

## Philippians 3:12-4:1 The Upward Call of God in Christ Jesus

**Review:** All of Philippians 3 focuses on the same theme: rejoicing in the Lord (**3:1**)— as opposed to the Law. Paul ended the passage with an exhortation to stand firm in the Lord, **4:1** (read both verses). They are like bookends. In the middle is a similar plea: **3:16**.

**What's the difference between apostle and an apostate and Aeropostale?** Aeropostale is the French air-mail service and a chain of mall-based clothing stores. Apostle is a Greek word; *apo* = “away from” and *stellein* = “to send away.” A missionary is modern equivalent. Apostate is also Greek in origin; *apo* = “away from” and *stasis* = “to stand” (thus, to stand away from). Thus, an apostate is someone who has renounced Jesus and who stands away from the faith.

**Introduction:** Danger for the church in Philippi came from two different people groups: Judaizers and apostates. **Judaizers** sought to get the Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism in order to be right with God (**3:2**, *read*). They promoted either a false version of the gospel or legalism (requiring for obedience things God does not require).<sup>1</sup> Thus, in **3:9**, Paul contrasted a righteousness of his own based on the Law of Moses, versus the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ (*read 3:8-9*). The other dangerous group will be introduced to today: **apostates**,<sup>2</sup> those who had former claimed to be Christians, but who had fallen away from the Faith.

**Joke:** Did you heard about the little kid who fell out of bed while he was sleeping? He said, “I guess I fell asleep to close to where I got in.” In your walk with the Lord, don't be like that kid! Some people barely just get inside the front door of the kingdom, then go sleep! Philippians 3 warns against that. Don't be content where you are in your walk with the Lord. Look at Paul's life goal: **3:10** (*read*). As illustrated last lesson, in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and even though Christopher Columbus discovered America, he was barely on the edge of a vast continent that remained to be explored. Don't be like Columbus; instead, be like Lewis and Clark!

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**\*\*\*\*In 3:12-16, what “one thing” (3:13) did Paul do?** With a singularity of focus, he pressed on toward the goal to win the prize for which God called him heavenward (**3:14**). Paul had a “quest for the best!”<sup>3</sup> *What an attitude, what a motivation, what a goal!*

ESV **Genesis 5:24** Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

ESV **Philippians 1:21** ... to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

<sup>1</sup> Fee, Philippians, 297.

<sup>2</sup> Our English word is transliterated from a Greek word that is a compound of “away” and “to stand.”

<sup>3</sup> Several applications throughout this lesson have been taken from a sermon Adrian Rogers preached at Bellevue Baptist in the early 1980s entitled, “The Quest of the Best.”

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:12 ... now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully ...

**Stadium Terms:** This passage is full of stadium and athletic terms, like you would find in the Olympic Games. We must pursue knowing Christ with the persistence and enthusiasm of a runner in the Greek games:

- **“make it my own” (3:12):** From *katalabo*, a Greek term that has the word “down” attached to it. The original idea was that an object was caught hold of and pulled down, as when a football player tackles and pulls down another player, or when a cowboy ropes and pulls down a calf for branding. Paul wanted to grasp, to experience all that Christ had for him.
- **“forgetting” (3:13):** From *epilanthanomenos*, which here more likely carries the idea of “to pay no attention to, to be unconcerned about.”<sup>4</sup> The idea is of a lead runner completely forgetting his opponents whom he is leading in the race and was undistracted, not looking over his shoulder.<sup>5</sup>
- **“straining forward” (3:13):** A Greek athletic term that describes a runner whose “eye outstrips and draws onward the hand, and then the foot.” His eye is focused on the finish line.<sup>6</sup> Literally it is “to stretch forth after.”
- **“press on” (3:14):** In classical Greek this word (*dioko*, same as 3:12) was used of a chase in the sense of pursuing, or of a race (someone streaking down the track toward the finish line). Paul was a man of single-minded drive and determination.
- **“goal” (3:14):** This word (*skopos*) referred to the point at which an archer aimed. It is the aim, the mark, or the runner’s finish line.<sup>7</sup>

**Application:** Paul had not yet fully known Christ. Never be satisfied with your spiritual attainments. We won’t fully know Jesus until we are resurrection (3:10-11). *Does this describe your feelings this morning?* Paul had been a Christian 30 years when he wrote this. Don’t level out, don’t plateau, don’t get stagnant in your walk with the Lord. Press on! Too many believers draw breath and draw a salary, but they waste their lives relative to the pure light of eternity.

ESV Revelation 2:4 ... I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

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<sup>4</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 347.

<sup>5</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2286.

## —3:12—

**Ever head of the doctrine of sinless perfection?<sup>8</sup> Well, they ain't no such thing! Based on the previous paragraph, what is the standard for being made "perfect" (3:12)?** It is to be like Jesus, to know Christ, to experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul had not yet fully comprehended intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually the magnificence of Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

**Think for a minute about cause and effect. In 3:12, what caused (as in "because") Paul offer to press on to make Jesus his own?** It was "because" Jesus made Paul his own!

ESV 1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

## —3:13—

**Paul wrote once in 3:12 and then again in 3:13 that he had not yet taken hold of it. Why do you think he felt the need for the Philippians to know that?** No reason was given. Perhaps the tendency is for believers to grow at ease in Zion, and Paul wanted to help them stay focused. Nobody is perfect this side of eternity. We must take care that we do not level out, plateau, grow stagnant in our walk with the Lord. There is to be no cruise control, no auto pilot, with the Lord! There is simply too much to know about Jesus to ever think we have arrived on this side of eternity.<sup>10</sup>

**Example:** Our salvation is guaranteed in Christ. A truly saved person cannot lose his salvation. You didn't do anything to earn it, and you can't do anything to lose it. The indwelling Holy Spirit works in a person's life to enable him to persevere in the faith, and desire to obey Jesus' teachings. It is called the "perseverance of the saints" (or better yet, the perseverance of the Holy Spirit within the saints!). However, this doctrine has been truncated in some circles to simply "once saved, always saved," without any emphasis on persevering in faith and obedience. This is led to some saying things like, "The world is remarkably well arranged; I like to sin, and God likes to forgive sin."<sup>11</sup> Based on **3:12-17**, Paul would not have had much use for the truncated doctrine of "once saved, always saved."

**Joke:** A Sunday School teacher preparing children for the church service. When she asked them why they should quiet in the sanctuary, one of them answered, "Because people are sleeping in there." *Are you asleep in Zion?*

ESV **Revelation 3:15b-16** ... you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

<sup>8</sup> An impossible condition this side of eternity

<sup>9</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 375.

\*\*\*\*According to 3:13-14, what “one thing” did Paul do? *Reread.* He forgot what lay behind and strained forward to what lay ahead. Paul narrowed his interests. No man can serve two masters. Double-minded men are unstable. Concentration is the secret to spiritual power. A river without banks is a swamp; channel it and you have a mighty, powerful river. Make all things an end to knowing Christ. Paul had a quest of the best!

**Joke:** A Sunday School teacher taught how Lot’s wife looked behind and turned into a pillar of salt. One little boy helpfully added, “My mom looked behind, and she turned into a telephone pole.” We get in spiritual trouble when we look around and get distracted by the world.

**In context, Paul when said that he himself was “forgetting what is behind” (3:13), what did he have in mind?** He had in mind all his past religious accomplishments in Judaism (3:4b-6).

**Application:** There is a healthy balance between faith and works, between God’s call and a believer’s response.<sup>12</sup> *How intently do you pursue your walk with Jesus?*

—3:14—

**Based on 3:14, what “prize” (3:14) did Paul have in mind?** The main prize was the upward call of God in Christ Jesus that can be partially realized now and fully realized at the resurrection of the dead (3:11).

**Application:** *Can you honestly say that this is your view of things? Is this true of your life and goals and ambition? Is your life consumed with a passion for knowing Christ?* The course is clearly set before us. We are to focus on the finish line. Run the race, fight the fight. You can’t reach the goal with a take it or leave it attitude.

—3:15-16—

\*\*\*\*According to 3:15, what is true of those who think like Paul did about all this? The “mature” think this way.

**Suppose you are spiritually immature, what did Paul promise, according to 3:15?** God will reveal that to you! The Holy Spirit is persevering in the lives of believers!

**Application:** Ask God to show you if you are thinking wrong about your walk with Jesus. Then count on him to reveal that to you!

ESV **James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

\*\*\*\*\***What did Paul ask of his readers in 3:16?** He wanted them to hold true to what they had already attained. In context, this meant to resist the temptation of rejoicing in the law rather than in the Lord! This is sandwiched between 3:1 and 4:1.

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2286.

**What is grammatical purpose of the word “only” in 3:16?** It is designed to give focus and concentration. Don't go backwards or sideways!

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**\*\*\*\*What big change awaits us at Jesus' return (3:17-21)?** Our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like His gloried body (3:20-21); see back to 3:11.

ESV **Romans 8:18** ... the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

NAS **1 Corinthians 15:52** The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

—3:17—

**What two walkways did Paul contrast in 3:17-18?** Paul contrasted those who walked according to Paul's example versus those who walked as enemies of Christ (apostates).

**What command is found in 3:17?** Paul urged his readers to **1)** imitate him and to **2)** watch those who followed Paul's example. This is the opposite of what he said earlier about false teachers:

ESV **Philippians 3:2** Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Paul led from the front, and was not shy about setting himself up as an example for others to follow.

NAS **1 Corinthians 4:16** ... be imitators of me.

NAS **1 Corinthians 11:1** Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

NAS **2 Thessalonians 3:7** ... you ought to follow our example.

NAS **2 Thessalonians 3:9** we . . . offer ourselves as a model for you ... follow our example.

- **“example: (3:17):** From the noun *tupon*; the verb form, *tupto*, means “to strike.” The noun refers to the impression left by the strike, to the mark of the blow. Thus, “imprint.” The old Mark VII production company always had an opening video that showed a worker's sweaty arm gripping a metal stamp, and hitting it with a sledge hammer against a sheet of metal, leaving a deep “Mark VII” impression. *Tupon* is basis for our word “type” (as in a type writer; on a type writer, metal keys flew up and struck the ink ribbon and left an ink mark on the page). **Applications:** We are to follow those who lives have been impacted by Jesus. Furthermore, there is to be an impact of Jesus on your life!

NAS **2 Corinthians 5:17** ... if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

**Example:** Years ago, when I bought my home, thick kudzu covered half the lot. The surveyor's sight was blocked from front to back, so he put up a half way marker flag, a sighting point between boundary pins. We all need patterns to follow. This was not from any conceit on Paul's part. Jesus is no longer visible in flesh, yet people need a visible role model. It is a fact of life that imitation and role modeling play a large part of all life.

- **“those” (3:17):** Paul said to keep our eyes on “those” (plural) who walk according to his example. Paul was not the only one who followed Christ. There are many who can serve as examples, even today. For example:

ESV **Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

**Application:** *Are you one of the ones who follow Paul's pattern?* If not, you should be. Other people are watching you, whether you know it or not. *What kind of a church would we have if you were the standard, and everyone imitated you, just as you now are? Would you want to go the church here?*

—3:18—

**In 3:18, we find the word “tears.” Paul was crying as he warned them about those who walk as enemies of Christ. Why the tears?** It was and still is common for pagans to walk with indifference toward the cross—no surprise there. The tears allow for the possibility he is referring to apostates, apathetic people who began with Christ, but then fell away. They did not press on and run the race. They got distracted and quit. Philippians was a stop-over spot on a long road between two other cities, so it may be that these apostates came through regularly on their way elsewhere.

**Example:** Joshua Harris and Abraham John Piper fall into the apostate category. Many sincere Christian parents have taken their children out of public school in order to shield them from ungodly influences, giving them a Christian education, only for their children to grow up and then neglect or even reject the gospel, becoming enemies of the cross. They may not be antagonistic, but they are apathetic.

**What does it mean to walk as an enemy of the cross (3:18)?** The cross stands in utter contradiction to all human wisdom and power. An enemy of the cross is one who refuses to go the route of the cross, or who actively opposes the gospel. Such people obviously walk contrary to the example Paul modeled.<sup>13</sup>

**Why do you suppose that Paul had feel the need to tell them about this “often” (3:18)?** It is easy to fall in with the wrong crowd, easy to follow the wrong patterns! Bad examples and false teachers are everywhere. There is nothing new in this letter to them.

**Example:** In ancient times, lights were used by pirates to lure ships onto the breakers. False lights point the way to death.<sup>14</sup> Spiritual pirates still do the same today, ship wrecking people's faith.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 370.

<sup>14</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Paul's Joy in Christ*, 213.

ESV **2 Corinthians 11:14** ... Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

—3:19—

**In 3:19, what can we learn about those whom Paul warned were enemies of the cross? 1)**

Their end was destruction, **2)** their god was their belly, **3)** the glory in their shame, and **4)** the minds were set on earthly things (exactly the opposite of **3:14**).

**1) “destruction” (3:19):** According to 3:19, their end (destiny) is destruction. This is in contrast to the destiny God has for those who belong to Christ (**3:11, 21**).

**2) What does it mean to have your belly as your god (3:19)?** They sound like Epicureans!<sup>15</sup> They lived only for the present. In the Greek classic, *The Cyclops in Euripides*, where we find this statement: “My flocks ... I sacrifice to no one but myself, and not to the gods, but to this my belly, the greatest of gods. For to eat and drink each day, and to give one’s self no trouble, this is the god of wise men.”<sup>16</sup>

**3) What does it mean in 3:19 when it says that their glory is their shame?** Paul did not elaborate. Perhaps this is a similar idea to what Paul wrote elsewhere:

ESV **Romans 1:32** Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things [sexual sins] deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

**4) What does it look like to have minds set on earthly things (3:19)?** Earthly women guilty of this are only interested in men, money and manicures. This is the exact opposite of what Paul embodied: pursuit of the heavenly prize of knowing Christ.

ESV **1 John 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

NAS **Hebrews 12:16** ... godless ... Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal.

—3:20-21—

• **“citizenship is in heaven” (3:20):** Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece, and the people there justifiably proud of their Roman citizenship. Followers of Jesus are citizens of heaven while living on earth. We are just passing through. The church is a colony of heaven here on earth. We are to be a “pattern” of the heavenly for earthly citizens. Elsewhere, the New Testament states that we are “ambassadors for Christ.” We are to be in the world, but not of it.

ESV **2 Corinthians 5:20** ... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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<sup>15</sup> A connoisseur of the refinements of sensual pleasures.

<sup>16</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 372

**Eschatology is the study of end-time events. What was Paul's belief about the future (3:20-21)?** He expected Jesus to come from heaven, and to be resurrected.

ESV **Acts 1:11** ... "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus' return is called the blessed hope and should exert a powerful influence for holy living:

ESV **1 John 3:2-3** ... we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

**Two Comings:** There was a judgment "coming" of Jesus in A.D. 70 to destroy Jerusalem. However, Jesus did not appear in person, the dead did not resurrect, nor were living believers transformed. The second appearing of Jesus is yet future.

**According to 3:21, the same resurrection power that transforms us will also enable Jesus do to something else; what?** It will enable Him to subject all things to Himself.

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**\*\*\*\*How did Paul conclude this whole section (4:1)?** He concluded with a statement that they should stand firm in the Lord. Don't slip backwards into apostasy!

**What is the "therefore" there for (4:1)?** Arguably, it ties 4:1 back into all of chapter 3. Paul began with "rejoice in the Lord" (3:1), continued with "hold true" (3:16), and finally concluded with "stand firm thus in the Lord" (4:1). They are synonymous statements.

### So What?

**Application:** Live life like a citizen of heaven, as ambassadors for Christ. Live a life of purity expecting the return of Christ.

**Application:** Beware the temptations to legalism (Judaism) and apostasy (Christianity isn't true). *If Paul had to repeatedly warn the Philippian believers to rejoice in the Lord and to stand firm in the Lord, how likely do you think it is that we need same warnings and encouragement?*

We are to follow/imitate/mimic godly men who are patterns/types of Christ, and we ourselves are to lead others into godliness by example. We are look out for legalists and apostates.

**Application:** Though Paul was a spiritual giant, he made it clear that he had not yet attained the goals of 3:10. See 3:12. There must never be a stalemate in our spiritual growth. There is no plateau beyond which we cannot climb, A close, daily walk with Jesus is important. We must realize that we have not "arrived" spiritually, and so must keep on keeping on. Press on!

ESV **Psalms 27:4** One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD ...



\*\*\*\* = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

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