

6. Pressing toward the goal

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We all have seen 100 meter sprints in Olympic games. Sometimes TV cameras show us these fine runners in slow motion. They are concentrating in one thing: finishing it faster than anyone else. Every fiber, every muscle in their bodies strained, their eyes fixed on that white tape at the finishing line that waits for the first runner. At the last moment, the runners literally throw their upper bodies toward that tape to touch it first.

Christian life is much like that. But the biggest difference is that our race in Christianity is not a short distance sprint, rather a marathon. We have to be consistent with our God in our lives to finish the goal with triumphant.

The chapter 3 can be divided in three sections:

v1-11	v12-16	v17-21
Paul's past	Paul's present	Paul's future
the accountant	the athlete	the alien
"I count" - New Values	"I press" - New Vigor	"I look" - New Vision

Our Lord wants us to learn how to be press toward the heavenly goal consistently through the letter of Apostle Paul.

A. BE AWARE OF THEM

Philippians 3:1-3 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Paul says, "Finally." This didn't mean that Paul was almost finished. After all he is a preacher. After he said that, he went on another chapter. He has another 'finally' in 4:8.

'Rejoice in the Lord' is a fitting theme for the whole letter as we found out at the beginning of this book. This abiding joy is fitting for the believer because it shows that we really can trust in a God who has everything under control. When we believe this, it isn't any surprise that we are then filled with joy.

'Beware of dogs' was a harsh reference to the troublemaking legalists who attempted to deceive the Philippians. Bible students call this group of false teachers who tried to mix the Old Testament Law and New Testament Grace "Judaizers." The Epistle to the Galatians was written primarily to combat this false teaching.

The orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a "dog," but here Paul calls orthodox Jews "dogs". Paul is not just calling names. He is comparing these false teachers to the dirty scavengers so contemptible to decent people. Like those dogs, these Judaizers snapped at Paul's heels and followed him from place to place "barking" their false doctrines. They were troublemakers and carriers of dangerous heresy infection.

You guys thought I was blunt. I have good teachers from the Bible – Jesus and apostle Paul. To compare with them, I am a mellow and lay back person.

Paul uses a pun on the word "circumcision." The word translated "circumcision" literally means "a mutilation." The Judaizers taught that circumcision was essential to salvation. But Paul states that circumcision of itself is only a mutilation. The true Christian has experienced a spiritual circumcision in Christ, and does not need any fleshy operations. Circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper, tithing, or any other religious practice cannot save a person from his sins. Only faith in Jesus Christ can do that.

Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ

B. NOT ME, BUT THE LORD

Philippians 3:4-11 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

As we face often, those who promote the idea of having confidence in the flesh are the same ones who are the least qualified to have such confidence.

Paul personally knew the futility of trying to attain salvation by means of good works. As a young student, he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the rabbi of rabbis. His career as a Jewish religious leader was a promising one. He was a member of Pharisees, the spiritual elites of Judaism. He had everything going for him. Until he met the One he was trying to destroy on the road to Damascus. After that, Paul gave it all up – to become a hated member of the "Christian sect" and a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If anyone could lay claim to please God by law-keeping and the works of the flesh, it was Paul. He was far more qualified than his legalizing opponents were to make such a claim.

Becoming a Christian did not make him less a Jew. In fact, it made him a completed Jew, a true child of Abraham both spiritually and physically.

Many of you would remember what Jim Elliott, the missionary who gave up his life in Ecuador, South America, said, "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." This is what Paul experienced: he lost his religion and his reputation, but he gained far more than he lost.

It is easy for us to get wrapped up in "things," not only the tangible things that we can see, but also the intangibles such as reputation, fame, achievement. Quantity is no assurance of quality. Many people who have the things money can buy have lost

the things that money cannot buy. They are the slaves of “things,” and as a result do not experience real Christian joy.

When Paul became a Christian, it was not the end for him, but the beginning. His experience with Christ was so tremendous that it transformed his life. It was also a literally painful experience to him. In fact, suffering had been a part of his experience from the very beginning. But Paul knew that it was a privilege to suffer for Christ.

C. PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Apostle Paul could easily tell us that he has arrived this spiritual plateau of maturity and purity we all desire. Yet he assured us this was not so. There was no perfectionism in Paul.

Sadly, it is common for many Christian leaders to cultivate the attitude that they have already attained. Without saying the words, they put forth the image of constant triumph that gives the idea that they have already attained and are already perfected.

Because Paul realized that he had not arrived, there was only one option open for him. He had to press on. There was no turning back for Him.

He could look back and dwell on his “could, should, would”. But all the “could, should, would” of the past will not make any difference in the future if we are just wasting time regretting. Rather, we can use our past mistakes as a stepping stone to make ourselves closer to the Lord in the future.

Satan wants us to live either in regret of the haunted memory of the past and anxiety of unknown fearful future. But God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now.

Many Christians are self-satisfied because they compare their “running” with that of other Christians, usually those who are not making much progress. But Paul did not compare himself with others. Rather he compared himself with himself and with Jesus Christ! The mature Christian honestly evaluates himself and strives to do better.

Often in the Bible we are warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition. The church at Sardis in the Book of Revelation was a case in point. They had reputation without reality.

Revelation 3:1 “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich, when in God’s sight it was “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”. In contrast to the Laodicean church, the believers at Smyrna thought they were poor when they were really rich.

Philippians 3:15-16 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

It is not enough to run hard and win the race. The runner must also obey the rules. Paul emphasizes the importance of the Christian remembering the “spiritual rules” laid down in the Word. The issue is not what the runner thinks or what the spectators think but what the judges say.

Bible history is filled with people who began the race with great success but failed at the end because they disregarded God’s rules. It happened to Lot from Gen. 19, Samson from Judges 16, Saul from 1 Sam. 28, and Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

D. OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

Philippians 3:17-21 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

We shouldn’t think that Paul was being egotistical here. He knew that he was not a sinless or perfect example, yet he was still a good example.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Pastors and church leaders are a pattern for their congregation, if they intend to be or not. It is not a surprising thing at all for to see how a congregation take on the personality of its pastor, in both good and bad ways. If the pastor is warm and friendly, the congregation will be same. If the pastor is selfish and shallow, they would be in that way, too.

If you are a leader of one of ministries in this church, whatever you do will be noted by someone in the congregation. That is extra responsibility all the leaders must take.

These enemies of the cross of Christ are out there to satisfy their own carnal desires. While they do that, they want to pull others down, just like one drug junkie would offer illegal drug to others.

V19 describes the idolatry of these enemies. Not that they were necessarily focused on what they eat, but belly here has a broader reference to sensual indulgence in general. They live for the pleasures of the body, mind and soul.

The more I learn about the Christianity, the more I realize how much it is different than all the other religions. While Christianity emphasizes in glorifying the Lord since it is all done by Him, other religions emphasizes in glorifying individual carnal desires because all the religions are based on human effort, so it is natural for them to look for return-on-investment.

Someday, all the born-again Christians will have the bodies that conform to His glorious body, no longer ruled by sinful nature and carnal desires, but to glorify our Savior. Rather than eternal damnation in hell, we will all be glorified by His grace into eternity. That is the result of having the citizenship of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) **The abiding joy is fitting for the believer because it shows that we really do trust in a God whom we really believe is in control. When we believe this, it isn't any surprise that we are then filled with joy.**

- 2) **While we are on this earth, our goal should not be about having the most toys, best homes, and fancy cars, but it should be pleasing the Lord.** Many people who have the things money can buy have lost the things that money cannot buy. They are the slaves of "things," and as a result do not experience real Christian joy.

- 3) **Satan wants us to live either in regret of the haunted memory of the past and the anxiety of an unknown fearful future. But, God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now.**

- 4) **We need to honestly evaluate ourselves according to the Word of God and strive to do better.**