



The Letter to the Philippians – Lesson 6

Philippians 3:1-4:1

The tone of Paul’s letter to the Philippians seems to change abruptly in the early paragraphs of chapter 3. Paul has a strong warning for his beloved church, and he intends to impress on them the importance of standing firm in unity of faith and purpose. We are all easily distracted and easily misled; Paul challenges them (and us!) to be alert and focused so that we may accomplish the purpose for which we were created.

1. Read through all of Philippians 3:1-4:1 *Paul makes an urgent appeal.*
 - a. You may find chapter 3 to be confusing in your first reading of it. As we study it, we’ll break it down into component parts. Let’s begin with an overview of Paul’s “bottom-line” concern. Read Phil. 3:1, Phil. 3:14, and Phil. 4:1. If these verses represent the essential point of Paul’s instruction to the church, then how would you summarize Paul’s specific, urgent request in less than ten words?

 - b. How does Paul describe his own perspective on life in Phil. 3:8-9?

For review: What is the *gospel*? *The gospel is the good news that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection have purchased for us forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the family of God. The work of Jesus that purchased salvation is done; our work is simply to believe and accept the offer of salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 explains, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

2. Read Philippians 3:2-11 *Knowing Christ is better than our credentials.*

- a. In Phil. 3:2, Paul gives a strong warning to his beloved church. They are to be on guard against false teachers who were denying the gospel of Christ. These false teachers (called “Judaizers”) argued that Christians had to become circumcised and follow the Law of Moses as a requirement for salvation. How does the claim of the Judaizers contradict the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ?
(see Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5)

The Judaizers had confidence that their credentials as Jews—being circumcised and following the law of Moses—made them pleasing to God; but they were wrong. The law of Moses could not provide salvation. God requires faith in Christ as God's only provision for eternal salvation.

Here in the book of Philippians, Paul uses the term “circumcision” as a metaphor to refer to those who are in relationship with God through faith in Christ. In the book of Romans, the term Paul uses is “circumcision of the heart” in contrast to circumcision of the flesh. Romans 2:28-29

- b. Paul declares that he and his fellow Christians “*are the circumcision.*” What three identifying characteristics of truly circumcised people does Paul list in Phil. 3:3?
- c. Paul urges the Philippian believers not to place their confidence in the “flesh”—in their own works, accomplishments, and credentials. How did Paul view his own Jewish credentials in Phil. 3:7-8?
- d. As a zealous Jew, Paul once pursued righteousness by obeying the Jewish law, but he now understands that passion to have

been to his detriment. What is the basis of true righteous standing before God—the righteous standing Paul now enjoys? (Phil. 3:8-9)

- e. What is Paul's foremost ambition—his overarching goal for his life? (Phil. 3:10-11). What is surprising to you about this description?

3. Read Philippians 3:12-16 *Knowing Christ is a glorious adventure*

- a. Paul describes the Christian life as a lifelong journey with the ultimate result being the realization of God's good purposes in his life. List the things that Paul continues to do as he pursues his life's goal.

- b. ***For personal reflection:*** Consider Paul's determination to "*take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*" Take a moment to contemplate the fact that Jesus had a specific purpose in mind when He created you and called you to Himself. How does that expand and enlarge your thinking about your own life purpose?

- c. Hebrews 12:1-3 gives a similar picture of the Christian life. List from the passage in Hebrews the things that are involved in effectively "running the race" toward the spiritual goal.

- d. **For personal reflection:** Paul says that he is forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what is ahead. What things in your life might be things you should forget and set aside as you move forward in your Christian life?

4. Read Philippians 3:17-4:1 *Knowing Christ makes us citizens of heaven.*

- a. Paul urges the Philippians to follow his example in living a life that is dedicated to pleasing God. Why is it beneficial to have a more mature model to help you learn to follow Christ?

- b. **For personal reflection:** Are there examples in your life of mature believers who can encourage you in your Christian walk? Perhaps you may want to find a mentor who can guide you and encourage you as you grow in your faith.

- c. How does Paul describe our destiny as citizens of heaven? (Phil. 3:20-21)

- d. What is Paul's final exhortation in Phil. 4:1?

- e. What do you think Paul meant when he urged his readers to "stand firm"? You may want to pull examples from prior chapters.

- f. What would it mean in your circumstances today?

Take a moment to pray and ask God to help you stand firm in the faith. Ask Him to enable you to forget what lies behind and press on toward the goal of your abundant welcome into the presence of Christ. Your eternal citizenship is in heaven!