



# PHILIPPIANS

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**I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** Philippians 3:14

Paul now explains "reaching forward to those things which are ahead" which he referred to in the previous verse. The sum of them is "the prize" he will now mention. In order to get to this prize, he says that, "I press toward the goal." The word for "press" indicates "to pursue with all haste." For example, it is used when a hunter is chasing a catch. Every fiber of Paul's being was directed toward "the goal." This word for "goal" is *skopós*. It is used only this once in the New Testament. It is where the English word "scope" comes from, such as a scope on a rifle which is used for target shooting.

Paul was wholly directed toward this goal, which is the ultimate objective of the life of faith that a believer possesses. It is the state of glorification which will be granted when Christ returns for His people. To Paul, this was what his earthly life was directed toward. It is "the prize" which he now refers to. It is the word *brabeíon*, which is the reward granted to a victor, and specifically the noted recognition which is a result of that triumph. The only other time the word is used is by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 –

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*.<sup>25</sup> And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown.*" 1 Corinthians 9:25

This prize then is the result of pursuing “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This phrase is rich in theological significance. The term for “call” is *klé̄sis*. It indicates a “calling; used of God inviting all people to receive His gift of salvation – with all His blessings that go with it” (HELPS Word Studies).

In other words, the word “call” itself signifies that a voluntary act of the will is made based on what God has done in Christ Jesus. It negates the idea of being predestined as taught by Calvinists which says that one is “regenerated in order to believe.” Such an act would not require a calling. But God has done something in Christ Jesus which calls out for men to respond. This is the “upward call.” Other versions say, “the high calling,” “the heavenly calling,” etc. The word indicates “above.” In this case, it implies “heaven.” It is the shout of “Come unto Me” which draws our souls to Christ who is in the heavenlies awaiting our response.

This was Paul’s greatest desire, and it is what wholly consumed him. It did not mean that he didn’t stay active here on earth. In fact, just the opposite is true. It means that he did all he could as an apostle, a teacher, an evangelist, and a Christian brother to accomplish the work set before him. His earthly life and walk was the set-out course for this high calling. It is what would bring him to the prize resulting from his triumphant work. The crown of life is guaranteed, but that crown of life carries with it other rewards which are a result of what we do now.

Life application: We have a high calling by God in Christ Jesus. We are to respond to that call by receiving Him and His work. When that is done, we still have a course set before us in order to receive the final reward of that high calling. Too often, we want the reward without living out the race which is taking us to that reward. But the race is what gets us to our end goal. Let us keep our eyes on the prize, but not forget that rewards accompany the prize which is based on the race we run.

**Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.** Philippians 3:15

“Therefore” is given based on what he has said in verses 12 through 14. He said he was not perfected, nor had he already attained the end goal. Instead he was still in the race with all of his efforts directed toward “those things which are ahead.” He sums that up by saying, “...let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.” He is saying that those who are mature in their thoughts should conduct themselves in exactly this same manner.

Concerning the word “mature,” he uses the adjective form of the same word he used in verse 12 which was used as a verb. There, the NKJV translated it as “perfected,” but it is the same word. Because of this, there is certainly irony involved in the thought. He is contrasting himself

to those who may claim that they are already perfected, which obviously they are not. Translating the words the same way will show his hint of irony –

12. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected...
15. Therefore let us, as many as are perfect...

Obviously, his intent is that being perfected is not the same as being perfect. Rather, the choice of “mature” gives the correct sense, but it loses the irony. The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 5:14, and etc., where it indicates a state of maturity. He is saying, in essence, “Those who are mature are not already perfected, but are striving forward towards that goal.” For the others then, they fall short because they are, in fact, not perfected. Instead they are not striving forward toward perfection, and thus they are immature.

He then notes this directly by saying, “...and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” For those who are not striving forward in the way noted in verses 12-14, they have a surprise coming. God will reveal to them their folly in pursuing the temporary instead of pursuing the eternal. They should have fixed their eyes on Christ, and instead they have fixed their eyes on the flesh. While they should have been concerned about circumcision of the heart, they are having parts of their body removed; a body which would corrupt and return to the earth. Whatever was not being done with the ultimate goal of Christ in mind was useless, and that would be revealed to them by God.

Note that he does not say “by Christ Jesus.” They have not kept their eyes on Him as they should have. He should be the chief desire of their heart, and so God – Father, Son, and/or Holy Spirit – would reveal to them the error of their ways. God’s intent is for the Son to be exalted.

Life application: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, striving towards Him as our goal. We are to emulate Him now, endeavoring to be more and more like him until we are perfected in Him.

**Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.** Philippians 3:16

The word “Nevertheless” is given to show that there are different degrees of maturity within the body. In other words, Paul said “as many as are mature” in the previous verse. But there really are none who are on exactly the same level of maturity. Some had heard Paul speak many times and were well-grounded in their understanding of the work of Christ. Some may have missed those meetings, or had come more recently to the faith. And some of them simply

may have been incapable of understanding the more difficult issues which were presented to them.

Whatever the state of the individual was, and for whatever reasons, to that degree to which they were mature, he instructs, "...let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." In other words, arguments and divisions serve no valid purpose if they do not involve heresy or major doctrinal differences. When the end of life comes for an individual, it won't be the lesser points of doctrine that people speak about at their funeral. Instead, it will be that they loved Christ Jesus, spoke out boldly for Him, and were willing to walk in harmony with others who may have disagreed, even over things that ultimately make little difference in the overall scheme of things.

When Markus Polonius is laying in his coffin, nobody with a modicum of decency would come up and say, "He believed that the church replaced Israel, and so he was a really crummy Christian." Instead, they will speak about what united them, not about the things he was wrong on and which will be revealed to him by Christ. If this is how we speak about one another at death, is it really necessary to tear them apart in their life?

Life application: Doctrine matters. It is right for teachers to hold the line on what is proper doctrine. But when two teachers with opposing views speak to one another, it shouldn't be for tearing one another down. Minds are not changed that way, and it is only harmful to the fellowship. Let us learn to hold our tongues at times when our lofty opinions are unwanted, or when they will only cause division.

**Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.** Philippians 3:17

Paul, having addressed the doctrinal error of the Judaizers, will now set out on another course of correction concerning doctrine. He will address those who use their freedom in Christ as license to sin. This is known as the Antinomian heresy.

For now, he begins with "Brethren." He is addressing saved believers in Christ, and he is identifying himself with them. With this understanding, he says, "...join in following my example." The phrase is unique in the New Testament, and it indicates being joint imitators. He is saying that he is an imitator of Christ, and he desires them to jointly follow in this imitation of the Lord. The Pulpit Commentary notes that, "He changes the singular number to the plural, modestly shrinking from proposing himself alone as their example."

From this point, and understanding that all are to be united in imitating Christ, he next says, "and note those who so walk." The metaphor of the race which was used in the previous

verses is now changed to a walk, thus a walk of life. The conduct in this life (even if it is a race with our eyes on the goal), is to be one which is in imitation of the life of Christ. In this walk there is an example laid out for them. This is seen in the words, "...as you have us for a pattern."

In a broad perspective, he shows that there are two types of people who are to be found in a church. Those who imitate Christ and have their minds, hearts, and affections on heavenly things, and those who are earthly and carnal. The apostles and their designated representatives had set the first example, and he desires that they follow in that. Those he will describe in the coming verses will be given as examples of what not to emulate.

Life application: In the quickly apostatizing church of today, the carnal is growing almost exponentially. It is incumbent on us to go to the word itself, and to follow it as closely as possible. This will keep us from going astray. This is what the word is for. Let us not deviate from it.