can you renew your commitment to press on toward the goal of being like Christ?

[Resources: Life Application New Testament Commentary, The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, Adult LessonMaker Questions]