

Philippians Chapter 3
Part 3
'Joy in spite of things'

Philippians 3:12 -16

Pressing on Toward the Goal

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. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.'

In Philippians 3 Paul is giving us his spiritual biography, he explains his past in verses 1 – 11, his present in verses 12 – 16 and his future in verses 17 – 21.

We have seen him as an 'accountant' counting all that was in his past as rubbish when he met with Jesus. In this section we meet him as the 'athlete' as he likens his spiritual journey to running a race.

In the final section of this chapter we find him describing himself as an alien and stranger here, passing through this present world, having his citizenship in heaven and looking for the Coming of Jesus which every generation of Christians since Paul, have looked for – this is called the **doctrine of imminency**. This means that we need to be ready at all times for the Coming of the Lord, and the catching away of the Church, His bride, this is not the **Second Coming**, but the translation of the saints to be with him prior to the 7 years of Great Tribulation which is to come upon the earth. If you wish to understand more of this time, please request the teaching on the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Back to Paul and in each of these views, Paul is exercising the **spiritual** mind, he is looking at things on the earth from heaven's viewpoint and as a result he is not upset by anything, nothing moves him, what has gone, what is or what is before him is of no account compared with the excellency of knowing the Lord Jesus. He is **totally** single minded in his pursuit of God, which gives him not only a submissive mind, but a **spiritual** and **secure** mind.

His letter is being written to believers and the race he talks about shows us that we have a responsibility to run and achieve the goal, the prize that is set before us. This is the picture he paints in -

Philippians 3:12 -14

Each one of us is on the track; each one of us has a lane to run in, each one of us has a goal to achieve. If we reach the goal in the way God has planned for us we will receive a reward, if we fail,

we will lose our reward, but *we will not lose our citizenship*. We cannot lose our salvation. (Again if you require teaching on this, please ask and it will be provided.)

1 Corinthians 3:11 -15

It seems important to me that we understand the essentials for winning this race so that one day we will receive the reward that is promised, Jesus is interested in us completing the race and receiving a prize. We must not close our eyes to the fact that there will be a day when our works will be tried and we will receive a reward for the things we have done. This should excite us and push us on daily, like Paul.

1. **Dissatisfaction:**

The first essential to pressing on is - dissatisfaction. That may sound odd, but look at -

Philippians 3:12-13

Paul is saying here *'I'm not satisfied with where I am, there is more to press on into'*. He hasn't permitted himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments, but desires to achieve all that Jesus died to give him. He desires to be like Jesus.

Philippians 3:10 NIV

'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.'

A divine dissatisfaction is a very necessary quality if we are to possess everything that Jesus has for us - so sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in the Christian race. Many Christians are self satisfied because they compare their running with others, usually those who they perceive are not running in the way that they are. Yet others are dissatisfied in a wrong way, they are dissatisfied with their church, the music group, the teaching, the leadership. This is not the kind of dissatisfaction of which Paul speaks. His is an internal desire to press toward the goal of the high calling of Christ to become like Him in character.

Had Paul compared himself with others he may have been tempted to be proud and ease up a bit. Rather like Joseph in Potiphar's house (Genesis 39) when Potiphar's wife made a pass at him, he could have thought, *'I deserve a bit of rest and recuperation after all I have been through, I'll just accept this invitation'*. As you know, Joseph actually fled from the scene, leaving his cloak behind him in his haste to get away. Potiphar had entrusted his whole household to Joseph and he was not about to let all that go for a moment's self-indulgence.

Paul was the same; nothing would move him from his declared goal – *that I may know Him* -

Philippians 3:8-11

A question for you at this point, do you have a **dissatisfaction** about your Christian walk, or are you **satisfied** with where you are, perish the thought, compared with those around you? Having read the

foregoing, which attitude do you think is the right one? You may wish to talk to the Lord about your response and even ask Him to give you a divine dissatisfaction in order that you too may press on towards the goal.

Paul uses two words here to describe himself, 'perfect' and 'mature.' He says in verse 12 of Philippians 3 that he is not 'perfect', and then goes on to speak of those who are 'mature', in verse 15. In verse 12 he is telling us he has not arrived at perfection, and in verse 15, he is 'mature'. When Paul speaks of being 'perfect' he never means sinless perfection, he is referring to maturity in his faith and behaviour.

One mark of maturity that Paul displays is he describes himself as not 'perfect', not yet having attained fullness, and he recognised it. The mature Christian is able to evaluate honestly their progress before God, whilst striving to go on to full maturity. There is always a higher place to attain in the spirit.

We are warned against esteeming ourselves more highly than we ought –

2 Corinthians 10:12 NIV

'We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.'

The letters to the Corinthian church had the same author!

So Paul doesn't compare himself with other believers, he compares himself with Jesus and says I'm not there, but I am on my way. Self-evaluation has its down side too, because we can be in danger of going into error in two directions –

1. We make ourselves better than we are
2. We make ourselves worse than we are

Paul had no illusions about himself, he kept pressing on. A divine dissatisfaction therefore, is essential for spiritual progress.

2. Devotion:

Philippians 3:13

'One thing' is a phrase that is important in the Christian life.

Mark 10:21

Luke 10:42

John 9:25

And a familiar Old Testament scripture –

Psalm 27:4

Too many of us are involved in too many things. The key to spiritual progress is to concentrate on one thing – winning the race.

Any athlete will tell you that the race is not won on the track; it is won or lost when they are training for the race. If they are insufficiently trained, they will not run the race. We must devote ourselves to running the race, and not be distracted by other things that could be rolled into our path.

In the days of the Greek games when marathon races were run, the athletes ran naked with their bodies oiled to minimise moisture loss, and not to be impeded by clothing. Bystanders would try to slow them down by rolling balls of gold on to the track to divert the attention of the athlete – if they stopped and picked these up, not only had they slowed themselves down, but they then had to carry the weight which further slowed their progress and often resulted in losing the race.

What are you holding that is impeding your Christian race right now?

3. Direction:

Philippians 3:13

Most people in the world are controlled by the past, but the Christian is running the race, looking towards the future. The athlete would lose the race if they looked back, if you look back your past will become your future -

Luke 9:62

Paul tells us to forget what is behind and concentrate on what is before us. In using the term 'forget what is behind' he does not mean fail to remember! It means do not any longer be influenced, or affected by the negativity of your past. Instead, count on what Jesus has done and is doing and the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in you daily, giving thanks for the present and looking with anticipation towards the future. He *will* perfect that which He began in you; He will present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy.

Jude 24 NASB

'²⁴Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy'.

So when Paul is saying forget the past, he is simply saying, break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but we can be free from it as we live in the new nature that being 'in Christ' gives us.

If anyone could have been held back by the past, Paul had a reason –

1 Timothy 1:12 – 17 New American Standard Bible

'¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.'

Paul had experienced God's complete forgiveness and though he freely admits he formerly had been all these things, he knew his previous sinfulness, and he knew what it was to be forgiven, so these things did not limit him now – instead he was full of joy and thanksgiving for deliverance from the past and everything which attached to it. Like the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, he knew what he had been and what he was now and rejoiced in the new.

These things did not hamper Paul, they inspired him to run the race.

We can see an example of something similar in the Old Testament in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Genesis 45:1-15

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers he held no feeling of resentment towards them. Joseph had learnt to see the past from God's viewpoint and says '*God meant it for good*'.

It is possible to have dissatisfaction, devotion and direction and still lose the race because there is a fourth essential –

4. Determination:

Philippians 3:14

No athlete becomes a winner by listening to lectures on running, watching films, reading books or cheering from the sidelines. They become a winner by getting into the race and being determined to win. The Christian runner with the spiritual mind realises that God must work in them if they are going to win the race.

Philippians 2:12, 13 The Message

Rejoicing Together

'¹²⁻¹³What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent

and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.'

John 15:5 AMP

'I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing.'

God works in us in order to work through us, and he cannot do through us what he has not been able to do in us. As we apply ourselves to the spiritual life, God is able to mature and strengthen us for the race.

2 Timothy 4:7 – 8

The runner with spiritual determination.

Philippians 3:14

When we reach the finishing line there is a reward –

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Wreaths, palm branches and ribbons were the corruptible crowns the Greeks won. And whilst only one athlete received the prize, every Christian may receive the reward. The laurel or oak wreath or crown received by the Olympic Games athlete faded, but the crowns Jesus gives will never spoil or fade – the important thing for us is that we run the race Jesus has set out before us.

So those are the four essentials for running the race that is set before us and receiving the reward; there is just one final thing that we need –

5. Discipline:

Philippians 3:15, 16

It is not enough to run hard to win the race; you must also obey the rules. In these verses Paul emphasises the importance of the Christian remembering the spiritual rules laid down in the scriptures. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians in

1 Corinthians 9:24 – 27 New King James Version

Striving for a Crown

²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶ Therefore I run

thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.'

If an athlete breaks training or breaks the rules, they are disqualified, no athlete in the games was crowned unless they competed according to the rules.

2 Timothy 2: 3- 5

The issue here is not what the athletes or the spectators think, but what the judges say. One day each one of us will stand before the judgement seat of Christ to receive our rewards.

Romans 14:10 – 12

The Greek word for 'judgement seat' is Bema. It was the word used to describe the place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes. It was a small, raised platform – it is **not** the Great White Throne, as believers we will never stand before that, this is where we receive our rewards for deeds done '*in the body*'. If we have disciplined ourselves to obey the rules, we will receive a prize. Bible history is full of people who began the race with great zeal, but failed at the end because they disregarded God's commandments. It is not how we start but how we finish that is important. As previously stated, you cannot lose your salvation but you can suffer loss of reward.

1 Corinthians 3:15 Amplified Bible

⁴⁵But if any person's work is burned up [under the test], he will suffer the loss [of it all, losing his reward], though he himself will be saved, but only as [one who has passed] through fire.'

It happened to Lot –

Genesis 19

It happened to Samson –

Judges 16

It happened to Saul –

1 Samuel 28:16 – 20

And in the New Testament, it happened to Ananias and Sapphira and it can happen to us, but we do not want to think about that eventuality, we have no need to be disqualified if we will run the race and finish our course with joy.

In the book of Hebrews, again, the writer likens our spiritual race to an athletic contest as he tells us to strip off everything that would hinder us and run with patient endurance and persistence, the race that is set before us -

Hebrews 12:1, 2 AMP

'¹THEREFORE THEN, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony to the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance (unnecessary weight) and that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us, ²looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God'.

May God richly bless you as you run your race, 'Looking unto Jesus'.

Amen.