

Main Reading: **Philippians** 3:12-21

Last week, we covered the first 11 verses of chapter 3.

We don't have time to do a *full* recap, I *do* want to remind you of the mountain peak moments...

- #1 — **Rejoice!** Christians have the *biggest* reason to rejoice. [**forgiven!**] (v. 1)
- #2 — Watch out for **false teachers**. (v. 2) Especially those who require you to do works [**circumcision**] in order to be considered a believer.
- #3 — Paul had a great **résumé**, but he threw it all away in order to know Jesus. (v. 4-8)
- #4 — Righteousness is required for Heaven. We don't have it. Jesus gives us *His* through **faith**. [**imputation**] v. 9
- #5 — God has purposes for **suffering**.

v. 12-14

There is a goal to the Christian life—Holiness/being Christlike/godliness.

But here's the problem with that goal: we are all *still* sinners—including Paul.

Yes, *every* true Christian is saved and **forgiven**...

but every *honest* Christian *must* admit that they are also *still* a sinner.

From the moment you trusted in Jesus as Lord, and the minute you realized how *terrible* sin is,

God declared you **innocent** [**justification**]...but you have sinned *since* being forgiven...

So, where does that leave us? Where did that leave Paul?

After all, he was a Christian, but here he is; admitting that he has not reached the goal.

So, how can we *still* be sinner and *still* be forgiven at the same time?

[This is what we might call a **paradox**—a true statement that *seems* to contradict itself.]

In the 1500's, a preacher, named Martin Luther, gave a *Latin* name to this scenario:

**Latin:** "Simul justus et peccator" | **English:** "Simultaneously **justified** and a sinner."

[SIMUL — same time, JUSTUS — justified, ET — and; "**Et tu Brute?**", PECCATOR — sinful]

This is an obvious fact about the Christian life, but there are dangerous extremes on both sides.

One side says: "Nope. I don't sin anymore. I am *totally* holy." [**not even tempted**]

They need to do some reading...1 **John** 1:8, and **Matthew** 6:11-12 (*daily* [**daily bread**] forgiveness).

When God saves us, he doesn't *immediately* place us into a new **body** with a sinless **mind**...

We will get those rewards in Heaven...Until then, we are in a **battle** against our flesh.

But the other *dangerous* extreme says: "Why bother with self-control? I'm forgiven, and I know I'm going to sin anyways, so I might as well indulge myself."

Obviously, both of these extremes are wrong.

Christians will **not** become perfect. But, at the same time, our forgiveness isn't a license to sin.

Paul speaks against that type of thinking in **Romans** 6:1-2

And in our Philippians text, Paul makes it clear that it's not about perfection, and it *certainly* isn't about being content with your current spiritual state...

On earth, we won't see *perfection* but we should see **progression**.

Now, understand that there will be no circumstance in which you could say:

"You know...I've been such a *godly* person recently, I deserve a few days off."

You haven't arrived to that point, and neither had Paul when He wrote this letter.

Instead, we "***forget what's behind, strain forward to what's ahead, and press toward the goal.***"

But why should we press on? With what **motivation** do we do this?

Paul spells it out. Your *salvation* is your motivation. Jesus Christ has made us *His own*!

Notice the **order** here. You don't get saved by trying to be Christlike...

You live the Christian life *because* you are *already* saved.

Once you belong to the one, true, living, and kind God, you will be motivated to pursue Him.

Your salvation should have you running toward God's commands like a **sprinter** runs to the **finish**.

That's the Bible's analogy for Christian life: an **athlete**—a runner. 1 **Corinthians** 9:24, **Hebrews** 12:1

And just like the olympic medal is awarded after the race, your prize

(a new body and a sinless mind) will be awarded to you at the **end** of the race, not in the middle...

So, "***don't drop out of the race,***" Paul says. "***Don't look back...Forget what's behind you.***"

Jesus gave this same warning **Luke** 9:62 So...what exactly are we to not look back at?

**1) We shouldn't look back on the good things we've done as ways to **earn** God's favor.**

In Paul's case, it's his Jewish background—his previous **religion** where doing all kinds of works, laws, and rituals was supposed to save you.

Paul was now trusting in Jesus, and there's no looking back.

**2) We shouldn't look back on our **sinful** past **positively**/with desire for it.**

Think about the story of Lot's family leaving Sodom and Gomorrah,

Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.

[Fun fact: that geographical area has many halite formations (rock salt) to this day.]

An angel told her, "Don't even look back as you leave" but she disobeyed...

**3) And we shouldn't look back and dwell on our past failures.**

It's hard to move forward in your spiritual growth if all you can think about is your sinful past.

Now, you *should* look back and identify sin, but you should also praise God for His forgiveness.

Here's a great example of this: **Romans** 7:21 - 8:1

So, examine yourself, are you growing and pressing on? Or, are you looking back?

The Bible is a great landmark to show us our progress in this race.

Take the the Sermon on the Mount—it's Jesus message about what it means to live as a Christian.

1. A *distinguishable* lifestyle — **Matthew 5:13-14** — Jesus calls Christians "Salt and Light"

2. Obedience to God — **Matthew 5:17-48** — Jesus describes Christians as people who

- Hear and obey the written **word** (5:17-19)
- **Think** differently...it's more than just outward behavior (5:21-32)
- Keep their **promises** (5:33-37)
- Don't seek **retaliation**, love their neighbors/enemies (5:38-47)
- **Worship** sincerely (6:1-18)
- View **money** through the lens of the Bible (6:19-24)
- Uncritically **love** others (7:1-12)

v. 15

Throughout this *entire* study, we've noted that the Philippians had a very solid church.

But, even still, there was **trouble** and confusion brewing among them.

The Philippians had a very solid church, but they *still* had troublemakers. [**easily applicable**]

So, there must've been a group at their church, who had a bad **attitude** toward spiritual growth.

And, in verse 15, we see how Paul addresses these people.

See, when Paul writes "***I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying,***" there are some readers who'll say "*Well, that may be the case for him, but not for me...I have made it. I am good enough.*"

And to them, Paul says "Everyone who's **mature** will agree with me"

In other words, "*The first sign of spiritual maturity is realizing that you aren't mature enough*"

None of us are even close to the point where we can put our spiritual life in **cruise control**.

We should *all* be able to admit our imperfections.

But, for some people, it doesn't matter *how much* teaching or preaching they hear,

almost *nothing* will **change** their mindset or their lifestyle.

You could show them every Bible **verse** to correct the sin in their life, but it won't have any effect.

The *only* thing that could impact these people is hitting rock bottom. **Job** 36:15

So, Paul's attitude toward these people is "If you won't listen to me, it'll take an act of God."

This may even include **discipline** from God. **Hebrews** 12:11 says,

But maybe you're wondering "*How does someone get to this point of spiritual deafness?*"

Well, in this case, they had been *incorrectly* **taught** by the "dogs" mentioned back in v. 3.

So, Paul offers *this* encouragement in v. 16, "***...let's continue following the truth we already have***" (ERV)

These words echo the Prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah** 6:16 (*the old way / godly path*)

This is why we Christians stick to the Bible...Yes, it's **old**, but it's *the* **godly** way.

When teachers come along, we should pull out our Bibles to analyze what's being said. **Acts** 17:11

v. 17

Now, Paul gives them simple steps to spiritual growth.

**1) Follow Paul's example.**

Paul's example was **not** perfect, but it was **memorable** for the Philippians.

Paul started their church, knew most of them very well, & they would've remembered his conduct.

Paul wasn't their *only* example...He tells them to watch "**those who are living the way we showed you**"

So, it's true that finding a **mentor** *could* be a wise move for your spiritual life.

This is one of the reasons why it's so good to intermingle with people of other ages at church.

Older Christians are more-than-likely *wiser* Christians, and so they often make great mentors.

But, here's the one drawback to following the example of others: they mess up—they're sinners.

Even Paul was a sinner, and his example was *only* good to the extent that he was following Christ.

The *only perfect* example is Jesus Christ, and we can find His example in the pages of our Bibles.

Nowadays, we Christians are blessed. We can turn to the Bible and *always* find

the *right example* of what to do in a certain situation.

v. 18

Then, immediately, Paul gives them an example of who **not** to follow.

He describes them as "enemies of Christ"—a reference to those *same* "dogs" again...

Paul thinks about the wrong things that they taught and it brings him to **tears**.

David expressed this *same* feeling in the Psalms. **Psalm** 69:9

It should give us *great* concern when someone teaches wrongly about God.

v. 19

Here, Paul goes into a deeper description of what these people are like.

- "**Their end is destruction**"—they're headed for **Hell**. [**Another reason for tears**]
- "**Their God is their belly**"—not a sense of *actual* hunger...these people *always* "go with their **gut**"  
They worship whatever *feels* right. They do everything to fulfill their own desires. They elevate what they want to the level of God's authority.

- **"Their glory is their shame"**—They elevate themselves in front of others. "I'm holy...I rank higher than you...I'm gifted." Jesus never put others down to lift himself up...He **washed** his disciples feet. Paul never lectured people that he was better than them. He **admitted** his weaknesses. Anyone who comes and brags about their "special authority," doesn't have any. A good teacher's job is never to draw attention to *themselves*...instead, they should always be shifting the attention to Christ.
- Their minds are **"set on earthly things"**—these false teachers were focused on **money**, or women, or anything that the world offers.

**v. 20**

Unlike the enemies of Christ, a true believer's destiny is Heaven.

We are really just traveling through and visiting this world...

Paul describes this situation like this: we are **citizens** of Heaven.

In fact, our names are *registered* there in the Book of Life.

Remember, way back to our *first* study, Philippi was a Roman **colony**.

Just like Virginia used to be a British colony.

In the same way, the *true* church is a *Heavenly* colony on earth.

Though we are still on earth, we *already* belong to Heaven....we have *dual* citizenship.

**v. 21**

We are *eagerly* **waiting** for Jesus to appear again, and take us to our homeland.

There, he'll give us bodies that are no longer subject to weakness, disease, or pain.

We will have bodies that will be able to fulfill our heavenly jobs,

and we'll be able to glorify God without getting tired.