

Philippians 3

I Press towards the Goal (The Purpose Driven Life)

The Prize of our High Calling in Christ

Sentence 35 (3:1a) Finally my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy is a spirit state. We can command joy, whereas we cannot command happiness or pleasure. We contrive all kinds of things to make ourselves happy and we would love to always be able to give ourselves pleasure. People will overdose themselves with all kinds of things to gain pleasure, but there is no guarantee that we can please ourselves with pleasure. Joy comes from our place in God. We are to find ways to rejoice in the Lord.

Sentence 36 (3:1b) For me to write the same things to you is not tedious but for you it is safe.

The nurture and the admonition of the Lord is a continual instruction in godliness. It is a spirit discipline. The discipline is to always be looking to God as our resource in the midst of our spirit warfare and not to ourselves.

Sentence 37 (3:2) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilators (of the flesh [circumcision]).

The Greek word for dog is 'kuon' with adjective 'kunikos' (doglike). From this we get the word 'cynic' which derives from a Greek philosophical school lead by Antisthenes who argued for a life of self-interest (derisive of lofty ideals) which we would describe as cynical. Beware of those who would deride your desire for the higher things in life. Beware of (avoid) those who work evil. In particular, avoid those (Judaisers) who are always arguing for circumcision and adherence to the Jewish Law and attempting to take away our freedom, in Christ, from legalism.

Sentence 38 (3:3-4a) For we are the circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Jesus Christ and have no confidence in the flesh, although I might have confidence in the flesh.

Those clinging to the Law and circumcision were those who took confidence in the flesh. They enjoyed earning their religious credentials by visible flesh procedures and rituals. They gloried in their flesh. Paul starts to realise that if it comes to flesh credentials he already has a few himself, whereby he can make an impressive showing to the world.

Sentence 39 (3:4b-6) If anyone else thinks he can have confidence in the flesh then I have more: as to circumcision, on the eighth day; as to the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the law, a Pharisee; according to zeal, persecuting the church; according to righteousness in the law, blameless.

Paul has been very successful in his chosen profession. He is a fully qualified and legalised prosecutor of the law; pharisaical, zealous and blameless. He has every desirable, earthly credential.

Sentence 40 (3:7) But what things were gain for me, I now consider loss on account of Christ.

After having met Jesus Christ, whatever Paul regarded as gain, he now regards as loss. Christ has radically changed Paul's attitude to himself and to whatever he thinks is worth living for.

Sentence 41 (3:8-11) More than that, I regard everything as loss for the surpassing value (excellence) of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered (endured) the loss of all things and I consider them as refuse (dung) in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes through the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith; that I may

know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings by being conformed to His death, if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul experiences a total attraction to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ becomes his world and the nature of Christ defines his goals in life. To know Jesus Christ is to know a surpassing excellence of being. Nothing compares with Christ. Everything else is rubbish by comparison. Being righteous (with the effect of feeling good about yourself) is no longer based on legal performance but on faith in (engagement with) the Work of Christ. Once his life is measured by faith expansion (not legal contraction) Paul's life now has dynamic faith boundaries and is not based on the minutiae of legal requirements. The life of faith expands but the life of the law contracts. Paul wants to expand his horizons by knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. He wants the vigour of resurrection life (John 11:25). Paul also wants to know and experience the fellowship (company) of Christ's sufferings because he wants to be conformed to Christ's death. To know the dying of Christ leads to the living of Christ. This is not a morbid interest in death but a spirit way of passing through death in the victory of Christ. Paul wants total isolation in Jesus Christ so that his future life is based entirely and exclusively on the fundamentals of the Christ life. This is Christian holiness (devotion, concentration).

Sentence 42 (3:12) Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfected (completed), but I press on (pursue) that I may get hold of that (thing) for which Jesus Christ got hold of me (Acts 9:15-16; 22:10, 14-15; 26:16-18).

Jesus Christ has got hold of Paul. Remember, at anytime, Paul could walk away from the grip of Christ. But Paul is aware that Jesus Christ has got hold of him for a purpose. This purpose is to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul presses in (the Greek word means 'persecutes', goes after) what it is that Christ is pressing into him. We also should ask, 'If I am attracted to Jesus Christ for what reason or purpose is Christ attracting me to Himself?' (Phil 2:12-13). I also should attempt to thoroughly get hold of why Christ has got hold of me. As I press into God, God is pressing something into me. This becomes my purpose-driven life.

Sentence 43 (3:13-14) Brethren, I do not consider myself to have laid hold [fully] but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward for the things which are ahead, I press on for the goal of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is expressing the basic attitude of the disciple of Jesus Christ. He recognises that he has not fully grasped the meaning of Christ for his life. Christ has got hold of him but has he got hold of Christ? Therefore he clears the decks in his life by saying how he will handle the confusing and compromising issues in his life: he will forget the past. This is extremely hard to do. We define ourselves by our past. Our past is who we are. Our past determines our choices. To forget our past is to walk naked into the future. We will be going into life not knowing who we are or where we are going or where we are from. How can we function as a person under these conditions? The person is a product of their past. But Paul is saying that as he rejects the dictates and directions of his past performance, he will only look to the things in his future. This means that, at any time, he is looking only to the future and not letting the past determine his living for Christ. This is truly a redemptive state. Our person is redeemed from the guilt and sin in our past, if we repent. It is our sin that destroys our sense of purpose. In life, what happens

is what happens. Even God cannot change the past. But by faith in Christ, we can deal with the sin of our past. God does not wipe our memories of painful or sinful experiences. Through our repentance and faith in Christ, God deals with the sting of sin in what we have done or the sin in what has been done to us. Paul says that he handles the power of his past by repenting and looking forward to the goal of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The goal is the aim or purpose of his life. The prize is the award handed out by the judge (umpire, referee) of the contest (the public games (Col 3:15)). The contest is in responding to the high (heavenly) calling that Paul received at his conversion. Paul disciplines himself as an athlete to achieve his spiritual purpose (1Cor 9:24-27). The spiritual life is a contest, in fact, a battle with spirit forces. But Christ is his master (coach, general, spirit director) who calls him to his spirit destiny. This may be represented as follows:

<u>Past</u>	<u>faith</u>		<u>look ahead</u>	→	<u>goal</u>	<u>high</u>	<u>of God</u>
Sin	repentance		press in	→	prize	calling	in Christ
NOW							

The NOW point is always the present. We deal with the sin of the past by faith and repentance. We are always looking to the future, to what is to come, because we are goal-oriented. Our purpose is to win the prize of fulfilling our heavenly calling from God in Christ. God does not wipe our mind of the past but the past is no longer a burden (a guilt trip/ trap, guilt kills desire); the burden (purpose, desire) is for the future. Here are the steps:

1. Meet Jesus Christ; He is waiting to meet you (John 5:40; Acts 9:4-6; 1Cor 15:8; Rev 3:20).
2. Receive (conceive) a heavenly call (purpose, goal) from God in Christ (Acts 26:19). Be seeded by the promises of God (1Pet 1:23).
3. Deal with the sin of your past by repentance and faith. Repent and believe, in that order (Mk 1:15). Seek the Holy Spirit for revelation of your sin so that you can repent and break the habit of bondage (defeat) in your spirit (Eph 1:17). Sin is an ownership (by Satan) in our spirit. The sin is the problem not the memory.
4. Do not look to your past for direction (answers, clues). Do not choose to define yourself by your past (performance, lessons).
5. Always look (orient yourself) to the future goal (cross, calling). A cross carried is always for a future purpose in God.
6. Desire the prize (award) of fulfilling your calling (1Cor 9:25).
7. Taste the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5). What can this mean?

The question is not: what are the lessons from my past (mistakes)? The question is: what is my goal for the future? The test is faithfulness to the future not faithfulness to the past.

Sentence 44 (3:15) Therefore let us, as many as are mature (complete), have this mind and if in anything you think otherwise God will reveal even this to you.

Paul has outlined what is mature (perfect) for the Christian. It is God's desire to reveal to us all that is needful.

Sentence 45 (3:16) Only let us hold fast (walk straight) to what we have already attained.

Let us agree in and maintain the maturity of our Christian unity.

Sentence 46 (3:17) Brethren be imitators of me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

Paul is not afraid to make himself an example which becomes a standard in Christian behaviour.

Sentence 47 (3:18-19) For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you even weeping), as enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly [appetites] and whose glory is their shame; they have set their mind on earthly things.

Paul wants us to be aware of those who (even as Christians) walk as the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Such people are not broken by the Cross of Calvary nor by carrying their own cross (the cross of discipleship). They resist the work of the Cross (and cross-carrying) in their life by worshipping their own appetites. Their mind is set on earthly things. They create/ pursue a way of thinking that is earthly, sensual and demonic (James 3:15). Their end is destruction (perdition) and they glory in what is shameful.

Sentence 48 (3:20-21) But our citizenship exists in heaven from where we eagerly await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the body of our humiliation to conform to the body of His glory according to the working of His power whereby He can subject all things to Himself.

The destiny that Christ has prepared for us who believe awaits us in heaven. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). But Christ will come again to claim those who are His. As Christ calls us to Himself, He has the ability to change the body (identity) of our humiliation into the body (image) of His glory. All the circumstances and experiences of our humiliation will be swallowed up in our being conformed to the body (substance, reality) of Christ, as He is. We will be conformed to the body of His glory. Conforming to Christ means that we are being made like Him (1Jn 3:2). Remember Jesus Christ is ascended and glorified Man (Acts 17:31). Christ is Man who is not under the consequence of death and corruption. We are conformed to His death (Phil 3:10) and to His dying (2Cor 4:10). We are conformed to His image (Rom 8:29). We are conformed to His glorious body (Phil 3:21). Christ has created the future for us to walk in. We are secure in Him.