
Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study
“Moving Forward”

Philippians 3:1-14 (NIV)

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. **Why does Paul say, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal”?**

Philippians 3:12; 2 Peter 3:18

- Why is recognizing that we still need to grow a sign of spiritual maturity rather than weakness?

2. **What were Paul’s religious credentials, and why did he eventually consider them “loss”?**

Philippians 3:4–8; Acts 22:3–5; Galatians 1:13–14

- What accomplishments or titles can Christians be tempted to trust instead of Christ?

3. **What is the difference between knowing about Christ and actually knowing Christ?**

Philippians 3:8–10; John 17:3; Jeremiah 9:23–24

- Is it possible to be active in church and still not be growing in your relationship with Jesus?

4. **What does it mean to “be found in Him” and have a righteousness that comes through faith?**

Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:21–24; Ephesians 2:8–9

- Why can’t morality, church attendance, ministry, or good works make us right with God?

5. **Paul says, “I want to know Christ.” What does it mean to know both the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings?**

Philippians 3:10; Romans 6:4–5; 2 Corinthians 4:8–10

- Why do we often want resurrection power without suffering?

6. **What does Paul mean by “forgetting what is behind”?**

Philippians 3:13; Isaiah 43:18–19; 2 Corinthians 5:17

- How can past failures keep us trapped?
- How can past successes keep us stuck?

7. **What is the difference between learning from your past and allowing your past to control your future?**

Philippians 3:13; Romans 8:1; Genesis 50:20

- Is there something from your past that you have physically left but emotionally or spiritually still carry?

8. **What does spiritual stagnation look like in the life of a believer?**

Philippians 3:12–13; Hebrews 5:12–14; Revelation 2:4–5

- What are some warning signs that we have stopped growing even though we are still attending church?

9. **What does Paul's phrase “reaching forward to what lies ahead” teach us about the effort involved in spiritual growth?**

Philippians 3:13; Hebrews 12:1–2

- What is God calling you to reach toward in this season of your life?

10. **What does it practically mean to “press toward the goal” when life becomes difficult?**

Philippians 3:14; Galatians 6:9; James 1:2–4

- What makes people want to stop pressing?
- How do you remain faithful when you are tired, disappointed, or discouraged?

11. **How did Paul continue moving forward even when his circumstances seemed to hold him back?**

Philippians 1:12–14; Acts 28:30–31; 2 Timothy 2:9

- How can God continue using you even when your circumstances are not what you hoped they would be?

12. **If you were completely honest, what is one thing you need to leave behind and one thing you need to reach toward in order to move forward with Christ?**

Philippians 3:13–14; Hebrews 12:1–2; Isaiah 43:18–19

- What specific action can you take **this week** to demonstrate that you are moving forward?

Closing Thought: *You cannot change where you have been, but by the grace of God, you do not have to stay there. Forget what is behind, reach for what is ahead, and keep pressing toward Christ.*

Closing Reflection

Read Together: Philippians 3:13–14

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Final Challenge: Paul's testimony reminds us that the Christian life is never about standing still. We never graduate from grace. We never outgrow our need for Christ. Whether burdened by yesterday's failures or tempted to live on yesterday's victories, God continually calls us to keep pressing forward. The goal is not perfection—it is persistent pursuit of Jesus Christ until the day we see Him face to face.

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

A. Pressing On: Guarding Oneself, 3:1-3 Introduction: this chapter is one of the great chapters of the Bible, a chapter that needs to be studied time and again. It includes the great personal testimony and ambition of Paul. It gives us some of the great principles that governed Paul's life. The subject of the chapter is "The Pressing On Of The Christian Believer." These are some things the Christian believer must do as he presses on for Christ. First, he must guard himself.

1. (3:1) Rejoicing: guard yourself by rejoicing in the Lord. A person who is always rejoicing in the Lord will not go astray. As the believer walks through life, two things are always confronting him: circumstances and false teaching. No matter where he goes, the trials of life, both minor and major, confront him. He has to stand face to face with the awful trials of life including...

- enticing temptations • lust of the eyes • lust of
- the flesh • greed • selfishness • arguments
- divisions • inhuman behavior • criminal acts
- death • accidents • disease

The list could go on and on. No person escapes the trials of life—not if he walks upon this earth. He is confronted with the awful reality of trials every day of his life. Note another fact as well. No matter where he walks, the false teachings of this life confront him. No matter which way the believer turns, he is confronted with different ideas about how to handle life and its great trials.

⇒ There is the teaching that says, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Ignore the trials and problems of life. Life is to be enjoyed by those who have the health and money to enjoy it, so get all the gusto out of life possible. Do your own thing."

⇒ There is the teaching that says, "Discipline and control yourself. Take care of your body and mind. Don't give in to the lusts and passions of this life. The abuse of a mind and body is a waste. Live as long and contribute as much as you can by walking a disciplined and controlled life."

⇒ There is the teaching that says, "Don't go overboard. Enjoy life—join in—do what you want; but do it within reason. Don't overly abuse your mind and body. It's all right to join and indulge occasionally; just don't do it too often and hurt yourself."

⇒ There is the teaching that says religion is the answer to both life and death, "Join a religious body, undergo its rituals, adopt its beliefs, and live the best you can. This will give you a strong self-image and confidence that God will accept you. Just be as good as you can and God will accept what goodness you are able to build up."

The list of false teachings could go on and on. The point is this: the believer is bombarded by both trials and false teachings every day of his life. He must, therefore, guard himself; and the first guard is to rejoice in the Lord. If he walks throughout the day rejoicing in the Lord, his mind is upon the Lord. He rejoices over what Christ has done for him—rejoices over the Lord...

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| • justifying him • adopting him | • securing righteousness for him • dying for him—bearing his condemnation and judgment |
| • reconciling him • saving him | • arising for him—giving him a new life |
| • loving him • delivering him • guiding and directing him • giving him an eternal hope and the glorious confidence of eternal life • looking after him | • giving him the privilege of knowing God |
| | • giving him victory over sin |

The believer just walks about joying and rejoicing in all that the Lord has done and is doing for him. This is essential if the believer is to guard himself against the onslaught of trials and false teaching in this life. If the believer is to press on in his Christian life, he must walk about rejoicing in the Lord.

Now note: the great thing that rejoicing does is this: it places and keeps a person in the presence of Christ. No matter what confronts the believer—no matter how terrible the trial—he knows that he is being looked after by Christ Jesus his Lord. He knows that nothing can separate him from the Lord and His love—that he shall never die, but rather live eternally. Therefore, he knows that whatever comes upon him can never conquer and overcome him. Christ will give him supernatural power and strength to overcome it. And if he is called upon to lay down his body and move on to heaven, he knows that he shall never taste or experience death; he knows that Jesus Christ is going to escort him right on into God's presence immediately—quicker than the eye can blink—about 11/100 of a second. The believer is forever secure in the keeping power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he walks rejoicing in the Lord: he rejoices no matter what confronts him.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" ([Romans 8:35-39](#)).

Thought 1. Rejoicing in the Lord is one of the very best ways to guard oneself against the trials of life and false teaching. When a person rejoices in the Lord, his mind is focused upon the Lord, upon what the Lord has done for him. And the mind cannot be two places at once. If it is upon the Lord and His glorious salvation, then it cannot be upon the trials and false teachings of this world.

"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" ([Luke 10:20](#)).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" ([John 15:11](#)).

2. (3:1) Scriptures: guard yourself by heeding what is written, that is, the Scriptures. Note: Paul says that he is writing some things that he had apparently written before. What he is about to write is so important that it has to be repeated. The church must do what is being said.

The point is this: the writings of Paul and of Scripture must be heeded. What Scripture says was written to instruct us and to help us in *pressing on* for Christ. No person can press on apart from heeding the Scriptures. If he fails to study and obey the Scripture, he will cave in either to the trials of life or to false teaching. Only as we obey the Scripture—the commandments of the Lord—can we show our love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)).

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" ([John 14:21](#)).

3. (3:2) Teachers, False: guard yourself by watching out for false teachers. Paul was always facing false teachers who were savage in their attacks upon him. He mentions three groups of false teachers in this verse.

1. Beware of false teachers who act like dogs (*kunas* [PWS:1143](#)). It should be noted that both Jew and Gentile called each other dogs as a term of contempt. The word "dogs" was the lowest title possible to convey contempt and ridicule. Dog does not refer to the house pet of today, but to the wild dogs that roamed in the forests by day and the city streets by night. They were scavengers and snarlers who could be very vicious and dangerous.

The point is descriptive: there are some false teachers who are just like wild dogs.

⇒ They are scavengers who seek out all whom they can consume with their false teaching. And if any step forward to defend the sheep and the truth, they snarl and often become vicious and dangerous, ready to attack the defender and destroy him.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" ([Matthew 7:6](#)).

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" ([Matthew 7:15](#)).

2. Beware of false teachers who are evil workers. The world is full of people who work evil things.

⇒ This refers to those who hold to and teach high standards of righteousness, morality, and religion. They are absolutely sure they are righteous and good—at least good enough to be acceptable to God. There is just no way God would ever reject them—they think.

⇒ This also refers to those who live and teach evil by the way they live and talk about morality, righteousness and religion. Some live base, immoral, indulgent, and extravagant lives, while others try to mix both a religious and indulgent life-style together.

The point is this: there are those who are always opposing the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation by grace alone. They do not accept that He is God's Son—that He is the Lord of man's life; the Lord who is to be given all we are and have. Therefore, they accept His teaching, but ignore or deny salvation by His blood. They stand opposed to the gospel of salvation by His grace alone. They go about establishing their own way to God, doing whatever good they feel is needed to make themselves acceptable to Him. The result is false teaching—a way to God that stands against the Lord Jesus Christ and His way. Such false teachers are evil workers—workers who stand opposed to the truth.

3. Beware of false teachers who are of the concision. The concision refers to the Judaizers

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven"
([Matthew 5:19-20](#)).

4. (3:3) **Believers—Circumcision:** guard yourself by knowing that you are the true circumcision Note that believers are called *the circumcision*. What does Paul mean?

1. Believers are those who worship God as He really wishes to be worshipped: in the spirit; that is, they have circumcised or cut away the flesh as the means by which they worship God. Think for a moment: How do most people attempt to worship God?

⇒ By attending church services ⇒ By praying ⇒ By making occasional gifts to needy causes ⇒ By thinking of God occasionally ⇒ By being circumcised or baptized or undergoing some other ritual ⇒ By keeping the rituals and ceremonies of a church ⇒ By joining a church ⇒ By observing special days

But note a critical point: as good as all of these are, they are not the basis of true worship. They are things that we do because we worship; they are the result and activities of worship. They are not the basis or spirit of worship. True, they may help us to focus upon God and stir us to worship Him, but as stated, they are not the basis and spirit of worship.

⇒ The basis of worship is the Spirit of God, and the spirit of worship is the Spirit of God.

To worship God, man must have the Spirit of God living within his body and spirit. He no longer worships God externally through rituals and ceremonies. He now worships God inwardly through the Spirit of God who lives within him. True worship is no longer through anything that is of the physical or material world, no longer of anything that is of man's flesh. True worship is of the spirit.

Thought 1. True worship has to be of the heart and spirit. Why? Because a man can attend church, keep all the rituals and ceremonies, and still be living in the depths of sin. But if a man's spirit is right with God, he

worships God with a clean and pure heart, free from all sin and defilement. The truly circumcised person is the person who worships God in spirit.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" ([John 4:24](#)).

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" ([1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)).

2. Believers are those who rejoice as God really wants us to rejoice: in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus...

- is God's only begotten Son. • is the Person who gave Himself to die for us, bearing our sins and condemnation. • is the Person who has saved us, made it possible for us to live forever in the presence of God.
- is the only Savior, the only acceptable way to enter God's presence.

Therefore, it is only natural that God expects us to rejoice in Christ Jesus. How could we boast and rejoice in ritual and ceremony and religion? The Source—the Author and Finisher—of our faith is Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer does not boast in anything physical or material—not in ritual or ceremony or religion. The true circumcision rejoices and boasts in Him who has given us salvation and access to God, even in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" ([John 15:11](#)).

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" ([Phil. 4:4](#)).

3. Believers are those who have no confidence in the flesh. The flesh...

- is only physical and material. • can only handle physical and material things. • can only do good works and keep external rituals and ceremonies and religious practices. • can do nothing beyond the physical and material.
- cannot penetrate the spiritual world or dimension of being.

The flesh ages, deteriorates, and corrupts. Therefore, the flesh goes the way of all material and physical substances: it dies and decays. And no matter what the flesh has done and accomplished in this physical world, it takes all its works to the grave with it. The flesh dies and all that concerns the flesh dies with it. Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer, has no confidence and puts no stock in the flesh. He has confidence only in Jesus Christ.

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" ([Romans 7:18](#)).

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" ([Romans 7:25](#)).

"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" ([Romans 8:8](#)).

(3:3) Circumcision: before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (cp. [Genesis 17:10-14](#); [Romans 4:11](#)). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man—not even to Abraham ([Romans 4:9-10](#)). It was given only as a sign—a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God's promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (see note—' [Romans 4:11](#) for more discussion).

However, many abused God's purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely an external and physical sign.
2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. [Acts 10:1](#); [1 Samuel 17:26, 36](#); [2 Samuel 1:20](#)). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be *cut off* and *far off*, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised) but from God Himself. An uncircumcised man was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting all other people (the Gentile nations).
3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come ([Galatians 5:6](#); [Galatians 6:15](#); [Col. 2:11](#)). Righteousness is now of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of rules and regulations (cp. [Romans 2:25-29](#); [Romans 4:8-12, 23-25](#)). The truly righteous man is the man who is God's inwardly—the man whose spirit has been recreated into the very nature of God. God's very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is born again. A man born again by the Spirit of God is God's "new creation" ([John 3:3f](#); [1 Peter 1:20](#); [2 Peter 1:4](#)).

B. Pressing On: Paul's Personal Testimony—Rejecting Self-Righteousness and Seeking Perfection, [3:4-16](#)

(3:4-16) Introduction: all across the world men sense they need a relationship with God. They have a sense of God, but they sense there is something wrong between them and God. Sometimes they feel things are right; other times as though things are wrong. But underlying whatever feelings they have, men are never sure whether or not things are right with God. They lack perfect assurance and confidence that they please God enough to be acceptable to Him. They have a hope that God will accept them, but they do not know, not with absolute certainty.

It is these feelings that have stirred the religions of the world. Men want to be right with God; they want to be approved and accepted by God. They want God to look after them and help them, and they want God to accept them when this life is over. Therefore, they set out to do what they feel will make them *good enough* to be acceptable to God. They try to do whatever good they feel is necessary to please *their god*. Granted, the degree to which men feel this differs among all men. One man will feel that he has to be extremely good, whereas another man feels that he has to be moderately good. The point to note is this: *this kind of religion* is a religion...

- of works
- of doing good
- of securing God's favor
- of making oneself acceptable to God
- of being good
- of preparing oneself for God
- of making oneself approved by God

It is a religion of self-righteousness—of becoming as righteous and good as a person can—of earning and meriting God's favor—of working one's way into God's presence. There is, of course, a severe fallacy with this approach to God.

⇒ God is perfect and not a single person is perfect. No person can do enough good to become perfect no matter what he does. In fact, man is already imperfect; and once perfection is lost, it is lost. Imperfection can never become perfection, not by the efforts of human (imperfect) flesh. Imperfection cannot make perfection.

The point is this: no person can ever earn or merit the right to live in God's presence. If a person is ever going to live in God's presence, it will be because God loves the person enough to accept him and to transform him into a perfect person. This is exactly what God does through Jesus Christ. God accepts men *through His Son*, through the love and grace of His Son.

It was this, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Paul had missed. And it is this that so many in the world miss. Paul had never seen the great love of God for man. Yet, *above all men*, he had given his life to seeking after God, doing all the good he could to make himself acceptable to God. But despite all his achievements, he still did not have peace with God. Perfect assurance and confidence—of living eternally with God—was still lacking. This is the message of the present passage: Paul's personal testimony—his rejection of self-righteousness and turning to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

1. (3:4-6) Self-righteousness— Paul: Paul had achieved the height of self-righteousness. Paul ranks among the greatest of men who have attempted to work their way into God's presence. Paul did all the good he could to secure God's approval. Few if any men have ever attained what Paul did by human effort. Yet, it was all to no avail. His goodness and his attainments did not make him acceptable to God. And there is one primary reason: he could not make himself perfect.

However, note what Paul says: "If any man thinks he can trust in the works and attainments of his flesh, I more. I can trust and boast in the goodness and morality and works of the flesh as much as any man who has ever lived." This is a phenomenal claim, but Paul lists seven privileges and achievements which show the total inadequacy of man to save himself. Paul divided the list under "Privileges of Birth" and "Achievements by Self-Effort."

1. The privileges of birth are three in particular.

a. "Circumcised the eighth day": Paul was saying that he had the *right birth*. A true Jewish family always had its male child circumcised when he was just eight days old. Circumcision was the sign that a person believed in old and in His promises—in particular the promise that the Jews were the promised and covenant people of God. Paul was claiming to be a true Jewish believer who had the privilege of believing parents.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in birth nor in religious rituals and ceremonies. Yet, how many people think they are acceptable to God because they...

- have godly parents? • have a godly spouse? • have godly children? • have godly friends? • have kept religious rituals and ceremonies?

How many expect the godliness of others to rub off on them—to count for them and to make them acceptable to God?

b. "Of the stock of Israel": Paul was saying that he had the *right national heritage* and a very special relationship with God. He was born in the right nation, among the right people. The name Israel goes back to the time when God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob had a special need, and God met his need in a very special way through a dream and changed his name ([Genesis 32:28](#)). When a Jew wished to stress his special relationship to God, he called himself an Israelite; that is, he was of the nation and descent of Israel which had a very special relationship with God and who had received a very special name from God.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in ancestors nor in social superiority. Yet, how many think that being born in a Christian nation and surrounded by Christian principles carry some merit with God? How many feel that the people of a so called Christian nation are more acceptable to God than the heathen of some idol-worshipping tribe in the depths of a jungle? How many feel that they have some merit with God because they have a Christian name? How many feel they have a little better relationship with God and are a little more acceptable to God because they live in a so called religious nation?

c. "Of the tribe of Benjamin": Benjamin was considered the aristocratic tribe of Israel because of the tribe's loyalty when so many were disloyal ([1 Kings 12:1](#)) and because of the tribe's courageous acts throughout Israel's history ([Judges 5:14](#); [Hosea 5:8](#)). Paul was saying that he was of the *highest aristocracy, of the most noble, of the most respectable persons of Israel*.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in social or religious status. Yet, how many feel they are more acceptable to God because they belong to...

- an upper class? • a more elite church? • a more dynamic church? • a more active ministry?

2. The achievements by self-effort are four in number.

a. "An Hebrew of the Hebrews": Paul claimed to have the *right language* and the right customs. When the Jews were conquered and scattered over the world, a believing Jew refused to give up his Jewish language and customs. He continued using Hebrew and he continued to practice Jewish customs. Every Jew did not, but Paul says he and his family did. What Paul meant was that he had the mark of faithfulness. He had deliberately kept the Hebrew tongue and refused to forget it. In his day, this was extremely difficult, for the Jews were literally scattered across the world and the world had one common language, Greek. But Paul remained steadfast. He learned and refused to forget the right language. He was loyal to the elect race of God. He was untinged by other philosophies.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious faithfulness, nor in a spiritual language, nor in the ability to know and speak in religious terms. Yet, how many think that they are acceptable to God because they..

- do good and are faithful in being good? • are faithful in studying their religion, the Bible, and the great doctrines of the faith? • are faithful in talking about and sharing spiritual things? • know and use religious terms and languages?

b. "A Pharisee": Paul claimed to have had the *right religion*; to have been a Pharisee. The Pharisees were strict religionists, so strict their very name meant The Separated Ones. Paul said that he was of the strictest religious sect ever known. He devoted his whole life to the most *separated* and demanding religion ever known to man. He achieved *separation*, an exacting separation from other men.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religion, not even in being a follower of the true religion. Yet, how many feel the very opposite?

c. "Zeal": Paul had zealously stood and fought for his religion. He hotly pursued and persecuted the church. Paul had such a zeal for his religion that he sought to wipe out any cause that differed from his

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious commitments or zeal. Few have ever been committed to their religion like Paul—few have ever been as faithful to the worship services, ordinances, rituals, and ceremonies of his religion as Paul. Paul was a religionist among religionists. Few have ever proclaimed and protected their religion like Paul. Paul was as zealous as a person could be in trying to reach converts for his religion and in keeping his religion as pure as he could. Paul was full of zeal for his religion, as faithful as a person could be.

d. "Blameless": Paul claimed he had sought to keep the law and he had kept it—completely and fully. This does not mean that Paul was sinless; it means that when Paul sinned, he obeyed the law and took his sacrifice to the temple. He obeyed all the commandments, rituals, and ceremonies just like Scripture said. He followed all the laws and instructions of the Scripture. He was blameless—ritually and ceremonially—in the righteousness of the law.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in keeping all the rituals and ceremonies of religion. They are not even found in keeping all the commandments of the Scripture.

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:20](#)).

2. (3:7-11) Righteousness— Perfection— Paul: Paul sought to win Christ, to win His righteousness and His perfection. The one thing in life that Paul sought was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He knew that no matter how good he could become, he could never become perfect. He still came short and he was still doomed to face death. Therefore, his only hope for living forever was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He had to trust Christ; he had to focus his heart and life—all he was and had—upon Jesus Christ. He had to trust the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ to *cover him*. Therefore, he cast his heart and life upon Christ. He lived for Jesus Christ, and he trusted God to honor his commitment. He trusted God to *count his faith*

as the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. If God did not do this, he was lost and doomed to death forever; he could never gain perfection. His only hope was Christ and Christ alone. This is what the present passage is all about. Paul believed with all his heart that if he trusted Jesus Christ—that if he sought after the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ with all that he was and had—God would take his faith and *count it as righteousness*. God would honor his commitment to His Son by accepting and giving him eternal life. Note five significant points.

1. Paul had a *past experience* with Christ: there was a time when he had counted *his own righteousness* as loss ([Phil. 3:7](#)). Paul was referring to his conversion experience. There was a time when he had given up his own self-righteousness and works, his own attempts to become perfect. There was a time when he had accepted the fact that he could not become perfect—he could not gain righteousness—he could not make himself perfectly acceptable to God.

a. Note that this is a past experience, a once-for-all experience. It is a definite time when Paul made a definite decision—a decision that he was unable to secure righteousness and perfection himself. If he was to become righteous and perfect, he had to trust the love of God—that God loved him enough to cover him with the righteousness and perfection of Christ.

b. Note also that this did not mean that Paul quit trying to live for God. On the contrary, it meant that Paul tried more diligently than ever to live for God. When God saw Paul's total commitment to Christ, God knew that Paul's faith was genuine. He knew that Paul really believed that Christ was his Savior, his hope for perfection and righteousness—for eternity. If Paul had not committed himself totally to Christ, God would have known his faith was not genuine and God would not have saved Paul.

Thought 1. God sees our faith; whether or not it is genuine. Genuine faith makes a total commitment to Jesus Christ. A person who truly believes in Jesus Christ gives all he is and has to Christ. He counts his own effort and works, his own righteousness as loss—as nothing—in order to gain Christ.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" ([Hebrews 11:6](#)).

2. Paul had a continuous experience with Christ: he constantly counted all things as loss and as waste in order to win Christ ([Phil. 3:8](#)). The word "count" is in the present tense; it is continuous action. When a person has made the decision to seek after Christ, he is *to continue* to seek after the knowledge of Christ—to learn all he can about the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ.

⇒ It is not a matter of making a decision to follow Christ, and then turning and walking on as a person has always walked—doing his own thing and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind.

⇒ It is making a decision to follow Christ and continuing to seek after the knowledge of Him—continuing to seek to know Him more and more.

a. Note that the knowledge of Christ is said to be excellent: it is the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most excellent knowledge in all the world. No other knowledge

can give a person righteousness and perfection. No other knowledge can make a person acceptable to God and give him the right to live eternally.

b. Note what Paul says: "I have suffered the loss of all things." The words "have suffered" mean to forfeit and to cast away. The phrase all things includes not only the religious position Paul had attained, but the "social, financial, intellectual, and political" gains he had made as well (Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Philippians*, p.163). Wuest gives a graphic description of what Paul gave up to become a Christian believer.

"Paul was a citizen of Tarsus. At the time he lived there, only families of wealth and reputation were allowed to retain their Tarsian citizenship. This throws a flood of light upon Paul's early life. He was born into a home of wealth and culture. His family were wealthy Jews living in one of the most progressive of oriental cities. All this Paul left to become a poor itinerant missionary.

*"But not only did he forfeit all this when he was saved, but his parents would have nothing to do with a son who had in their estimation dishonored them by becoming one of those hated, despised Christians. They had reared him in the lap of luxury, had sent him to the Jewish school of theology in Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the great Gamaliel, and had given him an excellent training in Greek culture at the University of Tarsus, a Greek school of learning. But they had now cast him off. He was still forfeiting all that he had held dear, what for? He tells us, 'that I may win Christ'" (Kenneth S. Wuest. *Wuest's Word Studies*, Vol.2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, p.91).*

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" ([Mark 10:28](#)).

"And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me" ([Luke 5:27](#)).

3. Paul sought a future experience with Christ: he sought to be found in Christ ([Phil. 3:9](#)). Paul was looking ahead either to death or to the return of Christ. When he came face to face with God, he wanted to be *found in Christ*. He wanted to stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not in his own righteousness.

Note that the righteousness of God is *Christ Himself*. The righteousness of God does not refer to behavior or works or deeds of righteousness. No person can ever secure the righteousness of God by behavior or works or deeds—no matter how good the works or deeds may be. The righteousness of God is Jesus Christ Himself. A person has to trust the righteousness of Christ to cover him if he wishes to become acceptable to God.

"Christ, the righteousness which is of God" ([Phil. 3:9](#)).

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" ([Romans 3:21-22](#)).

4. Paul sought a victorious experience with Christ: he sought to know Christ—to know His glorious power over the world and all that is in the world ([Phil. 3:10](#)). This is one of the Bible's great verses of Scripture, a verse that should be memorized and that should dominate the believer's life. As clearly seen throughout this whole passage, Paul's great pursuit in life was to know Christ. This verse spells out exactly what he meant by knowing Christ.

- a. To know Christ is to know the power of His resurrection. The power of the Lord's resurrection refers to three great things
- b. To know Christ is to know the fellowship of His sufferings. Most of us are willing to share in the blessings of Christ but we want nothing to do with the sufferings of Christ. We shrink from the ridicule, questioning, and abuse He had to bear. There is nothing pleasant about suffering pain and having people oppose us. There is nothing wrong with being honest about the fact. Paul said that he wanted to know the *fellowship* of the Lord's sufferings. That is, he wanted to share in *the purpose for which Christ was suffering*. Why did Christ suffer? He suffered because He proclaimed the righteousness and salvation of God—because He proclaimed the way men could become acceptable to God and live forever. Paul was saying that he wanted to suffer right along with Christ, suffer for the same cause—suffer for proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God.

There is no question about it: if we live for Christ—proclaim the righteousness and salvation of God—we shall suffer persecution. Why? Why would the world persecute anyone who brings the hope of eternal life to them? Because some persons want to live their lives like they want, and a righteous life and message condemns them. Therefore, they oppose anything that keeps them from living a life that pleases their own personal desires and flesh. The believer must know: he shall suffer persecution if he truly follows Christ.

"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" ([Acts 14:22](#)).

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" ([Phil. 1:29](#)).

Note one other thing: God draws close to the believer when he suffers for the cause of Christ. God gives a very special sense of His presence, love, and care when the believer is suffering. In fact, His presence is so near and dear it is called "the spirit of glory and of God" which rests upon the suffering believer.

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" ([1 Peter 4:14](#)).

c. To know Christ is to be made conformable to His death. Jesus Christ subjected Himself totally to God. He put His own flesh and desires to death; He did only what God willed and desired. Even when He died, His flesh did not desire to die. He did not want to take the sins of the world upon Himself and be separated from God (cp. [Matthew 26:39, 42](#)). But He subjected Himself to God's will. God willed Him to die for the sins of the world; therefore, Christ subjected His flesh and desires to do exactly what God willed. He subjected His flesh and desires and died for the sins of men.

Paul sought to be conformed to the death of Christ. He sought to subject himself totally to God—to put his flesh and desires to death and to do only the will and desire of God.

⇒ Paul sought to *deny himself and take up the cross* of Christ daily.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to *crucify his old man* with Christ.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" ([Romans 6:6](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to count himself dead to sin but alive to God.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" ([Romans 6:11](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to *kill himself* all day long.

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" ([Romans 8:36](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to *die daily*.

"I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily" ([1 Cor. 15:31](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to be always *delivered to death* for Jesus' sake.

"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" ([2 Cor. 4:11](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to be *crucified with Christ*.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" ([Galatians 2:20](#)).

⇒ Paul sought to be *dead with Christ*.

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances" ([Col. 2:20](#)).

"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" ([2 Tim. 2:11](#)).

5. Paul sought an eternal experience with Christ: he sought to be resurrected from the dead ([Phil. 3:11](#)). Paul sought to use all means—to commit himself totally—for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection of the dead. The words "if by any means" are not expressing doubt and uncertainty. Paul was not questioning the resurrection nor if he would be resurrected. Paul was simply saying what he had already stated ([Phil. 3:7-11](#)). He uses all he is and has—all the means at his disposal—for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He is totally committed to that glorious day of redemption. He lives for that day and for that day alone.

What is so significant about the resurrection of the dead? What is to be so different about that day? At death, we go to be with the Lord. Quicker than the eye can blink, when our time comes, we shall stand face to face with Christ. What is the difference between meeting Christ then and the resurrection? Why did Paul long for the resurrection over and above his meeting the Lord at death? There are at least two significant reasons why the resurrection, the glorious day of redemption, takes precedence over our meeting the Lord at death.

a. The glorious day of resurrection will launch the events that will soon bring about the new heavens and earth. At death, when we go to be with the Lord, the world continues on in its sin and shame, disease and death, evil and corruption. *God is still being...*

• cursed and dishonored. • denied and ignored. • rebelled against and rejected.

But as stated, the resurrection will launch the events that bring about the glorious day of redemption—the new heavens and earth—the day when all evil and sin and the cursing and dishonor of God will be stopped. God will become All in All: worshipped and served in glory and majesty, dominion and power forever and ever.

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" ([John 5:28-29](#)).

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" ([Rev. 21:1](#)).

b. The glorious day of resurrection will be the day when believers will have earthly bodies transformed and recreated into perfect eternal bodies. At death when we go to be with the Lord, we do not receive our perfect eternal body. We will either be given temporary spiritual bodies or live with Christ as disembodied spirits. But as stated, at the resurrection the elements of our present bodies will be called forth by God from all over the world, and the elements shall be transformed into perfect and eternal bodies. And we shall live with and for God forever.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" ([1 Cor. 15:42-44](#)).

"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" ([1 Cor. 15:49-54](#); cp. [1 Cor. 15:12-58](#)).

3. ([3:12-16](#)) Righteousness— Perfection— Paul: Paul did not count himself as having yet attained—he was not yet perfect. Perfection is the great end of the believer. God has apprehended or laid hold of the believer for one reason only: to perfect the believer—to make him perfect so that he can live and worship and serve Christ forever.

Now note a critical point: no person achieves perfection on this earth. The fact is so evident to the thinking and honest man that it is actually ridiculous to even make the statement. Yet, too many are so narrow in their thinking that they seldom if ever grasp what perfection would really mean. For example...

- Consider the brain and the mind. It has been estimated that man uses only *one-tenth of one percent* of his mental capacity. Imagine how far short this is of perfection!
- Consider the body. What would a perfect body be like? A body that never desired, thought, or did wrong; that never came up short; that never aged, deteriorated, died or decayed?

The examples could go on and on, but note what Paul says: he had not attained perfection. In fact, he was always emphasizing how far short he came.

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" ([Romans 7:18-19](#)).

Beyond doubt, Paul was one of the greatest men who has ever lived. The great *Book of Second Corinthians* clearly shows this. If Paul was so short of perfection, how much further are we? The point bears repeating: no person achieves perfection on this earth. But note: Paul says five significant things.

1. Paul followed after perfection, after his God-given purpose. When Christ saved Paul, that was just the begin-ning, not the end. He had been saved to *live for Christ and to serve Christ*, and as long as he was on this earth he was going to *live for Christ* and do all he could to *serve Christ*. The word "follow after" (*diōkō*) means to press; to pursue just like a runner in a race. There was no place for walking, much less for sitting or lying around in comfort, complacency and lethargy. Christ had saved Paul for perfection—to attain to the resurrection of the dead—and as long as Paul was on this earth, he was going to press and run after perfection.

⇒ Paul was going to do all he could to help the Lord in the Lord's great task of perfecting him.

⇒ Paul was going to do all he could to lay hold of perfection—the perfection for which the Lord had laid hold of him.

Thought 1. There is no such thing as a genuine believer sitting still after he has been saved. The believer must not...

- become comfortable, complacent, lethargic, or lazy.
- waste time and lose opportunity.
- begin to think he is safe and secure forever; therefore, he can sometimes do what he likes and give in to his own desires.

The believer must follow, run, and press after perfection—the perfection for which Christ has saved him. The believer must be active in living for Christ.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" ([1 Cor. 9:24-27](#)).

2. Paul worked at forgetting the past. This is a verse that is of enormous help to believers who have failed God—miserably failed Him. Paul had so failed God, and he was always confessing how far short he came Paul faced what so many of us face:

⇒ failure and shortcoming

⇒ the struggle to forget it and to move on

How does a person do this? It is one of the most difficult things in all the world to do. And it is especially difficult if others are not forgiving and willing to let the believer put his failure behind him. But note: Paul tells us how to deal with the past. How? By concentrating and controlling the mind and by reaching forth to those things which are before us. Note the concentration and focus:

⇒ but *one thing*.

⇒ but *this one thing I do*.

In one focused act, we must forget the things that are past and reach forth to those things that are before us. The act involves two parts: both forgetting and reaching forth. The past cannot be forgotten without reaching forth to what lies ahead. A person cannot sit around moaning and regretting the past. To do so is to be concentrating upon the past. The things of the past are to be *forgotten*. The things of the future are to be the focus of the mind. The believer is to zero in on the things at hand and on the things that lie ahead. If we do this, there is no time to wallow around in the past and its failure.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" ([Galatians 6:9](#)).

"Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" ([Col. 1:29](#)).

3. Paul pressed on toward the goal, toward God's purpose in Christ Jesus. What is God's purpose for us in Christ Jesus? It is to be conformed to the image of Christ—to be perfect even as He is perfect. Once we are perfect...

• we shall be incorruptible and eternal. • we shall live in honor and glory. • we shall live in God's perfect presence and power. • we shall live in perfect righteousness and purity. • we shall live worshipping and serving God eternally.

Perfection means eternal life, a perfect life that never ends—that goes on and on doing the things that God created us to do. Perfection means the eternal life of Jesus Christ—being conformed to the perfection of Jesus Christ.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" ([Romans 8:16-17](#)).

4. Paul kept his mind on growing and maturing in Christ. All believers are ordained by God to be perfect in Christ Jesus, and we shall be perfected in the glorious day of redemption. Let us, therefore, as many as are ordained by God to be perfected, keep our minds on perfection.

Note: this is sometimes difficult to do because we live in a world that is gripped by the lust for...

- comfort and ease • pleasure and plenty • possessions and recognition • indulgence and extravagance • more and more

But note something: God will not let the genuine believer rest unless his mind is on righteousness and purity, the gospel and witnessing. God pricks our hearts, reveals that we are failing and coming short. God stirs us to get our minds back upon living like we should—upon pressing for perfection.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" ([Matthew 5:48](#)).

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" ([2 Cor. 13:11](#)).

5. Paul maintained the growth he had already achieved. Too many live up and down lives. We gain some discipline and some growth, then before too long, we slip right back. It may involve...

- lying, stealing, or cheating • devotions or prayer • control of thoughts and mind • discipline of body and habits

Growth takes place, but then some circumstance or interruption takes place, and the *new man* and new growth are forsaken and we slip back into being the *old man*, living just like we used to live.

But note the strong exhortation of Scripture: take what you have learned and attained and walk by that rule; keep your mind upon that rule.

"For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" ([Romans 8:6](#)).

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" ([Galatians 5:16](#)).

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" ([Ephes. 5:15](#)).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.