

| **Philippians** |
Week 9 Scripture Guide | Philippians 3:12-21

Biblical Context

In this week's passage, Paul starts by saying "Not that I have already attained *this*"¹ connecting us back to 3:10-11: "My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead."² With this in mind, Paul explains first what *his* goals are, and uses that to instruct the Philippian church.

vv.12-16 So, what's Paul's goal? To recall: it isn't about *him* (3:12-13a). He doesn't want to be like Christ for his own benefit but because he wants to "make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (12b) The Greek in this verse, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφοθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ,³ can also be translated as "that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." When we consider this rather than "Christ Jesus has made me His own", we see that Paul is saying he is trying to achieve the standard and goal set for him by Christ Jesus. The goal here is a single-mindedness, "forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead" with his focus on the "prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (13b-14).⁴ As the *Africa Bible Commentary* puts it:

We are not yet complete. We have not yet reached our destination. To claim that we have shows a lack of humility. But we also should not dwell on our past. Paul ignores his past successes and failures as he presses forward expectantly to reach the goal. Our Lord, too, does not dwell on our past failures or successes. He wants us to keep moving forward by having faith in Him until the day of victory. A mark of a Christian is keeping on towards the goal, trusting in the Lord despite the circumstances.⁵

vv.17-21 Paul moves quickly into explaining that this should be the goal that he wants for the Philippians, that all of us should have a single-minded focus on pursuing Christ in faith, regardless of our circumstances, until the day of victory. He wants us to "be imitators of me" (v.17)⁶ not because he's perfect already, but because Christ has called us to this goal just as He had called Paul. But, just as he has called the Philippians to live in unity, he warns them to be aware of those around them. "Watch carefully those who are living this way...For many live, about whom I have often told you, and now, with tears, I tell you that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." (v 17b-18).⁷ There was a danger in Philippi of the Judaizers trying to add to the Gospel.⁸ They would force the Christians to follow a life of works

¹ *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019. (Emphasis mine)

² *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019. All Scripture references in this will be from this source unless otherwise stated.

³ Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature, 2011–2013), *Php* 3:12.

⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁵ Adeyemo, Tokunboh, Solomon Andria, Kwame Bediako, Isabel Apawo Phiri, and Yusufu Turaki. *Africa Bible Commentary*. Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2010. 1472.

⁶ *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁸ The Judaizers were a sect of individuals within the Church who sought to avoid persecution and suffering by conforming to the Mosaic Law, forcing those Gentile converts to Christianity to be circumcised and to abide by the other laws which they had been released from by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Paul specifically calls these individuals out in Galatians 6:11-16. (Unknown. "The Judaizers' True Motives." *Ligonier Ministries*. Ligonier Ministries, 2021. Last modified 2021. Accessed June 9, 2021.

[https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/judaizers-true-motives/.](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/judaizers-true-motives/))

instead of grace.⁹ Here Paul warns the believers in Philippi to beware of them.¹⁰ Paul weeps because these individuals are not brothers or sisters, but are rather enemies of Christ. Dr. Tony Evans explains it this way:

Paul says, with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ (3:18). They live lives of physical gratification and self-centeredness. He says their glory is in their shame. They praise themselves, which is shameful, when they should be praising the Lord. They are focused on earthly things (3:19) rather than the pursuit of Christ.¹¹

Paul ends this passage with encouragement: “Our citizenship¹² is in heaven — and we await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” who will one day make us perfect. We may not have reached the goal, we may not yet be perfect, but one day Christ will return and we will find ourselves transformed “into the likeness of his glorious body.”

Connection and Application

First, Jesus Christ has “laid hold” of us and set us the goal of knowing Him, becoming like Him, sharing with Him in His sufferings and resurrection. Second, we are to single-mindedly pursue this goal, pressing forward toward Christ, forgetting all our past failures and sins and to know only Christ. And third, we are to surround ourselves with those who are doing the same thing, looking to those who are more mature in faith as an example. We are to remove ourselves from those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ” who either add to the faith we follow, or pursue earthly things over the pursuit of Christ.

⁹ The Epistle to the Galatians really handles this issue as well

¹⁰ Wright, N. T., and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 444-446.

¹¹ Evans, Tony. *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019. 1244. Using the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation.

¹² It’s interesting to note here that the Greek word translated as “citizenship” is a variant of the same word used in Phil 1:27 “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” which is rawly translated as “live as a citizen.” We see here that Paul is hammering the point home to the Philippians that their citizenship as Romans is nothing compared to their citizenship in the Kingdom of God.