

The Passionate Pursuit of Knowing Christ (Part III) Philippians 3:15-21

All Stand and Read Scripture

Philippians 3:15-21 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ*, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

We have been using an illustration of athletics as we have been going through the 3rd chapter of Philippians. It is still very pertinent in this section of scripture.

A good illustration for this passage of scripture is **exercise**. All of you would agree that exercising is a good thing. For most of us, it is a struggle to exercise regularly. We don't exercise because it is **hard to find time** to do it and exercising is **physically, hard work**. It is difficult to convince yourself to do exercise because you don't get **instant gratification** for it. **You just get tired and sore**.

It is only when the long term benefits are considered that exercise starts to make sense. Once we have locked onto those benefits of more stamina, stronger muscles, less flab, and greater agility, it is much easier to set a schedule for exercising and set weight and strength goals.

Living our "new life" for Christ is much the same way. As Christians, **we all know** that we should be **pursuing Christ**. **We all know** that it is a **tremendous privilege to know Jesus Christ**.

Paul spelled it out for us in verse 8.

Philippians 3:8 (NASB)

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

In relationship to Christ, everything is loss. Remember that “Knowing Christ” is not a word that refers to an “intellectual” or “book” knowledge of Christ.

It is a knowledge that is based upon a personal relationship with Christ. It is an intimate knowledge.

We need to be “**more like Christ**”. We achieve this by being passionate about “**knowing Jesus Christ**”. The better we intimately know Christ by following what He teaches us through the scriptures, the more we will be like Him.

We **KNOW** this, but it is **HARD!** Just like exercise, it is hard to do. We must look beyond the instant gratification of earthly gains and see the long term benefits of serving Christ in our lives.

The long term benefits of **EXERCISE** is:

- more stamina
- stronger muscles
- less flab
- and greater agility

The long term of benefits of **KNOWING CHRIST** is:

- become more like Christ
- gain wisdom
- joy
- and an eternal life in heaven

Last week we talked about four of six spiritual exercise steps that we can use to pursue our goal of “**knowing Christ**”.

1. You need to admit your spiritual need.

In verse 12, Paul writes, “**not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect**”. Paul says, I have not become close, and I know it. We have to diligently pursue it.

2. You need to diligently pursue Christ’s likeness.

Paul continued by saying, “**but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus**”.

Remember that “press on” was the idea of pursuing with great effort.

“Lay Hold” means to “Grab”. Paul said, I want to “grab the very thing that Christ grabbed me for. Christ grabbed me out of my sin, now, I want to work hard and grab hold of Him. I want to be more like Christ.

3. You must not be distracted.

Verse 13 says “**Forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead**”. When a sprinter looks over his shoulder, he is being distracted from executing perfect form and is often overtaken in the race.

4. You need to stay focused on the prize.

Verse 14 says to “**Press on toward the prize**”. It means to keep your eyes on the finish line.

5. You need to think like an athlete.

Philippians 3:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

You must have the winning attitude of an athlete. The winning attitude of a Christian is that he wants to be like Christ. I want to put effort towards it because it is important to me. I want to become as much like Christ as possible.

6. You Must not take shortcuts.

Philippians 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

The phrase “let us keep living” means to keep things in a line; keeping them straight. When compared to racing, it is like staying in your own lane. If you don’t, you will be disqualified. Don’t take shortcuts.

There are no shortcuts to a mature spiritual life. It all takes time.

A good parallel is like dieting. We all know that eating the right amount of the correct foods and exercise will cause us to lose weight.

Many diet plans will suggest that you can eat anything you want without exercise as long as you take their pill, etc. But these shortcuts never work.

When the diet plans fail, we go back to exercise and a balanced diet. It all takes time. There really is no shortcuts in dieting. **As** this is true in dieting, which in the long run is not important, it is certainly true in our Christian life which **does have eternal importance.**

Maturing in Christ takes time. Growing in grace takes time. Living for Christ takes time. Disciplining your life takes time. There are no shortcuts. It takes time in the Word of God and it takes time in prayer.

Just like exercise, we know that, but it is still very hard. The key, once again, is to look at the long term benefits of **“knowing Christ”**. Also, when we exercise, it is good to have encouragement and direction from others to help us achieve our goals.

Paul gives us this encouragement and direction in the last five verses of chapter 3.

1. Follow those who pursue Christ.
2. Beware of those who oppose Christ.
3. Remember our identity in Christ.

BODY:

I. Follow Those Who Pursue Christ.

Philippians 3:17 (NASB)

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

You might ask, why should I follow somebody else? Why can't I just follow Christ?

I would ask, How are you going to know what to do when you sin? Christ never sinned, so we cannot know from any of His examples how to handle that situation.

We cannot use Christ as an example on how to ask for forgiveness, because He never had to ask for forgiveness.

The great thing about following other people's example is that all of us have sinned. Every Christian is sinful. So, what is wonderful about having human examples is that I observe someone who is just as sinful as me, and I can watch that person and that helps me to know what to do even when I mess up.

Thus Paul tells us to follow after his example AND observe those who are **“walking according to the pattern you have in us.”** This means that we must identify those who are truly following Christ.

Paul uses the word, “PATTERN”. Pattern is a design or model.

ILLUSTRATION:

When a coin was made many years ago, a piece of metal was placed under a die and was struck by a hammer. When the metal was struck, it took on the pattern or likeness of the die and became a coin.

When Christ “grabs” us and we reach out and “grab hold of Him”, we become an example of Christ and become a Christian.

Not only must we identify those who are a pattern of Christ, but we are also “observe” or study them. Find out how they handle different situations in their life that might help you with similar problems.

It is important that we are able to identify those who are in the likeness of Christ based upon the Word of God, because there are “professing Christians” who will try to pull us away from our faith.

II. **Beware of Those Who Oppose Christ.**

Philippians 3:18-19 (NASB)

¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Paul warns us that there are MANY of these people.

Who are these people? It is not people are in Christ’s church. Paul uses “brethren” in verse 17, but refers to these people as “enemies of the cross of Christ”.

Paul could be referring to the “Judaizers” mentioned in verse 2. **Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.** They were Jews who were trying to make gentiles, who had accepted Christ, to start observing Old Testament law. They wanted to add to the gospel of grace.

They would say, “Christ is wonderful. Follow Christ and keep the law”.

Another example might someone who would try to teach you that you are saved by just putting your faith in Christ. It doesn’t matter what you do, after you are “saved”, because you are saved by grace. Any teaching that does not follow God’s Word is an “enemy of the cross”.

Paul gives us four identifiers by which we can identify these people.

1. Their destination is destruction.
This is referring to an eternal judgment or damnation. They are enemies of the cross of Christ, and the only way we can go to heaven is through the cross of Christ.
2. Their god is their appetite.

The word “appetite” probably refers to “self”. This is probably speaking about a person who lives for himself. An enemy of the cross of Christ will be self-centered. He seeks after things that will please himself.

Even in the church, many are attending a church to meet their needs, instead of worshipping God, which is the first commandment, and loving each other, which is the second commandment.

We must not be focusing on ourselves!

3. Their glory is in their shame.
They rejoice in things that should be shameful. We can all come up with many worldly things that the Word of God tells us is wrong. These people will be proud of these shameful things.
4. They set their minds of earthly things.
Earthly things are just the opposite of heavenly. Earthly things are not all bad. We must realize, though, that earthly things have no eternal value and we must not put our focus on them.

Paul warns us that there are false teachers out there that will try to destroy your testimony through Satan. We MUST be able to identify them and BEWARE!

III. Remember Your Identity in Christ.

Philippians 3:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Four encouragements are given to us.

1. Our citizenship is in heaven.
Paul wants to remind us, that if we “**know Christ**”, we are citizens of Heaven, but we are not residents there yet.

The song goes, “**This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.**”

2. Our expectation is Christ.
Notice the second part of verse 20, “**we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ**”.

This begs the question, what are we eagerly looking forward to?

- I can't wait until I get married.
- I can't wait until I get a new grandchild.
- I can't wait until I get whatever thing!

If we took seriously our citizenship in heaven, we would be thinking, "I wonder if Jesus Christ is coming back today?"

"I wonder when I might see Jesus Christ?"

Christ is coming back and we should be eagerly anticipating the return of Christ.

3. Our glorification is certain.
Our citizenship is in heaven; we are anticipating Christ's return; and our glorification is certain.

Verse 21 says Christ "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

Glorification will occur in the future when we are completely saved from the presence of sin. We will **BE LIKE CHRIST**.

CONCLUSION:

I would like to conclude with this passage of scripture.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (NASB)

⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. ⁵⁵ O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

One day Christ will come. Until then we are called to passionately continue to pursue Christ's likeness.

How do we become like Christ? It is through spiritual growth in our life.

- It is reading and studying God's Word regularly.

- It is praying continuously by keeping your mind on Christ.
- It is praying for wisdom and guidance.
- It is listening to the Word preached and taught.
- It is by letting your light shine before men.
- It is proclaiming God's Word to everyone who will hear.

What is your next step of spiritual growth? What is the next thing that you could work on that would please Christ. We are all at different levels of maturity. Let the Holy Spirit direct you into new areas for growth.

If you have never turned your life over to Christ, today could be your day of salvation. Christ wants you to start living your life for Him and passionately pursue knowing Him. Christ died for all of your sins. Sin separates us from a perfect and Holy God and prevents us from knowing Christ. Christ has promised to take away your sins.

If you have not turned your life over to Christ, I want to give you that opportunity this morning.

If you are need of prayer, or want to become recognized as a member of Greenwood Christian church, please come forward this morning as we sing the invitation hymn.

He is Lord.

He is Lord. He is Lord.
He has risen from the grave and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.