

Love Letters

Lesson 13: Philippians 3

Arriving at the halfway point in his letter, Paul gathers his thoughts and, like an arrow aimed upwards, points his readers toward heaven! He will emphasize that righteousness cannot be won by our works; it is only to be gained by our faith in Christ. He consciously repeats himself as if to tell his readers that what he has to say is so important, he does not want them to miss it. Since repetition is the key to learning, it would seem to serve us, as well, to mind those things which Paul continues to highlight to the church.

Read Philippians 3:1–21.

Day One: Knowing Him

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (verse 1). Marking this turning point in the letter, Paul once again drives home the truth that no matter what we are facing, it is possible to have joy in our circumstances as we keep our eternal home in view. Like a father looking after his children to keep them safe, Paul strikes a chord of warning that potentially could be harmful if not heeded.

1. Whom does Paul warn his readers to beware about (verse 2)? (It would be helpful to look at this verse in different translations for clarity.)

Speaking to Christians, he is attempting to prevent them from listening to false teachers who would lead them away from Christ. Some of the Jews were adamant that people had to become circumcised by law in addition to believing in Christ (see Acts 15). These individuals targeted weaker Christians and Paul has harsh words for them.

2. How does Paul refer to himself and those true believers in Philippi (verse 3)?

Indeed, there is a choice for everyone: glory in the flesh and obey the law in its entirety; or glory in Christ’s atoning work on the cross. It is one or the other; placing one’s trust in anyone or anything else is futile. If anyone had a right to brag about their human credentials or pedigree, it was Paul—but placing his faith in Christ had changed his life.

3. Read verses 4–7 again, noting what Paul says about himself.
 - a. Verse 5:
 - b. Verse 6:
 - c. Verse 7:

4. Did Paul put any confidence in these things? How did he perceive them (verse 8)?

The religious leaders were satisfied putting their confidence in what they knew and what they did. Paul wasn't satisfied, even in how far he had gone in his relationship with Christ—he wanted more. What about *you*? Do you want more?

5. Consider this: “A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in the Christian race” (Warren Wiersbe). What do you think it means for a believer to have a “sanctified dissatisfaction”? How might it benefit you in running your race?

Memory verse: Philippians 3:13b–14 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Day Two:

Pressing toward the Goal, Part 1

“This one thing I do . . .”

Reread Philippians 3:8–16.

If anyone had a reason to put their confidence in human flesh, Paul did; but everything that he might have counted as gain, he counted as loss for Christ! “More than that, I count all things to be loss, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (verse 8 NASB). Everything apart from knowing Christ was relegated to mere rubbish!

1. What is Paul's conclusion about attempting to please God in the flesh (verse 8–9)?
2. What was Paul's one great aim according to verses 10–11?
 - a. His relationship with Christ meant Paul would have to share in something; what was it?

Why was Paul so single-minded in his devotion to Christ? Because he knew that his only hope of being righteous was being in a right relationship with God! It cannot be earned by works or merit, for truly we deserve nothing—all our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). God has done everything on our behalf: planning from eternity, creating the world, providing His Son Jesus, dying on the cross for our sins, raising Him from the dead, adopting us as children, declaring us justified and righteous, promising us resurrection and eternal life. The only human component in all of this is for us, by faith, to accept what a loving God has already done!

Paul's description of his desires—this joy in Christ—pointed to the future and a specific goal. He had not yet *arrived*—he had not already *attained*. He still had more spiritual growing to do, more of a sinful body to deal with; so he purposes to *press on* and lay hold of Christ as He had laid hold of him.

3. What had become Paul's determined purpose in life? (Think about the active tense of the verbs in these verses.)
 - a. Verse 13
 - b. Verse 14
4. Thinking back to what you already know about Paul . . . as he kept this goal in mind, what are some things he might have remembered that perhaps motivated him to press on?
5. Here's an interesting point to remember: while reaching for the goal, should you veer off course for any reason, of what truth can you be certain and how does it encourage you (verse 15)?

Selah ~

“It is better to say, ‘this one thing I do,’ than to say, ‘these forty things I dabble with’” (D.L. Moody). In other words, it is better to concentrate on the one essential thing than to divide your energy among many that will detract you from your goal. Everyone who finishes the race, like Paul, receives the same prize. Narrow your focus—look for Him—long for His return! Please share your thoughts.

Day Three:

Pressing toward the Goal, Part 2

“Let us be of the same mind.”

Paul wanted desperately to lay hold of that which had laid hold of him—Jesus! He realized there was a purpose in Christ’s call of him; and oh, that we would realize the same. To illustrate his point to the reader, Paul uses the analogy of running a race. He pressed forward, reaching higher, but there was always the danger of looking back at what was behind and reaping the consequences.

Today’s mission is meant to be a meditative assessment of how you’re running your race. Take a moment now to pray, asking God to enlighten you and help you to let go of anything that would hinder your progress. (Keep the illustration of the runner at the forefront of your mind.)

1. What would potentially happen to a runner who kept looking behind during the race?
2. How might believers be hindered in their race if they continually set their mind on the things of the past? What potential consequences could there be? Give examples.
3. From what you know of Paul’s life and testimony (Acts 9), what personal thoughts might Paul have had in mind when he penned the words: *forgetting what lies behind*?
4. Personal: Is there anything from your past *you* keep glancing back at rather than letting it go? What is keeping you from releasing it?

Some things are better left behind: sins of the past, old habits that hinder our well-being, and relationships that are outside of God’s will, to name a few. We should make every effort to get rid of anything that separates us from God, anything that dilutes our personal testimony for Christ in order to keep *growing forward*!

Selah ~

One of the great milestones of the Christian life comes not when you realize how far you’ve come, but how far you have yet to go to become like Christ. Each of us is accountable for the knowledge we possess and Paul adds that we should walk our course accordingly: “To the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” (verse 16). Is there an area of your life God has pointed out where you are “otherwise minded”? What is it? According to Paul, we have the ability to think like Christ. Look up 1 Corinthians 2:16 and note what you find. How will this knowledge motivate you to make any necessary adjustments? Please explain.

Day Four:

Follow My Example

Reread Philippians 3:17–21.

In order for Paul to confidently say, “Follow my example,” he had to be assured that his lifestyle was worth emulating. To follow Paul meant to follow Christ; and Paul asks that his readers note those worthy of acknowledgement.

1. What was Paul going to leave behind for those who came after him (verse 17)?
2. Contrast Paul’s example with those who lived contrary to the gospel; where did they place their focus? How does Paul describe them (verses 18–19)?
3. Where did Paul say he and the Philippian believers’ citizenship rested (verse 20)?
 - a. Pause and consider for a moment . . . Where is *your* citizenship? Paul had joy in knowing Christ because his lifestyle reflected Him—does *yours*? Are you eagerly awaiting Him?
4. Those that follow Christ reflect it in the choices they make every day. They live in anticipation of His return. Name a few believers you can think of that are noteworthy.
5. Personal: Do you think Paul would acknowledge *you* as someone other believers should follow? Why or why not?
6. Who right now is following your example as a believer? Where is that example leading them—closer to Christ or further away from Him? Please explain.
7. Paul didn’t say *follow me* in a cavalier way; he knew well what those words meant. On what basis was Paul comfortable encouraging others to follow him? See 1 Corinthians 11:1.

Selah ~

If you would like to pray to receive Christ as your personal Savior, just repeat these words: “Jesus, I want to know You. I invite You to come inside and be my Lord. Please forgive my sin; fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I willingly surrender myself to you today—I am Yours! Thank you for hearing and answering my prayer. Amen.” (If you prayed this prayer just now, please tell your group leader or someone in church leadership that you have made this commitment. Seek out someone who is mature in the Lord and can help you get started in your Christian walk!

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: What step of obedience will you purpose to take in our walk of faith this week?

Prayer Requests ~
