

This morning, I am continuing in a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which is a letter written by the Apostle Paul from a Roman prison to a church in Philippi that he had started. This morning is the second week that we will be in verses 1-16 of chapter 3. We will focus mainly on verses 10-16 this morning.

Philippians 3:1-16 - Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, **I have more:** ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have **lost all things**. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the **resurrection from the dead**. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me **heavenward in Christ Jesus**. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Last week we mainly focused on the first half of the passage, where Paul talks about righteousness, which can be defined as being in a right relationship with God. Righteousness is about how you measure up to God's standard and be right with Him. Paul tells the Philippians that previously he trusted in his spiritual resume – his pedigree and morality and commitment to God – but now he realizes that that approach is worthless, that even the best spiritual resume does not actually meet God's perfect standard, and that the only way to be right with God is through

the righteousness that is given to us by God and is by faith. On the cross, Jesus died for our sins and gives us His righteousness, His right relationship with God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Notice that it is God's initiative, God's gift to us, not something we earn but something we receive.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Again, salvation and righteousness is by grace, a gift of God. Jesus gives us a right relationship with God. Jesus gives us the A+, the perfect resume. And nothing we do can add or take away from that.

As Paul tells them at the beginning of the passage, and as we talked about last week, (slide) be wary of anyone who tries to add anything to this gospel message of salvation by grace or justification by faith. In this verse, Paul tells them to watch out for the dogs, the evildoers, the mutilators of the flesh. He was referring to a group known as the Judaizers, who claimed that in order to be right with God, one needed to not only believe in Jesus but also become a Jew by being circumcised and obeying the laws of Moses.

After this discussion of righteousness, Paul goes on to talk about his passionate desire to know Christ, his laser-like focus on knowing and living for Jesus. And at the end, (slide) he says “**All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.**” There is a mature way of understanding this faith we call Christianity, a mature way of looking at Jesus, and why we are here this morning, and there are immature ways. I want to look at three views we have that need to mature as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus.

1) From religion to relationship

⁸ *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Listen carefully to what Paul's goal is in this passage. It is to KNOW Christ. Not just to know about him, or to be a better person, or to be more religious. No – he wants to know Jesus, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. He wants to live like him, even if that means suffering for him.

This is NOT the language of religion. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. The immature way of viewing Christianity is that it is a religion. The immature way is to see Christianity as basically consisting of going to church, praying and reading your Bible, giving money, serving people, and trying to live a moral life. The immature view of God is to see Him as a heavenly Santa Claus, keeping track of who is naughty and who is nice, or as a heavenly scorekeeper, keeping track of how often you come to church and how often you pray and how much you give. The immature view is that God is keeping track of your good deeds and bad deeds, and that on the day you stand before Him, He will weigh them on His heavenly scale and decide your eternal fate accordingly.

All of us who are mature should take the view that Paul takes. This is not a religion. It is not about checking boxes and doing your religious duty and trying to be a good person. It is a relationship with the God of the universe who created you, with the eternal Son of God who gave His life for you, with the Holy Spirit who is God's presence inside of you. It is about knowing Him, trusting Him, honoring Him.

Prayer is not a religious duty you do five times a day or a deposit in some heavenly ATM or divine slot machine in the hopes that you will get some reward. **That is religion. That is the immature view of things.** Prayer is conversation with God. It is communicating with the one who created you, loves you, knows you better than you know yourself, has a plan for your life, invites you to be a part of what he is doing, and has the power available to you to overcome any sin or struggle in your life. That is the mature view of prayer!

Going to church is not a religious duty that you in order to prove to God that you deserve to go to heaven, or so that God will maybe give you good things because now he owes you. **That is religion. That is the immature view of things.** Going to church is coming together with brothers and sisters in Christ, with other adopted children of our heavenly Father, to love Him, to worship Him, to grow closer to Him, to be filled with His Spirit, to encourage each other, to receive encouragement from each other, to serve each other and to be served by each other. It is believing that He is present when His people gather in a special way that does not happen when we are by ourselves. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

Reading the Bible is not a religious duty by which you prove to God your dedication to Him in the hopes that he will reward you or give you what you want. That is an immature view of things. Reading the Bible is putting yourself in a position to hear from God, to let Him speak to you through His Word by His Holy Spirit, so that you might know Him better and become more of the man or woman He created you to be.

Tithing is not a religious duty by which you buy God's favor or remove the curse from your bank account. That is the immature view of things. Tithing and giving is an act of trust in the one who controls everything, an act of gratitude to the one who has given you all the money and possessions you have. It is declaring that your heart is at rest in His loving care, not in the size of your savings. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

This is not about religion. It is about relationship. Listen to Jesus' words:

John 17:3 - *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Eternal life is not sitting on clouds, or endless suffering, or a big family reunion. It is knowing God, knowing Jesus. Let Jesus' words drive this point home:

Matthew 7:21-23 - *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

May we never hear those terrible words “I never knew you” because we treated this like a religion and missed out on the relationship that was offered to us.

2) From fear, guilt, and trying to earn God’s favor to love, trust, and a desire to honor God

*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have **lost all things**. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the **resurrection from the dead***

As incredible as Philippians 3 is, there is also a way in which the logic doesn’t make sense at first glance. Remember that in the first half of the passage, Paul has declared that our spiritual resumes are worthless before a holy God, that the only way to be right with God is to receive the righteousness offered by Jesus through His death for us on the cross. Anyone who tries to stand before God on the basis of their pedigree or religious accomplishments will be lost, because no one can measure up to a holy God’s perfect standards. But the incredibly good news is that there is a way to be right with God that does not depend upon our good works.

Romans 3:20-24 - *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

So, Paul, you are telling me that the way to be right with God is by faith in Jesus and not by my spiritual resume? So, Paul, you are telling me that going to church and praying and tithing and serving the poor and trying to live a moral life does not earn me anything before God? **Then what is my motivation to do any of these things?** If the only way to be right with God is to receive the righteousness that comes from Jesus, then why not receive that right relationship from Jesus and then sleep in on Sundays, spend all my money on myself, forget about other people, and

live however I want to live? If the verdict is in and I have been found not guilty, then why not break the law? If Jesus has already given me the A+, then why study?

That, my friends, is the immature view of things. For the mature, the gospel results in a profound change in motivation, from fear, guilt and trying to earn God's favor to love, faith, and a desire to honor the one who gave His life for us and rescued us. I will go a step further – if your attitude is that salvation is like some kind of fire insurance, a “get out of jail free” monopoly card, and then you just go on living your life however you please, then you are very likely not saved and do NOT know God at all and should not have any assurance that you will be in heaven when this life is all said and done. At the very least, you are just very immature. Because what happens when you receive the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith in Jesus is that you also receive the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

You become a new creation in Christ. You receive a new heart, and new spirit, God's Holy Spirit inside of you, that will begin to move you to follow Him and give you a desire to keep His laws. When you receive His righteousness, your desires will begin to change. You may still be immature, but you will see over time that you are maturing into someone whose motivation is less about fear, guilt, and a desire to earn God's favor and more about love, faith, and a desire to honor God.

I believe that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all my sins, past, present and future. I believe that I could go out and murder someone or sleep around and that my sins are covered. So why don't I go do that? Because my motivation has changed by the power of the Holy Spirit inside of me. My motivation is **love** – I love God and want to know Him and live for Him. It is **trust** – I trust God, that what He has told me to do is good for me, and those things that He has told me not to do are not good for me. And it is **honor** – I want to bring Jesus as much glory and honor as I can through my life, and so I don't want to do things that would bring dishonor on my Lord, on the one who gave His life for me. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

When I took Spanish in high school, I studied hard because it was because it was a requirement, and because I wanted to earn good grades to get into a good college. Since I graduated high school, I have never again studied Spanish. But you know

what would motivate me to learn Spanish? If I were single and fell in love with a woman who only spoke Spanish. Love would motivate me, so that I could develop a relationship with her. Before I knew Jesus, I had no desire to pray, to read the Bible, to go to church, to turn from sin and self-centeredness. But now that I know Him, that He has taken hold of me and saved me, my desires and motivations have changed, and I want to know Him. Prayer and Bible reading and going to church and turning from sin is all connected to knowing and loving Him more. I am little by little moving on from immature motivations, that I might know Him better. As Paul said, he is even willing to suffer like Jesus did if it means knowing Him more.

In Joni Eareckson Tada's book *"When God weeps: why our sufferings matter to the Almighty,"* she tells of a five year-old boy named Matthew, who volunteered with his parents and his brother at one of Joni's retreats for disabled people (Joni is a quadriplegic). She writes how at the end of the retreat, Matthew asked his father, "When do I get to have my wheelchair, Daddy?" As Joni puts it:

This little boy doesn't need a wheelchair. He has no use for one. But try telling him that! A wheelchair, for Matthew, would top his Christmas wish list. A wheelchair means a joy ride. It also means an initiation into a wonderful club: a special group of kids who enjoy a special relationship with Joni. This five-year-old hasn't a clue about the pain and paralysis, the heartaches and hurdles. He discounts all of that, disregarding the dark side. All he desires is a chance to be among my best friends, a chance to identify with me, be like me, a chance to know me. If it means having a wheelchair, great. He'll welcome it.

Matthew wanted so much to be like Joni and her friends that if it meant having a wheelchair, then that is what he wanted. That is a laser focus – all that matters is knowing Him, even if it means losing all else.

Matthew 13:44-46 - *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

Christ is the sun, rising in the morning, whose light eclipses the stars of night. Every other desire fades in comparison to knowing Him. To come to know Him is

to be seized by the power of a great affection that completely transforms your motivations. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

3) From being controlled by my past to being drawn by my future

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul tells the Philippians that he still has a long way to go, but one thing he does: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, he presses on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called him heavenward in Christ Jesus. He is not going to let his past control him, but he is going to strain towards the future, the goal, the prize that God has called him to. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

Newness is very much a part of the gospel. Remember two verses we read earlier: **2 Corinthians 5:17** - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

And:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

Newness is very much a part of the gospel. The old has gone and the new has come. We are new creations in Christ. We are leaving behind old ways of living, old ways of thinking, old ways of being. We see our past differently than we once did, and our future as well. Paul says that he is forgetting what is behind. What do you think this means?

1) Forget your past failures

1 Timothy 1:12-16 - *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was*

once a **blasphemer** and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

I was the worst of sinners – a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man – but Jesus died for my sins, has forgiven all of it, taking the punishment I deserved on the cross, and has appointed me to his service. And so, I will not let the failures of my past weigh me down as I run the race and fulfill the calling God has given to me. What would it mean for you to trust His forgiveness and to forget the failures of your past?

Psalm 103:11-12 - For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

2) Forget your past successes and accomplishments

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, **I have more:** ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have **lost all things**.

He has not yet arrived! And so he will not become complacent. There is still so far to go, so much of Jesus to know, so many people to share the gospel with. And so he will forget his past successes and accomplishments and press on. Some might think that they have served the Lord and can now retire. That is an immature view of things. The way you serve might change, but a mature view of things is to press on to know Christ until the day that we die.

3) Forget your past suffering

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the **resurrection from the dead**.*

Paul will not let the suffering of his past stop him from pursuing Christ and serving Him. In fact, he knows that he is following a Lord who suffered and died on a cross, and he wants to know Christ even if it means his eventual torture and martyrdom. Paul knows that it is as we die to ourselves and give up the things of this world that we experience the resurrection life and power of Jesus.

Some of you have suffered greatly at the hands of others, and it may be keeping you from serving, from diving in to community, from truly following God without fear. What would it look like for you to adopt Paul's view on things, to forget what is behind – your failures and successes and suffering – and press on toward the goal, no matter the cost? Let me close with this passage:

***Hebrews 12:1-3** - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

He endured for the joy set before Him, which was your righteousness, restoring you to a right relationship with God. Let His sacrificial love and death for you transform your heart, that this faith might become less religion and more relationship, less about fear, guilt and trying to earn God's favor and more about love, trust, and a desire to honor God, and less about being controlled by your past and more about being drawn towards the future God has for you.