

The Art of Perseverance

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 3:14

Suffering comes to Christians in a fallen world. We live amid a culture that opposes us for our faith and rejects us because of our righteous identity in Christ Jesus. Not only can this impede our growth as Christ followers, but it can tempt us to alter our view of the Gospel and subsequently our behavior, so that our lives might be a little more comfortable. Thankfully, it doesn't need to be this way. The amazing grace that God has shed upon us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, makes a way for us to confidently advance towards the promise of eternal life in the presence of the Lord.

What does the Bible have to say about pressing on toward the prize that is promised to every Christian? To find out, we look to the words of Paul the Apostle in his letter to the church at Philippi. In Chapter 3, Paul encourages Philippian believers to rejoice in the Lord and progress in their Christian walk by emulating the lives of those around them, who are already living a life for Christ.

A Look at Philippians 3: 1-21

Part 1 – The Goal of Life

Paul is warning the Philippians to beware of those who oppose the Gospel, and to be joined with those other believers. He stresses the importance of community to sustain the Christian life. With great transparency, Paul shares that although he comes from religious pedigree, even he must be on guard against the desires of the flesh.

Verses 1-6

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Verses 7-11

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Part 2 – Christ Above All

Here Paul is saying that anything he has gained previously; status, importance, material goods, etc., he is willing to release for the sake of the Gospel. He refers to all this as “rubbish” – trash to be discarded, so that he may follow Christ. Paul says that his upright standing in his new identity is not because of anything that he did, but because of what Christ did on the cross. For this gift of grace, he is willing to suffer any cost, just as Christ did for him.

Part 3 – Pressing Toward the Goal

Paul is saying that Christ has claimed him and renewed him by Christ's atoning sacrifice, and because of this, he will honor Christ no matter the cost or opposition to his faith. He does so by discarding his previous life, in exchange for his new identity in Christ. He implores us, likewise, to press on relentlessly toward the prize of eternal life with Christ.

Part 4 – Citizenship in Heaven

Paul implores us to be imitators of Christ, by his example. To seek out mature believers and to emulate their faith. As a final warning, Paul reminds us that those who oppose us, and the cross of Christ, will face an eternity separated from God in hell. For if we are to endure those who oppose us, and press on, giving up all we have for the sake of the Gospel, we will be transformed in His presence, when we receive the Crown of Life.

Verses 12-16

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if anything, you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Verses 17-21

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Challenge Questions: Because the Gospel is the only way that we may know Christ...**Part 1 – The Goal of Life**

- + Who in your life must you beware of as opposing your Christian faith?
- + What can you do to safeguard against them wrongly influencing your walk?
- + Who in your community can you draw closer to sustain and grow in your faith?

Part 2 – Christ Above All Else

- + What desires of the flesh ("rubbish") are you willing to give up for the sake of Christ?
- + How much of your identity is in Christ, versus the things you've accomplished on your own?
- + Are you willing to suffer loss in return for the gift of grace, which you received through Jesus Christ?

Part 3 – Pressing Toward the Goal

- + Are you motivated by a desire to know Christ, or simply to allow Christ to know you because he has already claimed you as his own?
- + Do you retreat in the face of a trial, or do you swiftly advance drawing strength from Jesus to endure the suffering?
- + Are you willing to discard your previous life, and fully proclaim your new identity in Christ?

Part 4 – Citizenship in Heaven

- + Do you live life in the light of the Gospel truth?
- + Who in your community can you draw closer to sustain and grow in your faith?
- + Who in your life do you desire to see come to know Christ and be spared from an eternity separated from their Creator, and what are you going to do to share Christ with them?