

“Look to the Future”

September 7, 2025

Philippians 3:17-21

I. Introduction

Earlier in Philippians 3 Paul used his life as an example of the transformation and goals every Christian has gone through and should reach toward. In the first eleven verses Paul looked at the past—his motto then, like most of mankind, could easily have been: *“I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul”* (*Invictus* by William Ernest Henley). Or as many children demand, *“I can do it myself.”* But Paul’s values changed after meeting Jesus Christ; Paul went from a righteousness based on works—doing it his own way—to a righteousness based on faith—doing it God’s way. Turn to Philippians 3:7-9.

But, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, the change to faith-based-righteousness was just the beginning. In Philippians 3:12-16 Paul looked at the present. The life of following Jesus Christ, of being a Christian, is not a one-time thing—it is a life-long marathon. The purpose of life is no longer to please “self” but as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* Christians need to finish the race and bring praise and glory to God.

There is a past for Christians when values are changed, there is a present for Christians when purposes are changed, but if that is all there is, Christians are to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:19 put it this way, *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”* But there is a future for Christians where hope is changed. This is the theme of today’s Scripture: Look to the Future. As Paul looked to the future and becoming more Christlike, he gave 3 goals, the first was “Follow examples.”

II. Three Goals

A. Follow examples To some people, Paul seemed to be rather arrogant when he urged the Philippians to *“follow my example.”* But Paul wasn’t being conceited, putting himself on the pedestal of spiritual perfection, he had just told them in verse 12 that he wasn’t perfect. Rather, he was encouraging the Philippians to follow him, an imperfect sinner, as he pursued the goal of Christ likeness—in 1 Cor. 11:1 he wrote, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

The New Testament records Paul's failures as well as his triumphs. In [Acts 23](#) Paul had to apologize after an outburst against the high priest. Because of his struggle with pride, Paul wrote in [2 Cor. 12:7](#), “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” Thirty years after his conversion, Paul wrote to Timothy in [1 Timothy 1:15](#), “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst.” Paul still thought of himself as the worst of sinners. Paul wasn’t perfect; he hadn’t *made it*—AND HE KNEW IT!

Had he been perfect, Paul would not have been an easy example believers could follow. By watching or following someone who is not perfect, one can see how to overcome his imperfections, how to handle the struggles of life, its disappointments, and its trials, how to handle pride, and how to respond to temptation. As a sinner saved by grace, Paul modeled morality, overcoming the flesh, victory over temptation, worship and service to God, patience in the midst of suffering, how to handle possessions and relationships with others. He was a “real life” example to follow.

But Paul didn’t claim to be the only example to follow; he wrote in the 2nd part of [verse 17](#), “Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” That would include Timothy and Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians knew, as well as the overseers and deacons at Philippi whom Paul addressed in [Philippians 1:1](#). With that in mind, it is important for every Christian, but especially those in some leadership role, to lead a life that is an example to others—1st goal: Follow Examples.

B. Watch out for enemies But not everyone is an example to follow. For his second goal, Paul warned the Philippians to watch out for enemies, i.e., “[Enemies of the cross of Christ](#).” Some enemies do not appear to be openly hostile to the Christian faith. They claim to be Christians, yet their conduct contradicts their profession. [Turn to 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.](#) In [Matthew 7:15](#) Jesus warned, “[Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.](#)” These enemies of the cross--false teachers—sometimes become part of the church, even rising to leadership roles. In [Acts 20:30-31](#) Paul told the Ephesian elders, “[Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!](#)” Every Christian MUST be on guard. Every Christian

must know God's Word well enough so that he or she is not misled by a smooth talker or a charismatic speaker or, as Paul wrote in [2 Tim. 4:3](#), by “teachers saying what their itching ears want to hear.”

As Paul warned the Philippians about false teachers, he did it “with tears” as he recognized the havoc those false teachers could cause in the Philippian church, tears over those who would be misled by them, and even tears for the false teachers’ fate. Filled with the love of God, Paul didn’t want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). These false teachers were anyone who taught anything other than salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and a life lived as a servant of God. Some, like the Judaizers, wanted to add to the gospel; some wanted to subtract from it. There are enemies of the Cross today, too. There are some today that teach that both faith and works are needed for salvation. Others teach that saving faith doesn’t need to result in a life of holiness and persecution. They teach that since Jesus’ death paid for believers’ sins; it does not matter how they live.

Paul gave four marks of these enemies of the cross. 1) “Their destiny is destruction.” Having rejected the only way for salvation, all false teachers face the same fate—Jesus said in [Matthew 25:46](#), “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” 2) “Their god is their stomach.” Here stomach refers to all unrestrained sensual, fleshly, or earthly desires. Turn to [Romans 1:21, 24-32](#). [Jude 1:4](#) says, “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” 3) “Their glory is their shame.” False teachers boasted in the very things that brought them shame. The Judaizers boasted in their works—their “rubbish.” Others boasted in their liberalism, e.g., in [1 Corinthians 5:1-2](#) says, “A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief?” 4) “Their mind is on earthly things.” Such teachers aren’t spiritually minded; they are earthly minded. [James 4:4](#) warns, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Since their minds are on earthly things, regardless of their words, false teachers are not followers of Jesus Christ—they are not saved. The enemies of the Cross, whether they add to the gospel or take away from it, are to be avoided and never imitated.

C. Look to the future Paul's third goal was "look to the future." When Jesus ascended into heaven, angels appeared and in [Acts 1:11](#) said to those gathered there, "**Men of Galilee why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.**" The anticipation of Christ's return motivates the believer with a spiritual mind. [Hebrews 11:13-16](#) says that because Abraham looked for a city from God, he was content to live in a tent; [Hebrews 11:24-26](#) adds that because Moses looked for rewards of heaven, he willingly left the pleasures of Egypt. [Hebrews 12:2](#) says that because of "**the joy set before him,**" Jesus "**endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**" Like Abraham and Moses and Jesus Christ, the Christian's citizenship is in heaven.

For a true Christian, the hope, actually the fact that Jesus Christ is returning should be a powerful motive for being found faithful; as [Eph. 2:10](#) says, doing the "**good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do**" The spiritually minded believer does not live for the things of this world; he looks forward to the blessings of the world to come. This does not mean that he ignores or neglects his daily obligations; but it does mean that what he does today is governed by what Christ will do in the future.

Looking to the future, Paul wrote that when Jesus returns, He "**will transform our lowly bodies.**" Christians will receive a glorified body just like the body of Christ. [1 John 3:2](#) says, "**We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**" After His resurrection, Jesus appeared and disappeared at will, even entering a room whose doors were locked, He even ate some fish with His disciples ([John 20:19](#); [Luke 24:41-42](#)). It would seem that, just like Christ's resurrection body, believers' resurrected bodies will be recognizable. They will be able to eat, talk, and walk, but will not have the physical restrictions of our present bodies. Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:42-53](#), that it will all happen in "**in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.**" At that moment, all the things of this world will be worthless—just as they ought to be today. If we look to the future, then we will be exercising the spiritual mind and living for the things that really matter.

Paul wrote that Jesus will accomplish this "**by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control.**" [Revelation 19:15](#) says that Jesus Christ will have the power to rule the millennial kingdom.

Zechariah 14:4-8 tells of the power of Christ transforming the surface of the earth—moving mountains and valleys and rivers. If Christ can subject the entire universe to His sovereign control, he has the power to transform believers' bodies into His image.

III. Conclusion

So, on what do you base your righteousness—your acceptance into heaven? Good works aren't enough—Isaiah 64:6 says that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Acts 16:31 gives the only way to be saved from an eternity in hell, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, what is your purpose here on earth? Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This is why Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” *Are you doing good works in Jesus' name or for your righteousness?*

Hebrews 12:1 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, i.e., examples, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” As we run the spiritual race—our life-long marathon, we must look to godly examples—witnesses—for inspiration and instruction—both those found in the Bible and those we see around us today. At the same time, we must be on guard for those enemies of the truth—those false teachers who would lead astray every Christian and non-Christian they can. Finally, we must keep focused on the glorious hope that is ours at the return of Christ—the transformation of our bodies into glorious, heavenly bodies just like His. Within days of his execution, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:8, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day—not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” Like Paul we need to look to the future. Revelation 21:3-4 says, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Communion Devotion – September 2025

1 Corinthians 11:23-31

There is a misunderstanding by some about the purpose of the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table doesn't save, it is a celebration, something like Thanksgiving or a birthday. It reminds us of what Jesus did so that if we believe in Him, we would have our sins forgiven. The bread—the matzos reminds of Jesus' life and crucifixion. The juice reminds us of His blood that was shed for us. The empty cross reminds us of Jesus' resurrection and the hope we have that because of what He did, we will spend eternity in heaven and not in hell. The Lord's Table is a time to thank God for the love and mercy and grace that He extends to each one of us. If you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior, then whether or not you are a member of TBC, we invite you to join us in this celebration.

There is a 2nd purpose for the Lord's Table—as we just read, it is a time to examine yourself. Are your values those of the world or those of God and His Word? What is your purpose—to collect the most "toys" or to bring glory and praise to God? Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus and standing before Him or does the thought never cross your mind? Are you on guard for false teachers because you know the Bible, or are you persuaded by every smooth talker that comes your way? Do those around you know that you are a Christian by the things you do and the things you don't do? Do you stand in unity and harmony with fellow Christians, or do you feel more comfortable standing with non-Christians—the unsaved?

No one in this room can judge you, only you can. This morning as the elements are being passed, take time to thank God for His love and for your eternal life. But also take time to look at your heart, look at your motives as well as your actions. Are they really for God's sake or for your own sake? If God were to call you home right now, would you be embarrassed with what you have hidden away in the corners in your heart—in your life? If so, get right with God. Then come to the Lord's Table with a clean heart and a clean mind.