Philippians 2026 – Week 6 – Philippians 3:12-21

Philippians 3:12-21: *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ***13*** *Brothers and sisters, 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, then, 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.*
17 *Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.* ***18*** *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* ***19*** *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.* ***20*** *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ***21*** *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

INTRO to **Philippians**: The letter of Philippians is the perfect starting place for biblical teaching on following Christ as a disciple. This letter speaks to obedience and faithfulness in the life of the individual believer, and the importance of being healthy and unified in the Church. Philippians presents God's instructions in a warm and encouraging tone, as believers are challenged to conduct ourselves at all times and in all places "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

INTRO to **Philippians 3:12-21:** Here Philippians turns to a focus on true discipleship, using the common New Testament illustration of "running a race" with our eyes focused on Jesus and the heavenly prize of the fullness of His Kingdom. (see also **Galatians 5, 1 Corinthians 9, Hebrews 12, 2 Timothy 2,** and **2 Timothy 4** below).

I. A true disciple is in Christ and is becoming like Christ. (vs. 12-14)

-Here the Apostle Paul makes clear that He has not yet achieved his goal of perfect Christlikeness as he stated in the previous verses (vs. 10-11), but he is also committed to never giving up on His commitment to follow Jesus.

-The picture of "straining" to take hold of the prize is that of someone competing in a race, whether on foot, horseback, or in a chariot, who stretches his or her full weight forward in an effort to reach the finish line. The racer is not focused on the distance already traveled, but on the distance remaining to finish strong and win the prize.

-The call to “press on” forward in our race as disciples of Christ is not affected by our age, experience, or circumstances. We are not finished and the race is not over until the Lord says so!

-Every follower of Jesus can “win the prize,” because the prize is not finishing first, the prize is finishing faithful—**Matthew 25:21:** *‘Well done, good and faithful servant…Enter into the joy of your master.’*

II. A true disciple is focused not on earthly things, but on Christ Himself. (vs. 15-19)

-Those who are maturing in Christ are those who are pressing forward with purpose towards the goal of being like Him!

-Paul says about himself, and Timothy and Ephaphroditus – “watch me…watch us as we follow Jesus and join us on the journey!”

QUESTION: How many of us would feel confident to tell others who want to know how to follow Christ faithfully: “Watch me!”?

-Remember **vs. 1:6:** *He who began a good work in you will carry on to completion in Christ Jesus*; and **vs. 2:5**: *in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Jesus Christ…*

-Those who “walk” as “enemies of the cross of Christ” are not necessarily just those who are hostile to Christianity. *Their mind is set on earthly things.*

-For those who follow Christ, their destination is spiritual maturity and completeness. For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ, their destination is destruction. (See **Matthew 6:19-21** below)

III. True disciples devote their lives to the Kingdom of God above any other kingdom or commitment. (vs. 20-21)

-In these final two verses of **Ch. 3**, the language moves from the singular to the plural – from your race to our race – from being in one’s own physical body to being an active part of the body of Christ—the Church.

-The word for “citizenship” – *politeuma* (polis) means the place where we pledge our highest allegiance and live under its sovereign, constitutive regulations which bind everyone together.

-The fullness of the Kingdom of God is the final destination of the race of faith! *“…to live is Christ, to die is gain…”*

Other Scriptures Referenced:

Galatians 5:7: *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?*

1 Corinthians 9:24-25: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

Hebrews 12:1-2: *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 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

2 Timothy 2:5: *Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.*

2 Timothy 4:7-8: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Matthew 6:19-21: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Other Quotes/Resources:

-"A disciple is a person who has decided that the most important thing in their life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do." –Dallas Willard

-Verse 3 of the hymn *God of Grace and God of Glory*:

Cure Your children's warring madness;
Bend our pride to Your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
Lest we miss Your kingdom's goal,
Lest we miss Your kingdom's goal.