

# Philippians 3

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth Ferguson

[ 0 : 00 ] of scripture. The letter of Paul to the Philippians on chapter 3. And again reading from verse 13. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 4. In the Acts of the Apostles, we have an account from chapter 16. In the Acts I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we have an account from chapter 16 of a visit that the Apostle Paul paid to the city of Philippi.

And you remember that at the city of Philippi, Paul and those who were with him went down to the river where a prayer meeting was being held.

And there was a woman there by the name of Lydia. And when the Apostle Paul started preaching, it says that the Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she gave heed to the words spoken by Paul.

[ 1 : 53 ] And there was another conversion in Philippi also. You may remember from the same chapter the account we have of the Philippian jailer.

Very hard man. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, his heart was broken. And he came and he asked the all-important question of Paul and Silas.

They were in the innermost prison and their feet in the stocks. And the question this man had was, Sir, what must I do to be saved?

And the answer from the Apostle, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. And that was, as it were, the beginning of great things in Philippi.

That was around the year 53 AD. But now, writing this letter, it is 10 years later on.

[ 2 : 57 ] Probably the year 63 or 64 AD. And the Apostle is writing to these people who make up the church at Philippi.

And he tells them the love that he has for them still. He says, from the first day until now. It's as if there has been an unbroken bond of fellowship between these people and the Apostle.

That has lasted all of these years. And that's a wonderful thing. When we are able, in the bonds of the Gospel, to continue loving one another in the bonds of peace.

And that's what happened with these people. They were those who were always in the Apostle's prayers. And they were mindful of him also in his trials and tribulations.

They would send him things to sustain him and support him. At the beginning of chapter 3 here, he says, finally, rejoice in the Lord, my brethren.

[ 4 : 07 ] And then he says, for to me, to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. It's as if he's saying, I'm just underlining certain things that you need always to keep before your mind.

And that's the same with ourselves also. The Lord underlines certain things for us in the Scripture and in our own personal experience.

He underlines certain teachings and certain things which we must be aware of. And this is what he says here. Beware of dogs.

Beware of evil workers. Beware of the mutilation or, in the authorised version, the concision. People who were Judaizers.

People who still loved the religion of the Jews and all the ceremonies attaching to it. And these people were very proactive in seeking to advance the Jewish religion at the expense of the gospel.

[ 5 : 21 ] And they would say, well, you need to be circumcised. You need to observe these outward aspects of the religion of the Jews if you are indeed to be saved.

But the apostle says, beware of them. And then he says, we are the circumcision. Verse 3.

Who worship God in the spirit. Who rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. Do you remember that circumcision involved the cutting away of flesh according to God's commandment?

And that was symbolic of the cutting away of allegiance to the flesh and to the things of the flesh. And these Judaizers, they were taking literally what the apostle Paul knew to be essentially a spiritual thing.

He says, we are the circumcision. The Lord has circumcised our hearts. He has come into our heart, into our life, and he has taken away that heart of stone, that allegiance to the things of the flesh, that allegiance to the things of the world.

[ 6 : 46 ] And he has set in our hearts a fear of himself, a love for himself, a desire after himself. And this is what he says in verse 3.

We worship God in the spirit, not in just merely outward things, as the religion of the Jews emphasized. They emphasize the outward aspect of the keeping of the law and so on, in all the practical outworking of that.

And we rejoice in Christ Jesus, and we have no confidence in the flesh. And then he goes on. And he said, if anybody could have confidence in the flesh, I am the man.

And I'm just going through this by way of introduction. I've come to three points in a minute. He says, I might also, verse 4, have confidence in the flesh. If anybody else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I am also.

I was circumcised on the eighth day. I am of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Concerning the law, a Pharisee, that is the most strict sect of those who were living for the religion of the Jews.

[ 8 : 02 ] And he says, concerning zeal, I was persecuted in the church of Christ. And concerning the righteousness which is in the law, I was blameless. It's as if he felt in his unconverted days that he had really made it.

And he, by his own works and religious activities, was able to gain the favour of God. But something happened in his life.

Verse 7, what things were gained to me? These I have counted loss for Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, his life was radically changed. His heart was changed. His affections were changed. His allegiance was changed. He saw things from a new perspective. He saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And he said, to remember what he said on the road to Damascus, Lord, what will you have me to do for you? He was open to direction from Jesus Christ, whom he had been persecuting through the persecution of the church.

[ 9 : 23 ] But now he comes to verse 13 onwards. And he says, I do not count myself to have apprehended. He says, I haven't reached.

I haven't been able to secure salvation and peace with God through my own efforts. Neither am I able to do anything in my own strength.

But this is what he's doing. And he summarises his Christian life under these three headings. One thing I do, he says, verse 13, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He's a man who's doing three things. He is forgetting certain things. He also is reaching forward to new things.

And he is pressing towards a certain goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[ 10 : 37 ] Well, if I could say a few words under each of these three headings. First of all, the apostle says, I am forgetting those things which are behind.

Well, he says earlier on in the chapter, in verse 7, what things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Verse 8, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. He's talking about the things that he, in his unconverted days, held dear.

The religious practices that he held dear. The things that he trusted in. And the achievements that he felt he had made.

And the things that he had to be proud of. Because it says that he was, in his own estimation, concerning the righteousness which is in the law, that he was blameless.

[ 11 : 51 ] What a proud achiever, Saul of Tarshish, was in his unconverted days. And there are people like that still in the world.

They think that their lifestyle, as it is linked, must secure favor with God. Because comparing themselves with other people, they feel that they are on a higher level. And that they are proud of their achievements. And they are moral people, law-keeping people, and all of the rest of it. But you see, Saul of Tarshish was like that.

But he came to a point in his life, when the Lord showed him, that all these things in which he was trusting, were just rubbish.

They wouldn't stand the light of day. They wouldn't stand the light of the judgment seat of Christ. They wouldn't stand him in good stead, on his way to eternity.

[ 12 : 56 ] And he knew that his house was being built on sinking sand. And he realised that in the day that the Lord made his life change.

But now he says, I forget these or those things which are behind. Well, there are certain things that the Christian, on their journey through life, they realise that God's kind providence took care of them with.

Even before your converted days, and you look back now from your situation as a believing Christian, and you say, Well, I can see that if the Lord had not intervened in my life, at that particular time, things would be completely different.

It's as if the Lord intervened in his kind providence. And we thank him for that. But what the Apostle here is talking about is, these things that the Apostle, by his own efforts, was so proud of, by way of living as a Pharisee, and praying every day, and having long prayers, in his own estimation, and so on, he says, These things I forget.

Because the Lord has come into my life, and has shown me a new way. Amazing the way the Lord works in the life of his people.

[ 14 : 36 ] He brings his light into our mind, and into our conscience, into our heart. And when you see the sun shining into our womb, you see specks of dust in the air, that you weren't aware of, before the sun started shining in.

Well, that's the way it was with the Apostle. That's the way it is with the people of God. When the sun of righteousness, shines into our heart, and into our mind, we realize, that we're not at all as good as we thought we were.

In fact, that we are sinners like the rest. And the Apostle said of himself, that he was the chief of sinners. And so it is, we see our lostness, and we see the failures, and the shortcomings of our life, when the Lord comes in.

And we no longer lean upon our own good works. No longer lean upon our own achievements. He says, I forget these things. When he writes to the Thessalonian church, he puts it this way.

He says, you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and to God. There was this turning. There was this about turning.

[ 15 : 56 ] Maybe it was gradual, or maybe it was, like the prison warder in Philippi, seemingly instantaneous. But however it happened, a turning has come.

And now, you no longer serve yourself, but you serve the Lord. You no longer serve idols, you serve the living God. You no longer seek to attain the favor of God by your own efforts.

You look to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the savior of sinners, the one who is able to save to the uttermost, or to come unto God by him.

Forgetting those things which are behind. As a Christian, there are many things that you want to forget.

In Psalm 25, the psalmist says, Don't remember and remind me of my past sins, my sins and thoughts of youth.

[ 17 : 01 ] Do thou, O Lord, forget. After thy loving kindness, forget all of these things. And then, of course, in Psalm 45, the psalmist speaks and he says, Remember your father's house no more.

Don't remember, as it were, the lifestyle, seeking to go back there. No, don't go back there. Your face now is turning forward and you're looking in a new direction.

I was thinking of this yesterday and a story that I heard a long time ago came to mind when in the olden days people were living in what they called black houses.

And if money became available, their aim was to build what they called a white house.

A concrete house. And that's what many people did. And once the new house was ready, they would move right in there.

[18:18] But there was one individual and he used to go back to the old house, the black house. And he would look at some of the furniture they had left there and he'd go, Oh, well, there's a few years of life in that table yet.

Think I'll take it into the new house. And he would do that. Then he'd go back after another while and look at a chair or something else. Well, that wouldn't look out of place in the new place. I'd take it back and put it in the new house. And so on. It's as if they were taking something from the old life and establishing it in the new life.

In the new house. And what the apostle is saying here is, you mustn't do that. What he did was the past life and his past attitudes and his past sins and his past so-called achievements as a Pharisee. He says, I forget them. I leave them where they were. Don't take your past life into your new life.

[19:32] Don't do it. Leave the clear days. You are a new person and don't encumber yourself in your new life with stuff from the old.

Don't have old attitudes. Have a Christ-centered attitude. Come to him and follow him. Not the old past lifestyle.

God. So this is what the apostle is saying. I'm forgetting those things which are behind us. The second thing he's saying is that he is reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

It's as if when the Lord came into his life with saving power, given him new eyesight, giving him a new appreciation of things.

And Psalm 27 we were reading a few moments ago and the psalmist says, one thing I of the Lord desire and will seek to obtain that all days of my life I may within God's house remain that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire and that I in his holy place may revelantly inquire.

[20:57] A new focus. He says one thing everything else must fall by the wayside. but there's one thing and one person, one object I am going to follow.

All days of my life I may within God's house remain that I may behold the beauty of the Lord. I reach forward to those things which are ahead.

And the voice of the psalmist elsewhere, he says, my soul is thirsting for you. As a heart thirsts for the water, so my soul is thirsting for you alone.

It's as if his whole being is focusing upon the Lord. beforehand, it was focusing on himself, how good he would live, the attainments that he could have, the prayers he could offer, and so on and so on, all focusing on himself.

But now he has been turned as it were inside out, no more focusing on himself, but focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22:28] See what it says in verse 10, that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his day.

This is the thing with the people of God, that we may know him. I read recently a comment on the Song of Solomon chapter 5, I think it's verse 5, when the church is there, seemingly to some extent backslidden, and she says, the Lord came to her door and his head was wet with the dew of the night, and he calls her and she says, how can I get out of bed?

I'm in bed with my children and I have washed my feet while I dirty them, and so on. But then the Lord puts his hand through the hole in the door that makes up the lock.

I don't know what kind of locks they had, but there was some access to the latch through the door. And once the Lord did that, the myrrh of his fingers went on the lock of the door.

And when the smell of that myrrh filled the room, the church was moved to go to the door. And she touched the lock and her own fingers hand were filled with this wonderful aroma of the myrrh.

[24:21] And that's what the Lord still does. It's as if he puts his hand into our heart, into our life, and the myrrh of his gracious presence, his heavenly presence, fills our heart, fills our mind, and our desire.

And then the church says, I want to know him. I want to know more of him. And the power of his resurrection.

And isn't that what's leaving you here today? you have come to the means of grace that you might hear something about him, that your eyes might be opened to behold his glory, that you might feel in your heart and in your soul the warmth of his gracious fellowship, that you might know him.

It matters very little in comparison. Who else will meet you in this meeting here today? Yes, you meet with your friends, and it's wonderful to have meetings with friends.

It's a blessing in itself. But the greatest and most wonderful meeting that you ever could have with anyone is that you might meet him, the Lord of glory.

[ 25 : 43 ] And these are gatherings in which the Lord promises to be. Well, there are two or three gathered together in my name. There am I in the midst of them.

And that's why you come here today, that you might know him and know him better than you have known him before. That you might see him clearly and clearer than ever you have seen him before. That you might hear his voice with greater clarity and more distinctiveness speaking to you yourself. It is I, be not afraid, that I might know him.

And the power of his resurrection. What an amazing statement that is. The power of the infinite God raised Christ from the dead.

And that's the power that works within the heart and life of every believer. Nothing short of that infinite power can change your mind, can change your will, can change your life for the better.

[ 26 : 52 ] And you want that power so that your sins may be suppressed, so that the power of temptation may be dealt with, so that the power of worldliness that you are so tired of in your mind and in your heart, that that power may be subdued and suppressed.

Only the power of the infinite God through the work of the Holy Spirit can suppress these terrible influences upon our lives. And the apostle here is saying that I might know him.

He is the source of grace, he is the source of life, the source of light, the source of power. He is the one through whom salvation comes to me and whose blood cleanses me from all of my sin.

forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

Reaching forward. It's as if he is showing us somebody who is totally committed to this particular way of life.

[ 28 : 12 ] as a runner runs his race with full determination to win that race, so the Christian believer reaches forward to those things which are ahead.

the best is yet to be. And as the Holy Spirit leads and guides his people in the world, they are going heavenward.

seeking a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. They are seeking a closer walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are seeking him. you know, you never stop being a seeker. Although you profess to be a finder and you have found the Lord Jesus as your saviour, you still seek him, don't you?

You seek him when you come to open your Bible. How dry and empty it would be if you weren't aware of his breath coming upon you as you read his word.

[ 29 : 31 ] How difficult it would be if you wouldn't have glimpses of his gracious presence and faith as you read his word, as you meditate upon him on your own, as you go to the place of prayer.

How difficult and hard it would be getting off your knees after praying, not having had a moment of the Lord's territory. You're still seeking him.

You are still longing to know him, reaching forward to those things which are ahead. What does he say? He says, ask and let it be given to you.

Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you. What an amazing saviour we have.

It's as if he is saying with open eyes, come, all things are now ready. and that is what the Christian seeks to do. We are so often waylaid by the temptations of the evil.

[ 30 : 37 ] We have to be aware of the dogs, of the people who are unclean in their affections and in their lifestyle, evil workers and those who are in mutilation and all others who would seek to impede and slow you down in your life.

It's interesting, isn't it, when you read the epistle of Jude and at the beginning of that epistle he says that he was going to write to them concerning the faith once delivered to the saints.

But then he says, I am going to ask you to contend for that faith. It's as if he is giving them a call to arms, to cause their powers abroad that would seek to unseek you, seek to make a mess in your spiritual life.

And we have to put on the whole armour of God to fight the good fight of faith or to run away reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

Thirdly and finally, we see here, verse 14, I press toward the goal. I press toward the goal.

[ 32 : 02 ] Now we're really seeing, I think, an allusion to Paul's knowledge of the Greek games. When he was aware of the way the runners would run within the stadium and they are there with their eye upon goal, their eye upon that mark that marks the end of the race that they have to run.

That's their focus, the end of the race. And we also must have a focus there. The focus, the end of the race, and of course, the goal.

And at the end of the race is the prize. Somebody was describing the situation at the Greek games, where the person who was the master of the games was seated fairly high above the level of where the runners were running.

And whoever was going to run and win the race, he would then have to ascend up to the steps where this man was.

And there he would receive his Lord of Wreath of County. Well, there's a sense in which the apostle is using that in relation to the Christian's experience.

[ 33 : 35 ] He says, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Your effectual calling is really an upward call.

Rise from the dead. When the Lord spoke to Lazarus at the grave, Lazarus was dead four days, and his sister said, behold, there is an order of him, this is the fourth day, but one word, Lazarus came forth, and he had been dead, came forth, he walked out, he had risen from the dead.

It was an upward calling. And that is true with effectual calling also. The Lord calls us out of our sin and misery, out of our lost condition, out of our lost mess, he calls us.

But once we are called, we then run the race and press toward the goal for the prize. I think the Apostle Paul describes what the prize is when he writes to us in 2 Timothy chapter 4, when he says, henceforth there awaited for me a crown of righteousness, righteousness, which the righteous judge will give me at that day, and not to me only, but also to all that love his appearing.

The crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, the crown of life, the everlasting life in all its fullness.

[ 35 : 20 ] righteousness, when you come to the end of this chapter, you see the ultimate blessing that the people of God receive at the resurrection morning, verse 21, that Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to do all things to himself.

The resurrection morning, what a morning it will be, when you read in 1 Corinthians 15, regarding the body of the people of God, it is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power, sown body full of corruption, but raised in glory, and this is the ultimate goal for the people of God, this is the ultimate prize, a prize that the Lord himself will give them, not that they have earned it themselves, they have, but it's been earned for them, who earned it, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is the one who was made sin for us, he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, he gave us life, that we might have eternal life, he went into the awful darkness darkness off the cross, when he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, so that we would never ever be forsaken, in grace, nor forever in glory, sometimes you feel like you're forsaken, you feel so empty, and that everything is against you, but believe the scripture, the Christian is never forsaken, when the sons of

Jacob went down to Egypt, and Jacob eventually capitulated and said, well Benjamin can go with you as well, if the man in Egypt said he must come, so be it, if I lose my sons, I lose them, Joseph is not, Simeon is not, Benjamin you will take away, against me all these things are, but they weren't against him at all, in fact they were all for him, we make so many wrong conclusions, we'll laugh, but this is, you see, what the Lord has for his people, the upward call of God, in Christ Jesus, come up, sit up higher, higher, higher service, total and perfect sinlessness, perfect worship, full fellowship without a cloud on the horizon, the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, what an amazing upward call, what an amazing, glorious end to one's life, to be with Christ, which is better by far, for these three things and I pray that each of us may exercise ourselves by grace in the same way as the Apostle, forgetting those things which are behind, reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray.