

## **Philippians 3:12-21 Press on Toward the Goal! Pentecost 20 October 22, 2017**

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God's grace and peace have given us the goal of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen. Philippians 3:12-21 is written to the suffering Christians in Philippi to turn their focus from earth to heaven. These are Your words, heavenly Father. Use them to give each of us a desire to be with You in heaven.

Dear Redeemed in Christ, with a goal of heaven,

Sometimes, it may be easy for us to concentrate if we're rested and have no distractions. Other times it's hard to concentrate because we have so many other things on our minds. But it's important to concentrate. Concentrating at school may mean the difference between an A or a C grade. In a job, it might mean getting an order right or making costly mistakes. In sports, concentrating may mean the difference between making a basket, a goal, or a winning serve or losing the game. A lack of concentration can happen spiritually in our lives, too. This is what Paul warned about in our verses when he told them to

### **Press on toward the goal!**

**First, follow the course well.** Paul wrote, *"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* (v.13-14) Paul was a Christian. He knew that his sins were forgiven and that he was on his way to heaven. Paul was like a runner in a spiritual race. He knew that it was by God's grace that he believed in Christ as his Savior and was even in the race not to beat others, but just to finish in heaven. He hadn't come near the finish line yet. But, he wanted to make sure that he pressed on using every last ounce of strength in Christ to reach the goal. He did not want to look back at his old life and get off course nor did he want to become too weak to finish the race.

For us, there are many obstacles between where we are and our goal of heaven. Millions of people in the world don't know the saving news of Jesus. They would like us to join them in having every kind of goal but getting to heaven. Paul wrote, *"Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."* (v.18-19)

Paul had two groups of people in mind that were not focusing on heaven. One was the Judaizers. They confessed Christ but only as one who gave more laws to follow to save themselves. But the Bible states that those who to live by the law will *"be judged by the law."* (Romans 2:12) No matter how hard we try, we cannot keep the law perfectly. God gave us His law to show us our sin. After we confess our sins and trust in Christ alone to save us, we can thank God by following His laws of love. If we have true faith, it will be shown in our words and actions that honor God.

The other group was the epicureans whose purpose was to live selfishly without laws' limits. Paul called them enemies of the cross because they claimed to follow Christ as a way to excuse sins. Their money, possessions, and pleasure became their gods. We see examples of this in the Bible with Lot's wife. She had lived in the beautiful city of Sodom. When she was told to leave the city or die in the fires of judgment, she looked back to the city which she longed for and died. A young ruler who spoke to Christ chose riches over Jesus' offer for him to have treasures in heaven. They lost sight of the true goal in life.

Instead of following bad examples, Paul wrote, *“Join with others in following my example... and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (v.17)* It’s not that Paul had attained a perfect life. He called himself chief of sinners in thought and actions. In his battles with his sinful nature he often lost. But, Paul didn’t make excuses for his sins. He made every effort to fight against his sinful nature and temptations. Whenever he was distracted from the goal of life, Paul confessed his sins and repented of them. He daily turned to Christ for complete forgiveness and for help in fighting against the power of sin. He prayed daily for guidance and strength to live in ways that pleased God. We can follow his example.

We have heard the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit has given us faith to believe in Him. Getting to heaven is our goal! The Holy Spirit can help us when we face frustrations. We can ask Him to help us to concentrate on our heavenly goal so that we won’t waste time and money on things that don’t please God. We need to be reminded that we can miss the goal if we compromise our faith in Christ or our Christian principles. Rather, with heaven as our goal, people around us should be able to see the joy and excitement in our lives as we anticipate reaching heaven. Why can’t we be more like the great missionary, Paul? Actually, we are like him, and like every other Christian – struggling to maintain our focus and witness about the goal of eternal life. But, we are not alone in our struggle.

**Second, Christ keeps us focused on the goal.** Paul wrote, *“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (v.20)* Paul reminds us of the reason that Christ lived, died, and rose from death – so that we will have a place with Him forever. Paul called believers citizens of heaven. Paul was a Roman citizen and had many privileges and rights that common people did not have. The Philippians were also Roman citizens with those rights and privileges. But, what did that compare to being citizens in heaven? As citizens here, they had Christ’s promise of full forgiveness of sins. But, in heaven we won’t have any sins. We’ll live in perfection! In heaven there will be no evil to tempt us and there will be no sin. Here our minds and bodies are flawed by sin. But in heaven our bodies will be perfect and we will reflect the glory of Christ’s body: risen from death and shining like the sun. Paul wrote, *[Christ] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (v.21)*

Jesus will return and take to heaven all believers who are waiting for Him, whether they are alive or dead. Paul wrote, *“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)* Christians at Paul’s time were suffering and we also have times that are troubling to our hearts. But Paul reminded us. *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)*

So, when it seems difficult to concentrate on what is truly important because there are so many distractions in life, remember the goal that Christ has won for us: we have eternal life with Him in a perfect world! He urges us to keep looking to what is ahead: to the goal of heaven. Looking back to worldly goals will lead us into false pride over our accomplishments or despair over failures. But, if past sins or false teachers are trying to keep us from getting to the goal, let us remember that we are washed and made clean by the blood of Jesus. In Him, we can turn our backs on sins or sinners that seek to lead us away from our goal. Our thinking, words, and actions will be focused on eternal life not just for our sakes, but that other people learn to focus on heaven too. There may be many reasons in life to work on a good concentration. But, Jesus has given us our greatest reason and goal, eternal life with Him. So, *“fight the good fight with all your might. Christ is your strength and Christ your light. Lay hold on life and it shall be Your joy and crown eternally.” Amen.*