



Pursuing the Goal

Philippians 3:12-21

In our last lesson we discussed Paul's change of pursuits.¹ Paul now says, "I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead" (3:10, *NIV*). Paul has a new goal, but he makes it clear that this goal is still ahead. Read Philippians 3:12-14.

Nature of the Pursuit

1. How would you describe the attitude and manner of Paul's pursuit? (3:12-14)
What kind of analogy does Paul use to talk about his pursuit?²



2. What does Paul say to make it clear that his pursuit is not merely human effort to become a better person? (3:12, 14)³

Good & Bad Examples

In our last lesson, this question was asked: "Do you think all Christians should want what Paul wants?" The following verses should help answer that question. Read Philippians 3:15-19.

3. How should spiritually mature Christians be thinking and behaving? (3:15-16)

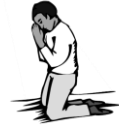
Christians are to "put into practice the truth they have already comprehended [3:16]. We are responsible for the truth we currently possess."⁴

¹ 'pursuit' – the act of striving or seeking to attain or accomplish an end, object, purpose, etc.

² Paul uses an athletic metaphor to illustrate the nature of his pursuit. In this case, his pursuit is like a race. Athletic metaphors are often used to illustrate the Christian life (e.g., *1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 2:2, 5:7; 2 Timothy 2:5, 4:7; Acts 20:24; Hebrews 12:1-3*). How is the Christian life like a race? It has a starting point (conversion), a finish line and prize (glory), and a direction (moving forward). The course is set by authority (God). It requires discipline, training, focus, endurance, and perseverance. It is important to note that the Christian 'race' is run 'in Christ,' who has already won the victory. By the power of the Spirit, we too will be victorious – in Christ. How is the Christian journey *unlike* a race? Christians are not in competition with one another. And our 'success' is not ultimately dependent on our own strength and effort. We can only run and finish the race by God's grace.

³ Paul presses on 'to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of [him]' (3:12, *NIV*). Paul can reach his goal only because Christ first took hold of him. Paul seeks to 'win the prize for which God has called [him] heavenward in Christ Jesus' (3:14, *NIV*). Paul runs and finishes the race only because of God's gracious calling. Paul's pursuit is not merely human effort to become a better person. Paul's pursuit is Christ-centered, including the knowledge of Christ, complete Christ-like maturity, being 'conformed to the image of [God's] Son' (*Romans 8:29*), bringing honor and glory to God. This cannot happen apart from God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. Paul presents two ways of living (3:17-19).⁵ We may call them *a good example* and *a bad example*. How would you describe these two ways of living? How are they different?
5. What does it mean to have our “minds set on earthly things?” What are examples?



Goal of the Pursuit

In contrast to those who have “their minds set on earthly things” followers of Christ should have their minds set on heavenly things (*Colossians 3:1-3*), for “our citizenship is in heaven.”⁶

6. Read Philippians 3:20-21. For those who are “citizens of heaven,” what are they looking forward to? What is their goal?⁷
7. What can *we* do to follow Paul’s example of pursuing the goal? What changes can we make in our thinking, priorities, and activities to help us “press on toward the goal?”

Reflection & Application

- Is your mind set on earthly things or heavenly things? What is the ultimate goal (end) of your life? Followers of Jesus Christ look forward to a glorious goal! Do you need to trust in Jesus?
- Brothers and sisters, what is the nature of *your* pursuit? Are you “pressing on toward the goal?” Or are you dwelling on the past, being distracted in the present, or failing to “fix your eyes on Jesus” and move forward? (*See Hebrews 12:1-3*) Reflect on question 7, pray for God’s guidance and empowerment, and “press on toward the goal.”

⁴ *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 1810.

⁵ In contrast to the example of Paul and his associates, there are many who ‘live as enemies of the cross of Christ’ (3:18). ‘Their god is their stomach (belly)’ – their appetites and fleshly pursuits come first; ‘their glory is their shame’ – what they take pride in is actually shameful; ‘Their mind is set on earthly things’ – earthly things take priority over heavenly things, including the values of God; ‘Their destiny (end) is destruction’ – Paul wrote elsewhere, ‘Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace’ (*Romans 8:5-6, NIV*).

⁶ As ‘citizens of heaven’ our values, belonging, loyalty, purpose, hope, etc. are heavenly-oriented, under God’s rule.

⁷ Christians look forward to the completion of their salvation. When Christ returns, he will ‘make everything new’ (*Rev. 21:5*). As believers, our bodies will be transformed to be suited for the new heaven and new earth (*Rev. 21*). Our transformation to Christ-likeness will be completed, and the glory of God will be fully realized (*1 Cor. 15*).