

Devote All To Christ

February 3 • Lesson 10

Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 3:1–16

Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 3:7–14 | Devotional Reading • 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50–58

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY the reason Paul did not take pride in his accomplishments; CONSIDER the value of our relationship with Jesus Christ; and DISCOVER ways to practice humility in our lives.

In Focus

Gabrielle was finally graduating with her doctorate degree. Her friends thought it would be nice to surprise her with a celebration. Many of her friends witnessed her graduate with her bachelor's degree, get married and stay married for 29-plus years, raise three children, remain actively involved in her grandchild's life, maintain a career as a teacher, operate her own salad business, and now graduate as Dr. Gabrielle! They were extremely proud of her success.

Graduation day was here! Of course, Gabrielle was prepared but she had no idea about the huge celebration that had been planned for her. As she walked through the door, tears of joy began to flow. She was surprised and grateful.

When it was time for Gabrielle to express her thanks, some were surprised at her response. She said, "I am so grateful! Thank you for this celebration! There were so many times I wanted to give up, but God saw me through. I love my family, I love my career, and I appreciate the business God allows me to operate. But the thing I am most grateful for is my salvation. I thank God for the relationship I share with Him. My pursuit is that of God's plan, purpose, and prize. There is still so much more work to do."

In today's lesson, Paul describes what he previously viewed as great assets to what he came to realize were of relatively less value. Are you resisting the appeal of anything that prevents you from knowing and gaining Christ?

Keep in Mind

"No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us" (Philippians 3:13–14, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Conform summorphidzomai (Gk.) — To have the same form, shape, or likeness.

B. Attained lambano (Gk.) — To obtain, receive, or possess as a prize or reached goal.

Say It Correctly

Apprehend. ap-ri-HEND.

Conformable. kuhn-FOR-muh-buhl.

KJV

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

NLT

Philippians 3:7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.

8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ

9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,

11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

The People, Places, and Times

Libertine. These people, who were a part of the early Christian church, believed they were essentially a soul or spirit. The body was only a temporary house, having no long-term value or significance. They held a dual view of life: spiritual matter as good and physical matter as worthless. The beliefs of the libertines were countered by the ascetics, who believed that the body was evil and tried to suppress it. Conversely, the libertines believed that the body was insignificant, therefore claiming the freedom to do with it as they pleased. Paul was contending against both of these groups as he wrote to the Philippians to keep the good doctrines they were taught.

Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin occupies the smallest territory of any of the twelve Hebrew tribes. In spite of its size, however, the tribe played a significant role in Israel's history. Saul, the first ruler of Israel, was a Benjamite, as was the Apostle Paul.

How can we guard against overvaluing or undervaluing our physical bodies and genealogy?

Background

In Philippians 3, Paul warned the church about the dangers of a distorted religion. He railed against the problem of having confidence in the flesh, versus the knowledge of Christ. With fatherly concern for the congregation, Paul warned them about people who could lead them astray. He was concerned about people who trusted more in themselves and their accomplishments. None, however, had reason to boast, according to Paul. For he himself had as much reason as anyone else, if not more. Paul had a background that was impressive by any standard, but especially by Hebrew standards. He understood from personal experience what it meant to have all the prized religious values, virtues, and achievements, only to discover that it was not the end all and be all of life. Paul was born out of the tribe of Benjamin, and was circumcised on the eighth day, according to the Law. Paul was a Hebrew born of Hebrews. (Philippians 3:5–6). He was from the tribe that had remained loyal to the Davidic line during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:23). He was trained and educated as a Pharisee and he used that knowledge to persecute the church. If anyone had reason to place confidence in their own ability and knowledge, it was Paul.

What accomplishments or attributes do people often grow prideful about?

At-A-Glance

1. All Gain Is Through Christ (Philippians 3:7–11)
2. Warning Against False Perfection (vv. 12-14)

In Depth

1. All Gain Is Through Christ (Philippians 3:7–11)

If ever a person had reason to have confidence in himself and his intellectual abilities, it was Paul. Yet, even though Paul had impeccable credentials that gave him standing in the Jewish hierarchy, he gave it all up when he encountered the Master. Paul was able to speak with authority concerning the worthlessness of something that he once valued highly. He told the Philippians about his own heritage and accomplishments (vv. 5–6). So devoted was he to his way of life that he gladly and eagerly persecuted those in the church. Obviously a man of great intellectual ability, Paul came to realize that no legalistic training or adherence could save anyone. He willingly walked away from a treasured lifestyle, held in high esteem by his family and community. What he now counted as loss was not a former state of wickedness, but of goodness. Yet whatever advantages Paul had in his former life were nothing in light of the salvation he was now granted through the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus. However, Paul did not understand freedom from legalism to translate to lawlessness. As it was

when he was a Pharisee, righteousness remained his consuming goal. But now he pursued righteousness from God, found through faith in Christ, not the self-righteousness of his previous life.

Therefore, our righteousness can only come through our faith in Christ. Paul wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

In order to live with Christ, we must die with Him. We cannot go back to the cross of Golgotha; however, the Christ who was victorious there can come to us and allow us to be conformed to Him and His ways.

What are some ways we see believers act self-righteously today?

2. Warning Against False Perfection (vv. 12–14)

After warning them about placing confidence in the self, Paul proceeded to warn the Philippians about the dangers of perfectionism. Although Paul strove with all that he had to attain this righteousness, he made no claim to having already achieved it. He emphatically rejected any claim to perfection. He knew from personal experience the dangers of legalism and its tendency to produce a false sense of righteousness. Apparently some at the Philippian church had deluded themselves with the notion that they were perfect. Paul emphasized that resurrection from the dead was not the only goal ahead. Even the goal that may be achieved in this life still lay ahead. Paul's goal is to attain the goal that Christ has set for him. Though unattained, perfection (completion) is his goal. He has begun the race, and is committed to finishing the course. In the meantime, he is concerned with avoiding the illusion of having actually attained the goal.

Since Christ grasped or took hold of Paul, he, in turn, wanted to grab hold of the perfection (completeness) that is Christ's goal for him. Conversion itself represents the beginning, not the completion of the goal. Salvation has both a beginning and a goal; it is a process, and a lifetime achievement. The King James translation to the word "perfect" in verse 15 appears to contradict Paul's insistence that he is not perfect. But what Paul meant here was that the mental attitude described in the previous sentences is the perfect attitude willing to admit shortcomings, open to correction, and willing to be re-created in Christ Jesus.

Paul advocates for completeness (perfection) in Christ, or ultimate fulfillment to put it another way. The Philippians were admonished to remain true to this point of view so that they could make further progress. They must neither forget the goal, nor suffer under the illusion that they have already attained it. Just as there was a danger in assuming perfection had been attained, Paul was well aware and equally concerned about those who treated the goal with total disregard.

How can we be committed to pursuing right living without falling into harmful perfectionism?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Paul now count the things of his former life as loss (Philippians 3:8)?
2. What was Paul committed to doing, even though he had not yet attained the goal (v. 13)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we keep ourselves from placing our value in our personal achievements over God's grace?
2. Is it possible to be content with where God has us in life and also trying to "press toward the mark" consistently? What does that look like?

Liberating Lesson

Far too often in our society, the goal of pursuing righteousness gets pushed aside. The pursuit of careers, homes, cars, and other material goods begin to consume us, often without conscious consent. Our capitalist society conditions us to prioritize money and material success over all else and can cause us to ignore our relationships with God and one another. The system itself is not concerned with justice or just relationships and conditions,

but productivity. Jesus cautioned us not to put up our treasures in places where moths eat and thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19–20). The material things of this world are under the control of the world’s whims and are temporary and unfulfilling. Instead of our quest for things, a pursuit for Christ and His will in our lives and communities can yield true abundance in this life and the life to come.

Application for Activation

In what ways have you pushed your heavenly goal aside, giving way to earthly or material pursuits? If your life has gotten out of balance in terms of where you have placed your priorities, list some steps you can take to shift the balance correctly. List, in ranking order, the priorities your life should have, according to what pleases God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Philippians 3:7–14

With the use of “finally,” Paul seems to indicate that he was coming to the end of his letter to the Philippians (3:1). However, in content, Paul is focusing on a different aspect of the Philippians’ situation, and now he addresses it. Here, he warns them against Judaizers, who he says put much “confidence in the flesh” rather than in Christ (v. 3). He gives himself as an example of one who had by all measures reached the height of fame in Judaism and was more qualified both through birth and religious rites and tradition than any other. As to preserving the Law and tradition, he was zealous about persecuting the very church that he is now preserving and building with his suffering. But that was the old Paul, as he explains in the following verses (vv. 7–14).

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

The Pharisees were a sect of zealous Jews, who held steadfast to the letter of their interpretation of the law and their own traditions. To reach that height, one must definitely be born a Jew, not a proselyte, “free born,” an ardent keeper of the Law, and “blameless” in all aspects of the religion (Acts 22:28; Philippians 3:6). To attain the position of a Pharisee, therefore, is a very rigorous undertaking, which requires much learning and knowledge of the Law. The position also comes with great advantages and privileges. Paul had reached that high echelon. Indeed, when it came to meeting every requirement of Judaism, being of pure stock and demonstrating fanatical zeal, he had no equal (Galatians 1:13–14). All the things to his advantage, including honor and respect, which he possessed as a Pharisee, he “counted loss for Christ” (v. 7).

Here, Paul is saying that all the positions and aspirations—that every Jewish young man dreamed of and were thought to be “gain” (Gk. *kerdos*, KER-dos, financial benefit) and what he has already achieved—are now *zemia* (Gk. *dzay-MEE-ah*), a “loss,” worthless, or valueless to him. *Zemia* here has the idea of loss as related to a trade or business enterprise where one incurs a material or financial loss. The loss is voluntary, where for the sake of something better and bigger, one purposely decides to take on forfeiture. Paul applies the language of business and considers all the things of his past—things gained before the Damascus encounter—as losses.

Paul considered everything lost “for Christ.” “For Christ” should be understood as for the purpose of gaining Christ, rather than “for Christ” as though Christ were to benefit from the loss. Paul’s encounter with the living Christ on the Damascus road altered his perspective and mindset in life. He reassessed his priorities in considering access to all the worldly glory and position while being ignorant in the riches of knowing Christ on one hand, and knowing Christ as Lord then gaining eternal life on the other hand. The word “excellency” is the Greek *huperecho* (hoo-pair-EH-kho), which has the idea of superiority or supremacy. Paul evaluates his past—his privilege, family, religious heritage, his achievements, rise to fame as a Pharisee, power, position—and finds it worthless compared with his new privilege of knowing Christ.

The Greek noun *gnosis* (guh-NO-seece) for “knowledge” in this instance is more than an acquisition of facts or an intellectual awareness, but rather experiential knowledge. It is more than intellectual cognizance of the truth about Jesus Christ, but a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus. In order that he might “win” (Gk. *kerdaino*, ker-DIE-no, gain or acquire) Christ, Paul says, all things he had before have become dung to him, things that are worthless and useless.

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Another reason for counting all things “dung” is that he might be found as righteous in Christ. Prior to his conversion, Paul attained high position by personal achievement of keeping the Law, which is the standard for righteousness in Judaism. This type of self-righteousness gave rise to and is characterized by pride and arrogance (Romans 10:1–3) and contradicts the work of Christ. Instead of depending on his own righteousness based on personal merit, Paul relies now on the righteousness based on the finished work of Christ (John 17:4) received by faith alone.

Righteousness (Gk. dikaiosune, dee-kie-oh- SOO-nay) or justification were used in both Jewish and Greek communities as judicial terms, whereby a judge would either justify or condemn someone. To justify is to vindicate or to declare one right. The only criterion for righteousness before God is faith in Christ. Faith here simply means “trust,” having confidence in, and accepting God’s work of grace through the life and death of Christ. It is not Paul’s faithfulness but Christ’s faithfulness and loyalty to the Father. Therefore, Paul’s desire is that his approval before God be dependent on his relationship with God through faith in Christ.

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Paul’s further goal here is that of an ongoing relationship with Christ—not a onetime knowledge of Him, but to develop a deeper relationship with the living Christ. The only obstacle was his past glory and personal advantages. Paul qualifies this intimate knowledge of Christ with a cluster of other phrases. The first is “and the power of his resurrection.” He wishes to experience the transforming, life-changing power that Christ has been endowed with through His resurrection power, by which we are accepted as righteous in God’s sight. The second phrase is “the fellowship of his sufferings.” Paul wishes to experience Christ by sharing in His sufferings. Just as to know Christ and the power of His resurrection is an inward spiritual experience, to know Christ in the fellowship of His suffering is equally a spiritual experience expressed in terms of dying with Him (Romans 6:8; Galatians 2:19–20). It means dying to sin (Romans 6:11), and dying to self, of which Jesus Himself spoke (Mark 8:34–35). The last in this cluster of phrases, “being made conformable unto his death,” tends to confirm Paul’s longing for holiness. This Greek word translated “conform” is *summorphizomai* (soom-mor-FEED-zo-my). It is to grant or invest in the same form, to share the likeness of, or to take on the same form—in this context an actual crucifixion. Paul expects to be martyred for the faith, which he later is, but by beheading. Yet for his audience this union with Christ is participation in the unique attributes of Christ, which include His humility, His unselfish love for all, which led to His sacrificial death, and His righteousness, which through His death has been imparted to all believers.

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Paul is not doubting the eschatological resurrection of all believers in this verse. He is certain of the resurrection. He is rather saying that he endeavors to lead a life that conforms to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ with the goal of attaining the resurrection of the dead. The use of this conditional clause, “if by any means” (Gk. *ei pos*, EY poce, if somehow), is Paul’s humble way of saying that salvation is not by good deeds, but depends totally on God’s gracious gift from beginning and to end. This humility emphasizes that salvation is not a consequence of our good works, or personal efforts, or our attempt to live holy. That is, the future resurrection cannot be presumed based on personal efforts, neither is God’s mercy to be assumed or taken for granted because we are Christian. However, there is no room for complacency. Paul recognizes this and looks forward, with great expectation, hope, and enduring faith, to the future bodily resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Now Paul makes it clear that the attainment of the resurrection is in the future, something he sets his eyes on but has not achieved yet. It tends to expel the notion that the resurrection of all believers is only spiritual, totally and

completely achieved the moment one receives Christ as Lord. It also goes on to confirm that realization of the resurrection is not what we assume we own, regardless of the life we live. Rather, the attainment of the resurrection is something to be maintained and to strive for after receiving Christ. Paul says that he has not yet “attained” (Gk. lambano, lam-BAN-oh), that is, laid hold of, taken, or received this prize. The prize is the resurrection from the dead that is still to come.

He has not yet reached his goal; neither is he “already perfect.” The word translated “perfect” is the Greek teleioo (teh-lay-OH-oh) and is also translated to mean “fulfill” (Luke 2:43; John 19:28) and “finish” (John 4:34; 5:36; Acts 20:24). It has the idea of completing a given task. It has been suggested that in Philippi, some thought they had reached the goal of Christian perfection. Therefore, Paul wants to let them know that he neither thinks of himself as having “arrived”—reached his goal—nor does he see himself as “perfect,” or sinless. This does not imply that Paul was lacking in spiritual experience, was deficient morally, or still cleaving to his old nature. It is another demonstration of his humility, whereby he acknowledges that in all his life, God’s grace is still working.

It means also that the task is not yet complete. The race is not over. There is still a course to finish to reach the set goal. To “follow after” (Gk. dioko, dee-OH-ko) means to run swiftly to catch a person or thing. It is also translated to press on—figuratively used of one that runs swiftly in a race as in the Olympics—in order to reach the goal and win a prize. He does it so that he could “apprehend” that for which by Christ he was “apprehended” (Gk. katalambano, ka-ta-lam-BAN-oh)—or to obtain, attain, lay hold of. This is an intensified form of lambano, and has the sense of being seized or taking possession of. Paul implies that Christ had a definite purpose for taking possession of him.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

These verses add emphasis, pointing to the seriousness and the importance of the matter with loving emotion. It seems that Paul, by adding “brethren” (Gk. adelphos, ah-del- FOCE), a word of endearment, is invoking his close relationship with the church and showing deep concern that they understand the truth he is writing. The use of the word shows he is deeply moved; he is speaking the truth and would not lie to them. They are to listen and take his word for it rather than listen to those who probably claim that they have already reached perfection. Although he has totally given up everything for the cause of Christ, renounced his Pharisaic opportunities and advantages, and has identified himself with Christ both in His suffering and death, Paul does not claim that he has reached perfection. Paul is focused on the race ahead of him and avoiding any distraction from his past to impede his focus on the prize.

Here are the three things Paul does:

1. He forgets the past—the ground he has covered, or the hurdles he has scaled in the race. Good athletes do not look back when running. Otherwise, they would lose speed, direction and, more often than not, the race itself (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).
2. He “reaches forth” (Gk. epekteinomai, eh-peek-TAY-no-my), meaning he stretches himself, sparing no energy while using every ounce of his strength to reach the set goal. This is the attitude of every good competitive athlete.
3. He presses on toward the mark—the finish line, the focus of every athlete’s eyes and mind from start to finish. The sense here is that the ultimate prize motivates him to persevere. Paul refers to that prize as “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Paul shares all of this to encourage believers to pursue Christ with the same zeal and focus.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Matter of the Heart
(Romans 2:25–29)

TUESDAY

Persistent Faith
(Mark 7:24–30)

WEDNESDAY

Paul's Solid Credentials for Ministry
(2 Corinthians 11:21–30)

THURSDAY

Boast in Christ Jesus
(Philippians 3:1–6)

FRIDAY

Live as Heavenly Citizens
(Philippians 3:17–4:1)

SATURDAY

Guard Your Heart and Mind
(Philippians 4:2–9)

SUNDAY

Be of the Same Mind
(Philippians 3:7–14)