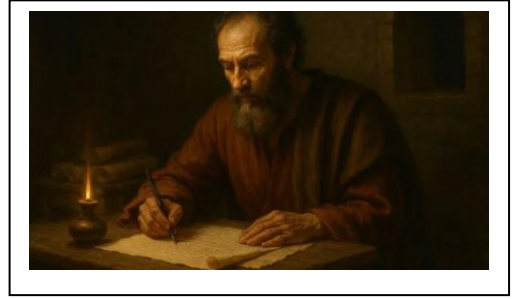


The Joy of Persevering

Philippians 3:1-21

Labors, imprisonments, beatings, lashes, stoning, shipwrecked, journeys, robbers, false brothers, hardship, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold, exposure, pressure of concern for all the churches. This is a list of Paul's perils from II Corinthians 11:23-28. This is the context in which he served God! How did he persevere through all these experiences? In this message we are going to see his answer in Philippians 3.



Today we continue our series, “**Joy for the Journey**” in the book of Philippians. Last week we considered the **joy of serving** by Paul's exhortation (2:12-16) and three examples (2:17-30). You can also check out “**False and True Service**” on this webpage in a separate document. You will see many contrasting qualities of service from Philippians 2.

Where does God want you to serve? Fredrick Buechner wrote, “*The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*” [READ MORE](#) We must remember that true service is not merely...

- **accomplishing** more and more tasks
- **altruism**, in the sense of human effort to do good
- **automatic**, as if checking all the boxes equals results

Today we turn our attention to the **joy of persevering**. There is joy in letting go of earthly accomplishment in order to gain the reward God has for us. Paul calls believers to a lifestyle of joy: “*rejoice in the Lord*” (v.1). Observe two challenging contexts in which Christians need to persevere.

[1] Persevere despite the legalist – verses 1-16

What is the danger?

Paul gave an intense description of Judaizers who taught legalistic, performance-based religion (v.2). He referred to them as: “dogs” or “evil workers” or the “false circumcision” (κατατομην, “mutilation”). Admittedly, this was harsh language. But Paul was determined to protect the Philippians from the temptation to work for their right standing with God. The true circumcision is comprised of those, who by the Holy Spirit find their life in Jesus Christ (v.3 – see also Galatians 5:1-6).

What is the response?

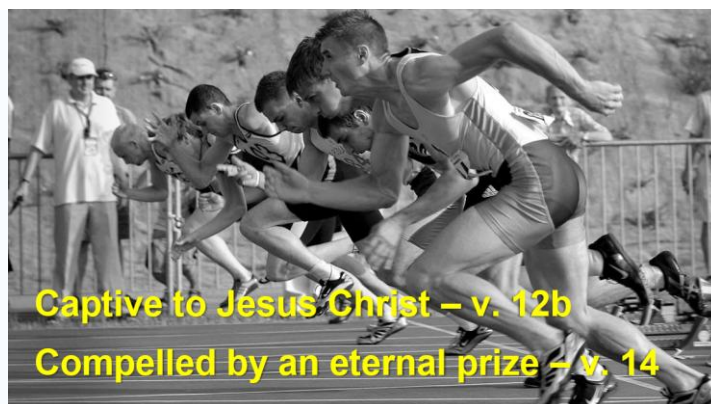
The correct response is two-fold. First, we put behind us any self-effort. The second part of this response is to press forward into the work which God is accomplishing in our hearts.

1. **Putting behind** is a deliberate decision. How well do we do this? Dwelling on our past (good and bad) is very common. Some things are put behind us without our consent, such as Sears (1952-2018); Woodward's (1892-1993); Eatons (1869-2002); Bay (1670-2025). Paul was *intention*. His credentials in verses 4-6 included: circumcision (ritual); Israelite (racial); tribe (lineal); Hebrew (linguistic/cultural); Pharisee (religious); persecutor (zeal); blameless (legal). What was of human “gain” (κερδη) Paul considered “loss” (ζημιαν) “for the sake of Christ” (vv.7-8). Tennis legend Roger Federer won only 54% of points – of each he said “*when it's behind you, it's behind you.*” [WATCH VIDEO](#)

2. **Pressing forward** is expressed by Paul in two ways. First in “knowing Jesus” (v.8) and second being “found in Him” as it relates to the gift of a righteous standing before God (v.9). In the Amplified translation these two verses read this way:

I count everything as loss compared to the priceless privilege and supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord [and of growing more deeply and thoroughly acquainted with Him – a joy unequaled]. For His sake I have lost everything, and I consider it all garbage, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him [believing and relying on Him], not having any righteousness of my own derived from [my obedience to] the Law and its rituals, but [possessing] that [genuine righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Paul echoed and intensified his longing to put behind and press forward. Any personal good is eclipsed by **engagement** with God (v.10) and being made fit by God’s grace for **resurrection** (v.11). A running race illustrates both steps. A runner **puts behind** anything that would hinder progress (v.13). Paul had not crossed the finish line (“been perfected” v.12a). But like a runner he was **pressing forward** (διωκω) toward victory. But this involves two graces:



In the 1929 Rose Bowl, U of Cal faced Georgia Tech. In the second quarter, Roy Riegels recovered a fumble but got turned around and ran 65 yards the wrong way – stopped by a teammate just shy of scoring on his own team. Devastated, at half time Riegels told his coach that he could not back out on the field and face the crowd. His coach said, “Get up and go back out there; the game is only half over.”

[2] Persevere despite the lawless – verses 17-21

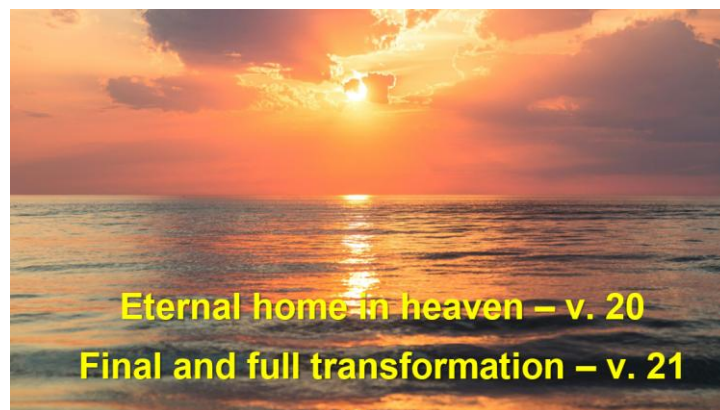
What is the second danger?

Some live (“walk”) as “*enemies of the cross of Christ*” (v.18). It made Paul weep when believers adopted **antinomianism**. C. H. Dodd described Christians who “*practiced and defended immoral license in the name of Christian ‘liberty.’*” (**TNTC: Philippians**, R. P. Martin, Eerdmans, 1978, 159). This means minimizing God’s standards which includes forfeiting the blessings therein (see Psalm 119). Rather than obeying God, “*their god is their appetite*” and “*their glory is in their shame*” (v.19). Hedonists hate the cross which allows us to die to self and live in Christ! Hedonists prioritize the earthly and materialistic. Citizens of heaven set their sights on the eternal (see Col 3:1-2).

What is the response?

How do we respond to lawlessness? The human tendency is to react with restriction and isolation. Paul’s advice is different. It is a Spirit-fueled, Gospel oriented response.

1. The **pattern to follow** includes those noted in chapter 2. Paul urged the Philippians to follow his example as “*fellow-imitators*” (συμμιμηται, v.17). Paul longed for the Philippians to know their core identity is not to be self-possessed but possessed by God. Donald Carson warns that if we are not careful, we can confuse the Gospel with a “*list of moral commitments*” (a result of the Gospel). The focus must remain on what God has done, in Christ. Otherwise, we devolve into “*moralism that is finally without the power and the glory of Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended, and reigning.*” (***The Gospel and the Modern World: A Theological Vision for the Church***, (Crossway, 2023, 89)
2. The **prize to seek** is heaven’s reward not “earthly things” (ἐπιγειαίος – see Col 3:2). Our world urges us to “live in the moment”. But the believer’s present life is linked to a future hope – what we *are now* has purpose and meaning because of what we *will be* when Jesus returns (see I John 3:1-3). Living towards our heavenly prize ensures that “the most central thing about us” is following Jesus. God has called us, by His mercy and grace, to live in Christ both in the present (perseverance) and ultimately (eternity). This requires an “*eager yet patient expectation*” (ἀπεκδεχομεθα, v.20) of two things:



Conclusion

Today, our conclusion brings us to the communion table. This is an opportunity to celebrate Christ and not give into legalism on one hand, nor lawlessness on the other. Communion is a powerful statement that we are indeed “captive to Christ” for salvation is found in no other – see Acts 4:12.



We need to ask ourselves, “Have we opted out of the joy of persevering?” Missionary pioneer of may years ago, C. T. Studd put it this way, “*If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.*” (C. T. Studd)

As you reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus for your salvation, take some time to listen to this song about the gift of God’s grace in Christ: “[A Debtor to Mercy Alone](#)”.

Want to ponder what it means to know Christ? Here is a link to a 30 minute message, “[Paul’s Desire to Fully Know Christ](#)” (Philippians 3:10-11) by Dr. Kent Hughes.

Remember to check out worship songs of joy – see “[Paul’s Picks](#)”